

New Ideas of China's Foreign Discourse Construction in the Context of Civilizational Mutual Learning— Based on the Perspective of Cultural Story Dissemination of Chinese Grand Canal

Chang Liu

Yangzhou University

Abstract. In recent years, considerable emphasis has been placed on the construction of Chinese Grand Canal cultural belt. As a window for the world to understand China, the Grand Canal is a profound embodiment of the essence of the finest Chinese culture, and the construction of an international image of the Grand Canal also serves to enhance the image of China. This paper aims to enrich China's foreign discourse resources by utilizing the Grand Canal cultural story as a carrier in the context of mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations. Through the current development of foreign discourse, the study will thoroughly explore the cultural connotation of the Grand Canal, analyse the Grand Canal corpus, construct a Grand Canal narrative discourse system, contribute new ideas to the construction of foreign discourse with Chinese characteristics, as well as facilitate the outward movement of Chinese culture and canal culture.

Keywords: Mutual learning of civilizations, foreign discourse building, Chinese Grand Canal cultural story.

1. Introduction

The Grand Canal of China represents the world's largest spatial span and the longest-standing canal in use. [1] Under complex natural conditions, its successive generations of architects have connected canals of different periods and regions into an artificial canal that runs north to south, fully embodying the Chinese people's spirit of respect for nature, defiance of hardship, innovation and eclecticism. Chinese Grand Canal is both a symbol of China's image and also a vital approach for the world to gain an understanding of China. By utilising the linguistic resources of the Grand Canal of China and incorporating the cultural spirit of the Grand Canal, it contributes to the construction of an authentic and dimensional image of China.

The Grand Canal is not only a cultural bond that connects China to the world, but also a cultural carrier that demonstrates the inclusive and liberal spirit of Chinese civilisation. In retrospect, the Grand Canal was essential for the transport of Chinese silk, porcelain, tea and other products to foreign countries. The Grand Canal was also integral to the visits of Japanese and Silla envoys to the Tang dynasty, the crossing of the East by the Chinese monk Jianzhen, and the travels of foreign envoys Marco Polo, Matteo Ricci and Macartney. In the context of mutual learning of civilisations as well as the collective pursuit of a community with a shared future for mankind, utilising the Grand Canal as a carrier to communicate with the world and effectively telling the story of the Grand Canal itself and its connection with the world will inevitably foster the spirit of innovation and synergy as well as demonstrate the liberal and inclusive attitude of a superpower. Therefore, it is imperative to fully take advantage of the discursive resources of the Chinese Grand Canal story, explore vivid and effective approaches for telling the Chinese story and spread Chinese culture abroad so as to successfully address the barriers to international public opinion and promote a correct understanding of China in the world. This paper systematically analyzes how to successfully narrate the canal story and disseminate the spirit of canal culture from the different perspectives of Chinese and Western civilisations, so as to shape an international image of Chinese Grand Canal as well as to promote Chinese culture and canal culture abroad.

2. The Ideas for Constructing China's Foreign Discourse in The New Era

According to Liu Huiwen (2023) [2], from the initial stage of the founding of the state to the reform and opening up and then to the convening of the 18th Party Congress, China's discourse power has witnessed a process of initial creation followed by effective enhancement. In order to enhance discourse power, it is necessary to strengthen the quality of discourse content, innovate discourse dissemination methods, improve the discourse dissemination mechanism, as well as foster high-quality talents.

According to Yuan Manlin and Jia Zhimin (2023)[3], in order to enhance China's discourse on the world stage, the first priority is to revive the exceptional culture of the Chinese nation. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a discourse that has universal appeal, incorporate content with strong leading values and emotional appeal, and tap into cultural concepts with modern values. Likewise, it is imperative that the 'peace' element of traditional culture is inherited and transformed to counter the Western 'China threat theory' and enhance China's image in the face of rising globalisation. At the same time, it is also an inheritance of the concept of openness, tolerance and virtue.

Against the background of the unprecedented changes of the century, Yu Yuanlai (2023) [4] argues that on the one hand, the West has been challenging China's discourse in various domains through the customary "dichotomy" under the Cold War mentality. On the other hand, the academic-theoretical deficit and the discursive disadvantage of media competition still exist. The construction of China's foreign discourse system should grasp the essential prescriptive nature and internal logic of the competition for discourse power, as well as employ a new mindset and concept to accelerate the construction of China's foreign discourse and narrative system. Hence, it is necessary to first explain China's modernisation and link China's development story to global development issues; actively create international issues, put forward Chinese solutions at the appropriate moment, and manifest Chinese wisdom. Similarly, it is essential to strengthen foreign translations, recreate and construct texts using international rules, common emotions and universal values, as well as to construct a moral discourse system with Chinese characteristics, starting from the meta-value of morality and meta-narrative and constructing a moral discourse system with Chinese characteristics so that the discourse is tailored to the demands of development, matched with the status of a superpower, facilitated by the media, and unified with moral interpretation.

