

Overseas Dissemination of Confucianism in the Documentary “Hello, China”

Jing Li

College of Foreign Languages, Qufu Normal University, Qufu, Shandong

2581382044@qq.com

Abstract. The introduction of Confucius and Confucianism in the French version of the documentary Hello, China plays a crucial role in promoting traditional Chinese Confucian culture to French-speaking countries. By using French as the narration language for the documentary, it facilitates the dissemination of Confucianism to French-speaking nations, particularly in Francophone Africa. This paper adopts a multimodal text analysis approach to explore how the documentary Hello, China constructs Confucius’ personal image and his Confucian identity, as well as how it spreads Confucian culture overseas. Through analysis, the study aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the documentary, thereby suggesting ways to improve the global dissemination of Confucianism and promoting its broader and deeper outreach.

Keywords: documentary, Confucius, overseas dissemination of Confucianism, multimodal analysis

1. Introduction

Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, possessed noble character and profound intellectual insight. His philosophical views on life are vast and essential, surpassing even those of Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in many respects [1]. Confucius and his teachings have played an indelible role not only throughout various Chinese dynasties and societal sectors but have also profoundly influenced events as far-reaching as the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution. From ancient times to the present, Confucius and related Confucian ideas have been continually disseminated or introduced to different countries, studied, and utilized by politicians or religious groups to spread their own ideologies and exert intellectual influence over people. In the process of Confucianism’s global dissemination, nations have primarily relied on translating Confucian classics, establishing Confucius Institutes, and conducting international cultural exchange activities to spread Confucius’ ideas and knowledge abroad. In today’s internet era, various media forms have expanded the ways in which people learn about the world and access information, playing a crucial role in shaping readers’ cognitive development [2]. Although the French version of the documentary Hello, China offers only a brief introduction to Confucius’ ideas, it still serves as foundational material for promoting Confucian culture to French-speaking countries, especially the relatively underdeveloped Francophone nations in Africa.

This paper employs a multimodal analysis approach to examine the Confucius-related content in the documentary Hello, China, exploring how the documentary uses various multimodal symbols, such as language and imagery, to disseminate Confucian ideas. Based on this analysis, the paper will also highlight shortcomings in the overseas dissemination of Confucianism and suggest efforts that need to be made for improvement.

2. Research Background

The initiative of “Chinese culture going global” is a government-driven cultural dissemination activity with active participation from the public. It is a cultural exchange strategy implemented in the context of China’s rapid economic development and its rising international status. This strategy is characterized by its fast expansion, wide scope, diverse approaches, and significant achievements, but it also faces numerous challenges. For example, while China’s external cultural dissemination emphasizes distinct Chinese characteristics, it lacks sufficient elements of international exchange and often fails to establish effective communication with foreign audiences [3].

China is the largest developing country in the world, and Africa is the continent with the highest concentration of developing countries. Similar historical experiences and a shared historical mission have closely linked China and Africa, making them a

community of shared destiny. Over the past decade, under the leadership of both sides, China and Africa have worked together in mutually beneficial cooperation to promote economic and social development, benefiting both their peoples and setting an example for building new international relations and a community of shared future for humanity [4]. Alongside the harmonious and friendly development of economic exchanges and cooperation, cultural exchanges and communication have also flourished. Particularly, with the rapid and diverse development of Confucius Institutes in Africa, enhancing Sino-African cultural exchange and promoting the global dissemination of Chinese culture—especially Confucianism through Confucius Institutes—has become increasingly important.

Historically, when developed countries swept across the African continent, they not only engaged in population transactions but also brought cultural infiltration. As a result, French-speaking colonies (mainly in West Africa) adopted French as one of their official languages. The selection of French as the narration language for this study's materials demonstrates linguistic adaptability and connectivity, facilitating the dissemination of Confucius and Confucian culture in French-speaking African countries.

Confucius advocated the idea of universal education without discrimination and was the first to establish private education, tirelessly teaching a large number of disciples. His efforts enabled more people to benefit from the influence of knowledge, which was of great significance. In contrast, however, in many African countries, education is often concentrated among a small elite, with limited opportunities for the general population, which has objectively affected both income levels and national economic development. The logic is simple: without sufficient cultural knowledge, many jobs requiring knowledge and skills cannot be performed, which directly impacts employment quality and living standards, and in turn, influences the overall trajectory of national development. In today's world, which is dominated by scientific and cultural advancement, without scientific and cultural knowledge, it is difficult to enhance labor skills, and without labor skills, productivity cannot be improved. The increasing presence of Confucius Institutes in Africa, which operate as non-profit organizations to promote Chinese language and culture, has been significant [5]. China has become the second-largest country after France to establish cultural institutions in Africa. Given that China, unlike the UK or France, has no colonial history in the region, this ranking is particularly noteworthy. China's efforts to disseminate Confucian culture in Africa are thus especially important.