In summary, China's foreign discourse should be anchored in its own cultural characteristics to enrich its content, utilize universal values to create connections with the world, employ appropriate media and strategies to effectively address the challenges of international public opinion, as well as manifest China's wisdom and image in a diversified manner.

3. A Review of the Linguistic Resources of Chinese Grand Canal

By establishing a media corpus on Chinese Grand Canal, the attention paid to Chinese Grand Canal by both domestic and international media was analysed. The corpus was extracted from the Wisers database and the Dow Jones database, with the following criteria: occurrence of Chinese Grand Canal, the Grand Canal of China, China Grand Canal, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, and Canal story in the keywords. The time span was from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2022, with over 200 news articles in total. After filtering out irrelevant information (e.g. dummy words and other content not related to the news content), the top 30 high-frequency words were extracted from the two sub-corpora by AntConc 3.4.3.

By comparing the high-frequency words in the media coverage of the Grand Canal both at home and abroad, it is evident that both mention "government", "cultural" / "cultural ", "province", "city", "heritage", etc. Hence, to a certain extent, both are attentive to the geographical location and cultural value of the Grand Canal in China. In contrast, foreign media reports make numerous references to 'development', 'transport' and 'project', focusing on the Grand Canal project and the construction of shipping and its development, while domestic media are more focused on the culture of the canal cities ('Shanghai', 'Suzhou') and the various dynasties ('dynasty').

Table 1. High-frequency Words in Media Coverage of the Grand Canal at Home and Abroad

number	foreign report		domestic report	
	frequency	words	frequency	words
1	2124	canal	556	china
2	1871	china	534	canal
3	1083	hangzhou	434	hangzhou
4	958	grand	348	city
5	953	water	331	chinese
6	897	world	301	grand
7	891	year	213	river
8	874	beijing	211	cultural
9	732	city	205	world
10	693	cultural	197	years
11	641	people	192	water
12	618	new	187	beijing
13	602	development	184	new
14	556	chinese	158	province
15	532	years	154	shanghai
16	508	province	153	people
17	506	river	152	lake
18	461	heritage	151	along
19	424	first	151	ancient
20	398	culture	147	suzhou
21	396	million	136	government
22	393	along	135	culture
23	380	government	135	local
24	372	group	132	dynasty
25	351	national	130	first
26	338	ancient	124	zhejiang
27	337	local	122	heritage
28	337	project	118	time
29	325	transport	117	museum
30	322	tourism	117	yuan

Zhang (2020) once established a corpus of the Chinese Grand Canal, and by comparing the keywords in a corpus with mutual reference to domestic and foreign media, she discovered that foreign countries focus more on issues such as residence and food, environment and consumption with a tendency to combine art, culture and personal experience. [5] In contrast, such topics are not emphasized in China. Therefore, it is crucial to identify canal culture landing points that can embody Chinese characteristics and to disseminate Chinese food culture, art culture and architecture culture with the Grand Canal cultural story as a carrier. Similarly, the prosperous development along the Grand Canal in China is utilised as a basis to incorporate it into short stories from the micro to the macro level, tapping into the mutual concerns of both parties.

4. The Narrative Perspective and Strategy of the Grand Canal Cultural Story in the Context of Civilizational Mutual Learning

4.1. Search for a Common Connotation with the World

In order to effectively strengthen the international understanding of the spirit of Chinese Grand Canal culture, to foster a better exchange of civilisations between China and the West, and to facilitate the world's understanding of the story of the Canal and thus of the excellent spirit of China embodied in the Grand Canal culture, it is necessary to take the "common story" as a handhold to achieve a "common ground while reserving differences" in culture." Under the theoretical framework of

Aristotle's three principles of persuasion, through convincing people with virtue, emotion and reason, an attempt is made to achieve audience resonance. Thus, by seeking common ground, we aim to achieve resonance with our audience.

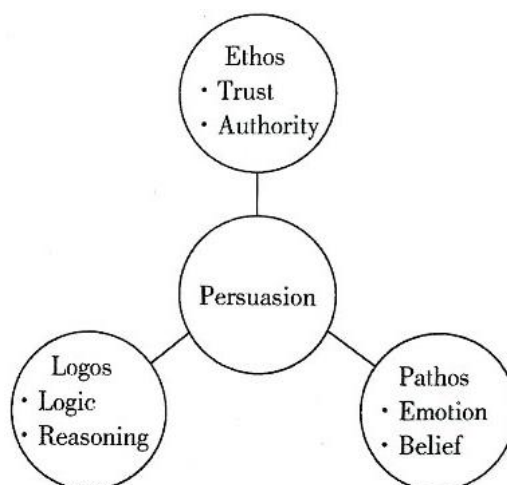


Figure 1. Aristotle's Three Principles of Persuasion

Taking the example of the Rideau Canal in Canada, as one of the world heritage canals, it has been preserved in its original structure using hydrostatic techniques. The Rideau Canal has a comprehensive system of conservation and management that combines the canal with natural and cultural resources to ensure coexistence. It is also worth mentioning that the Rideau Canal has been effectively transformed in its function and role in response to nature, with the successful launch of the Rideau Heritage Corridor Ecotourism Project, which protects the canal and safeguards the livelihoods of local people. In the course of formulating the route of Chinese Grand Canal, in order to successfully address the issue of the Yangzhou section being situated high in the north and low in the south, the water being turbulent and inconvenient for boats, Yangzhou craftsmen adopted the method of "Three Bays to One Dam", excavating a new river on the basis of not destroying nature and forming a tortuous "Three Bays". As such, the boats would no longer encounter any hazards. Both the Rideau Canal in Canada and the Grand Canal in China have adhered to the scientific spirit of respecting nature, adapting to nature, using nature as well as preserving nature in the process of construction and conservation. Therefore, the story of the Yangzhou section of the canal, whereby the principle of "ridding the unnecessary and employing the most appropriate" is featured, can be applied in the context of cultural exchanges with other countries.

Overlooking the Canal du Midi, the architect Pierre-Paul Déricet endowed the Canal du Midi with a creative conception that blends the canal with its surroundings, combining technical innovation, architectural and aesthetic concerns with man-made landscape aspects to successfully achieve a work of beauty. This is an approach rarely witnessed elsewhere and is a masterpiece in the history of architectural technology. The design of the French Canal du Midi is thus in sync with the 'spirit of innovation', one of the five spiritual dimensions condensed from the history of the Grand Canal in China. In retrospect, the planning and design of Chinese Grand Canal, its construction and maintenance, as well as the development of commerce and industry in the commercial cities along the canal has also been able to evidently illustrate the spirit of bold exploration and pioneering. Therefore, when exchanging canal culture with France, it is immensely significant to highlight the spirit of innovation that will resonate with the French. In the case of the Erie Canal, which connects the Hudson River to the Great Lakes and also represents a route that has shaped the history of the United States, the Erie National Heritage Corridor Act of 2000 emphasised the importance of the Erie Canal, which, in addition to its fundamental role as a transportation and geographic link, also served as a trade hub. Hence, it has successfully contributed to making New York the first trade and financial centre of the United States. At the same time, the Erie Canal was a political and cultural link, playing a pivotal role in social reforms such as the abolition of slavery and the women's rights movement,

thereby disseminating ideas of reform from New York State to other regions and fostering a sense of national identity. Likewise, Chinese Grand Canal, which links the North and the South, promotes economic and cultural exchanges between the North and the South. Nowadays, the economy of the cities along the Canal, especially in Jiangnan, has become prosperous due to the long-standing concept of embracing the strengths of all, which, together with the Erie Canal in the United States, has served to enhance exchanges between regions as well as to promote economic and cultural development in each region. As such, it embodies a spirit of openness that is inclusive and accommodating. Therefore, it would be an appropriate approach to explore the story of the integration and development of old brands in the Jiangnan region, such as the Huishan clay figures in Wuxi, Cai Zhi Zhai in Suzhou and Xie Fuchun in Yangzhou.

Table 2. Common Connotations of the World Canal and Chinese Grand Canal

World Canals	Cultural Connotations	Cultural Commonalities with the Grand Canal of China
The Canada Rideau Canal	A subtle transformation in tune with nature	Harnessing nature and preserving it
The French Canal du Midi	Uniqueness and boldness to innovate	Boldly exploring and pioneering
The United States Erie Canal	A cultural pivot that prosperously flourishes	Inclusive and accommodating

By performing a comprehensive analysis and integration of the various different historical stories of the canals in China and abroad, the same spiritual and cultural connotations can be extracted, and this will be adopted as the anchor point to successfully pursue a more profound resonance. The spiritual and cultural resonance embodied in the different canal stories from China and abroad can evoke a sense of identity in the audience, thus satisfying their attribution and emotional needs. Based on the emotional resonance, audiences will be encouraged to gain a deeper insight into the Chinese canal stories and their spiritual and cultural connotations based on their understanding of their own country's canal stories. Hence, it will successfully be able to facilitate effective communication.

4.2. Establish the Image of China in the Context of the Cultural Bonding Function

The traditional Chinese culture has the capacity to integrate Chinese and foreign cultures, and the classic stories of the people's wisdom can also serve as an excellent reference for tackling contemporary problems. The 5,000-year history of China, with its philosophy of benefiting the world and valuing harmony, has meant that China will never become the 'threat' that certain Western media have claimed it to be. At the same time, the invaluable cultural heritage of Chinese Grand Canal is an outstanding testimony to the Chinese spirit.