3. Research Methods and Data Sources

Modality refers to the various forms of media used in the process of text and discourse communication. Previous text studies mainly focused on monomodal texts, emphasizing the characteristics of textual discourse, i.e., linguistic modality. In contrast, multimodal discourse includes not only traditional linguistic symbols and paralinguistic symbols but also gestures, sounds, images, colors, videos, music, and other symbol modalities. In terms of both the variety and quantity of symbolic resources, multimodal texts far exceed monomodal texts and offer a stronger overall meaning-construction effect. Correspondingly, multimodal analysis is "a method of research that incorporates non-linguistic symbols used by humans into the process of meaning exchange, including images, gestures, eye contact, posture, etc., while also focusing on the interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic symbols." As a typical example of multimodal discourse, the documentary *Hello, China* incorporates various modalities such as sound, images, colors, and music. The dissemination of Confucius and Laozi in this documentary is a result of the arrangement and combination of these different modalities [6].

The documentary *Hello, China* was jointly planned by the National Radio and Television Administration, China International Broadcasting Station, and Higher Education Press. It introduces Chinese culture to the world, conveys China's voice, and enhances national confidence and cultural pride. Through animation, the documentary explains 100 common terms related to traditional Chinese culture and 100 Chinese words representing the essence of traditional Chinese culture. These terms reflect different aspects of the richness and depth of Chinese culture, helping international audiences better understand China and Chinese culture.

This paper selects the content related to Confucius from *Hello, China*, which is simple and easy to understand. It briefly introduces Confucius' birth, life experiences, his ideas on human relationships and expectations of rulers, his educational philosophy as a teacher, as well as his status and influence. Although the content is straightforward, it covers the fundamental introduction to Confucius, making it a basic material for the dissemination of Confucianism overseas.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Textual Level

The documentary *Hello, China* briefly introduces Confucius' birth, life experiences, his views on human relationships and the responsibilities of rulers, his educational philosophy as a teacher, and his status and influence.

From the outset, the documentary states that "Confucius is the person who had the greatest influence on Chinese culture in history," which lays the foundation for the overall introduction to Confucius and highlights his significant role in Chinese history. This, in turn, emphasizes the importance of disseminating Confucianism overseas. The documentary concludes by stating, "Confucius is the spiritual leader of the Chinese people. For over 2,000 years, his thoughts have influenced China and the world, becoming a symbol of Eastern culture," underscoring the profound impact of Confucian thought in China and its wide-reaching

influence. This further affirms the value of disseminating Confucius' thoughts and Confucianism overseas, aiding other countries in gaining a deeper understanding of Chinese culture related to Confucius and Confucianism.

"Seeking knowledge from renowned teachers ultimately led to the creation of Confucianism." This statement highlights that Confucius' Confucian thought is a collection of excellent ideas and advanced achievements from various thinkers, drawing on the essence of their philosophies. Although Confucianism was founded by Confucius, it does not solely represent his individual thoughts. Key figures of Confucianism, besides Confucius, include Mencius, Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, Cheng Yi, and Lu Jiuyuan. Confucianism can be divided into six schools, which refer to the six main branches of Confucian thought: the Si-Meng School, Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties, the School of Mind, the School of Qi, the New Text School, the Gongyang School, and the Apocryphal Theology. Rich in content and encompassing a wide array of ideas, Confucian thought draws on the best of various philosophies. Whether in China or abroad, Confucius and Confucianism hold significant value, making the dissemination of Confucian thought overseas highly meaningful. The phrase "seeking knowledge from renowned teachers" also underscores Confucius' tireless pursuit of knowledge and learning, reflecting his admirable qualities and personal charm.

"Confucian thought emphasizes personal self-cultivation and the importance of establishing harmonious relationships with others. It stresses respect and courtesy towards elders, sincerity and trustworthiness in friendships, and that rulers should strive to ensure the happiness of their people." Here, the documentary discusses Confucius' ideas on personal self-cultivation, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and the management of relationships between individuals of different statuses. These ideas are of significant importance both within China and in other countries. They have universal applicability across different social classes. In terms of spiritual and cultural education, Confucius' teachings and Confucian culture provide broad educational and guiding roles for people in various countries and social classes, especially beneficial for regions like Africa where spiritual and cultural development is relatively backward.