To establish a "Chinese-oriented" narrative system, it is necessary to adhere to the Chinese cultural stance and to selectively export, avoiding negative content that could be exploited. Concurrently, it should take advantage of the bonding function of Chinese culture to blend discourse and use additional connotations to enhance resonance so that China's foreign discourse can shift from passive clarification to active elaboration. [6]

In terms of environmental management, Huang Xie was the minister of Chu, and Wuxi was within his jurisdiction. He cultivated the water resources, and restored the 'Furong Lake', as well as building the Longwei Lingshan Road at the top of Mount Huishan which facilitated the livelihood of the people without damaging nature. It was alleged that he was responsible for the subsequent canal heritage such as Huangbudun and Chunshenjian. The successful development of the famous Jiangnan Canal was also based on a comprehensive study of the geographical advantages, from Jingkou (now Zhenjiang), through Wuxi to Yuhang, expanding the number of navigable merchant ships, and henceforth 'merchants travelled to and fro, and boats travelled incessantly'. Hence, it has successfully achieved a mutually beneficial situation for the people along the river. Historically, China has always been devoted to the unity of nature and mankind, adhering to the laws of nature and avoiding avarice.

Therefore, when recounting the story of the canal's excavation, the story should be presented in a less vociferous and costly manner, focusing on the wisdom of the excavators in tailoring their work to the local conditions and benefiting the people, reflecting their long-term strategic vision as well as their intention to facilitate the people. At the same time, it is a compelling statement in response to the threat of environmental destruction in China under Western discourse. From the perspective of war, for instance, the war between Wu and Yue required the excavation of a canal, and a number of historical allusions have been circulated, many of which relate to the famous minister Wu Zixu during the Spring and Autumn period, such as the gouging out of his eyes to be hung at the eastern gate, the flogging of the corpse of 300 people, the whitening of his hair overnight, and the repayment of kindness with a thousand pieces of gold. Wu Zixu was a loyal official of the state of Wu, but the king of Wu disregarded his advice and forced him to commit suicide. In the cross-cultural narrative of these stories, the tragedy of repeated persecution and the extremes of whipping a corpse for revenge should be weakened, and the emphasis should instead be placed on the portrayal of a man who understood gratitude, dared to advise, and was loyal to the very end. Therefore, in the narrative of the war, it is essential to avoid exaggerating the cruelty and deceitfulness of war, but to accentuate the loyalty and resilience of the characters, so as not to depict the Chinese people as 'warlike' and 'aggressive', but to establish a heroic image of righteousness and indomitable, reflecting the traditional attitude of the Chinese people towards war whereby the Chinese are reluctant to engage in war but are not intimidated in the instances where it is necessary.

In terms of the regime, from Emperor Yang's excavation of the Grand Canal to Qianlong's southern tour, one bridged the southeast and northwest of China, facilitating people's livelihoods and promoting national unity and urban prosperity, while the other remitted rewards, examined people's sentiments and consolidated the dynasty's harmony and prosperity. In the course of the narrative, it is imperative to embody the traditional Chinese philosophy of governance: a people-oriented approach that is beneficial to the country and the people, rather than the dictatorial dictatorship of the monarch and his own glory. From Ji Zha's abdication of his throne to Fan Li's retreat and concealment, one voluntarily abdicates his throne out of ritual and brotherly love, while the other, having served his time, retires from politics. The story of the ancient kings and their government should strive to convey the Chinese people's values of kinship, justice and altruism above personal honour, and to portray the image of a people-centred and responsible power, reflecting the distinctive strengths of the Chinese political system to counter the image of 'dictatorship' fabricated by the Western media.

Table 3. A narrative Approach to the Canal Story that Addresses the Barriers to Public Opinion

Aspects Challenged by public opinion	Content of challenge	Selected Stories	Narrative strategies
The environment	Destruction of the environment for the sake of efficiency	The Lake Controlling by Huang Xie	Emphasis on competent governance and weakening of laborious practices
The war	Warmongering and barbarism	The Remonstrate by Wu Zixu	Rendering the loyalty and wisdom of the main character and downplaying the cruel sequences
The system	Authoritarian and dictatorial	The escaping of Taibo to Wu	Highlighting how the politicians are indifferent to fame and fortune and are dedicated to the people, underlining the advantages of the distinctive system

5. Summary and Prospects

The Chinese communication practitioners should gain a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the significance and necessity of improving international communication under the new situation, strengthen international communication capacity, foster a favourable external public opinion environment for China's development and stability, as well as actively contribute to the

construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. In the context of civilizational mutual learning, it is wise to make good use of the cultural resources of Chinese Grand Canal to tell the stories that connect with the world. In the current complex international public opinion environment, China will definitely embrace the challenges that await it and disseminate China's voice correctly.

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