"Confucius was also a great teacher who advocated that everyone has the right to education." This statement highlights Confucius' achievements and thoughts in the field of education. As a renowned ancient Chinese educator, Confucius made significant contributions to Chinese education by founding private schools, widely accepting disciples, and implementing the principle of "education for all without discrimination," which expanded the scope of education and promoted the dissemination of culture and scholarship [7]. Additionally, he emphasized the role of education in societal and individual development and the importance of valuing education. Confucius summarized many practical educational experiences, proposed numerous educational philosophies, created effective teaching methods, and revealed educational principles. These ideas have had a profound and positive impact throughout Chinese history and continue to hold an essential guiding role in contemporary education [8]. Due to the economic underdevelopment in Africa, there is naturally backwardness in education. Therefore, it is especially important to focus on educational development in areas where conditions allow for education. Confucius' ideas provide valuable guidance for improving educational standards. The dissemination of Confucius' thought not only facilitates cultural exchange between different countries but also offers effective references for education, philosophy, and social governance in other nations [9].

4.2. Visual Level

First, the cover of the documentary features a stamp with the title "Hello, China." This stamp vividly represents traditional Chinese culture, especially highlighting aspects like Chinese calligraphy. Confucius' Confucian thought has played a significant role in Chinese culture from ancient times to the present, and the overseas dissemination of Confucianism is also an extension of the transmission of traditional Chinese culture. Spreading Confucianism abroad not only helps foreign countries and people understand Confucius and Confucian thought but also enables them to gain insight into China and its culture, fostering harmonious international relations based on mutual understanding. Furthermore, the beneficial ideas of Confucianism can promote development in areas such as politics, education, and morality in other countries.

The documentary begins with a depiction of Confucius' numerous disciples, which leads into the image of Confucius himself, eventually transitioning to a statue of Confucius. The disciples are shown standing solemnly on either side, extending toward the figure of Confucius. This imagery highlights that Confucius had a large number of disciples—records show that he had as many as three thousand. The solemn demeanor of the disciples also reflects the respect they had for their teacher, Confucius. However, it is important to note that the portrayal of Confucius and his disciples in the documentary bears a resemblance to the hierarchical relationship between an emperor and his ministers. In the documentary, Confucius is positioned in the center, with his disciples standing on either side, similar to how ancient Chinese emperors were flanked by their ministers. This could lead to a misunderstanding of Confucius' status, potentially suggesting that he was revered in a deified or authoritative manner, like an emperor.

The depiction of Confucius' life—from infancy to adulthood and old age—portrays his entire journey. He was born into poverty, persistently sought knowledge, and eventually founded and spread Confucianism. His rise from humble beginnings to becoming a great Confucian scholar is closely tied to his tireless pursuit of knowledge, his willingness to ask questions without shame, and his constant travel from state to state to promote his ideas. These commendable qualities of Confucius are also worth learning from for African countries.

5. Conclusion

The documentary Hello, China introduces knowledge about Confucius through simple text and video. For those familiar with Confucius and scholars passionate about Confucianism, the documentary might seem overly simplistic, akin to children's literature. However, in the context of spreading Confucianism overseas, particularly to some underdeveloped countries in Africa, this documentary undoubtedly serves as a foundational introduction to Confucian thought. For more advanced learning, additional Confucian knowledge can be gradually introduced according to the needs of international dissemination. Furthermore, building on the foundation of Confucianism, we can use the dissemination of Confucian ideas and wisdom to permeate and spread Chinese culture and stories. We should transition from being "passive recipients" waiting for others to engage with us to "active promoters" of our stories and culture. To promote Chinese culture abroad, we need not only enthusiasm and initiative but also the confidence and resources to do so. With our rich and high-quality cultural resources, we must work on effective dissemination methods, actively utilizing new media forms such as films, documentaries, and short videos to create a platform for Chinese cultural outreach [10].

The documentary Hello, China also has some issues and shortcomings in spreading Confucian culture. When conveying Confucian thought to other countries, we should consider the perspective of the audience and understand their needs to maximize acceptance. Currently, there are 21 Confucius Institutes across 14 African countries. The strong appeal of Confucianism in Africa can be attributed to the continent's long history of war and destruction, which has fostered a deep admiration for Confucian values of benevolence. Moreover, the younger generation in Africa believes that previous generations' mutual enmity was due to a lack of moral norms, and Confucian peace ideals offer a potential solution. Additionally, the underdeveloped state of education in Africa is another reason why Confucianism is likely to be adopted and spread in the region. Therefore, when disseminating Confucian ideas to African countries, we should closely align with local realities and needs, delivering content that meets their requirements and using approaches that resonate with their own thought processes [11].

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