

Exploration of the Connotation and Communication Pathways of Central Plains Culture

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Abstract: This study takes the culture of the Central Plains as its research focus, with particular attention to its pathways of dissemination. By sorting out the cultural resources of Henan Province, the research aims to construct a living transmission system supported by tangible cultural carriers, in order to provide ideas for the inheritance and innovative development of Central Plains culture. First, relevant concepts are clarified to define the scope of study. Second, a communication strategy is proposed that integrates traditional and modern methods, combines online and offline channels, and international approaches. Finally, Henan Province is taken as a case study to propose the construction of an academic system of the “Central Plains School,” the deepening of international cooperation, and the improvement of safeguard mechanisms, so as to achieve multidimensional interpretation and global dissemination of Central Plains culture.

Keywords: Central Plains; Culture; Communication Pathways.

1. Introduction

At a new historical starting point, promoting cultural prosperity, building a culturally strong nation, and shaping the modern civilization have become key cultural missions in the new era. Our government has repeatedly emphasized that cultural relics and heritage carry the genetic code and lifeblood. They are irreplaceable and represent valuable resources of outstanding civilization. He has also pointed out the need to actively promote the development and prosperity of Central Plains culture, integrating historical and modern civilizations to provide spiritual motivation and cultural support for social progress. As the core region of Central Plains culture, Henan Province bears the historical responsibility of driving the rise while also facing the practical challenges of inheriting and innovating traditional culture and promoting cultural prosperity. In recent years, significant achievements have been made in both theoretical construction and practical exploration of Central Plains culture and Central Plains studies. Representative scholars such as Li Gengxiang, Yin Quanhai, Tian Xianchen, and Zhang Xinbin have emerged, while numerous researchers have engaged in interdisciplinary studies covering Neo-Confucianism, Yi studies, Song studies, Canal studies, Yin-Shang studies, Yan-Huang studies, economics, ethics, jurisprudence, aesthetics, business studies, traditional medicine, Yellow River culture, and Feng Youlan's philosophy, among others. This has gradually led to the formation of an interdisciplinary academic community [1]. In addition, a number of specialized works have been published, including *The Encyclopedia of Central Plains Culture* [2], *Interpretation of Central Plains Culture* [3], *Cultural Henan: The Spirit of Central Plains Culture* [4], *Central Plains Culture* [5], and *Introduction to Central Plains Studies* [6], among others. However, a major challenge remains: how to concretize the communication pathways of Central Plains culture and build dissemination models that combine academic depth with practical value.

2. Analysis of the Connotation of Central Plains Culture

2.1. The Central Plains

The term “Central Plains” (Zhongyuan), as a historical and geographical concept, has referred to different areas across various periods. Historian Lü Simian proposed that “in ancient times, the so-called Central Plains region extended from west of Mount Tai to east of Mount Hua, south of the Taihang Mountains, and north of the Huai and Han Rivers—covering most of modern Henan and Shandong, and parts of Hebei and Shanxi.” [7] Li Xiacong further noted: “Judging from transmitted historical texts, the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River were the cradle of Huaxia civilization. Therefore, in its narrow sense, the Central Plains refers specifically to the dynasties that established their capitals in the Guanzhong and Heluo regions of ancient, reflecting the Central Kingdom's worldview centered on this area. In a broader sense, it refers to the middle and lower Yellow River basin, a perception rooted in ancient geographical cognition.” [8] In summary, the Central Plains is a regional concept centered on Henan, narrowly referring to the Henan area, and broadly to the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. Owing to its unique geographical location, profound historical legacy, rich cultural heritage, and enduring influence, Henan is considered the core representative of Central Plains culture. Therefore, this study adopts the narrow definition of “Central Plains,” focusing primarily on Henan.

2.2. Central Plains Culture

Central Plains culture originated in prehistoric times, flourished during the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, Zhou), reached its height in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, evolved toward pluralism during the Han and Tang dynasties, and attained mature refinement in the Northern Song dynasty. The archaeological cultural system theory introduced the concept of the Central Plains cultural

zone. Su Bingqi divided archaeological cultures into six major systems, among which “the Central Plains—centered on Guanzhong (Shaanxi), southern Shanxi, and western Henan—constitutes one of the six regions.[9]” Yan Wenming, based on Neolithic archaeological features, identified six major cultural zones: the Yan–Liao, Gan–Qing, Central Plains, Shandong, Jiang–Zhe, and Middle Yangtze zones, with the Central Plains zone centered in the Wei River basin and the border areas of Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Henan—covering almost the entirety of these provinces[10].

Regarding the concept of Central Plains culture, Liu Chengji and others define it as the sum of material, institutional, and spiritual culture created by the people living in this region[11]. Dong Zhaofeng and others further describe it as encompassing Henan’s tangible cultural heritage—such as historical relics, architecture, ruins, cultural cities, protected zones, and scenic areas—as well as intangible heritage including traditional drama, dance, music, literature, art, technology, and folk customs[12]. Central Plains culture is broad and profound, covering prehistoric culture, divine culture, political culture, sage culture, intellectual culture, famous figures, heroic traditions, agrarian culture, commercial culture, scientific and technological culture, medical culture, poetic culture, religious culture, operatic culture, folk traditions, martial arts, and family-name culture, among others[13]. In essence, Central Plains culture encompasses material creation, institutional development, spiritual inheritance, and artistic expression, characterized by continuity, inclusiveness, and orthodoxy, serving as the foundation of civilization.

3. Research on the Communication Pathways of Central Plains Culture

Currently, Henan Province possesses 65,519 immovable cultural relics. Among them are five UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites, 420 protected sites, and 1,521 provincial-level protected sites. It also boasts 17 archaeological site parks—the highest number in the country. Since 1990, 55 archaeological projects from Henan have been selected among “Top Ten New Archaeological Discoveries,” ranking first nationwide. The province has 402 museums with 1,773,620 pieces (4,783,457 individual items) of movable cultural relics in total. These figures reflect the region’s rich historical depth, splendid heritage, diversity of types, and large quantity. To transform this wealth of cultural resources into a vibrant civilization discourse system, the activation of Central Plains cultural heritage must take protection as its foundation, content innovation as its core, and coordinated channels as its engine, thereby overcoming the interconnected challenges of underdevelopment, homogeneity, and inefficient dissemination. This section explores three major pathways—integration of traditional and modern methods, online and offline communication, and domestic–international synergy—to strengthen the appeal, visibility, influence, creativity, and cultural–tourism integration of Central Plains culture.

3.1. Integration of Traditional and Modern Methods

3.1.1. Deep Cultivation and Revitalization of Traditional Means

First, cultural resources with distinctive Central Plains characteristics should be systematically reviewed,

scientifically selected, and evaluated. Efforts should be made to strengthen academic research, educational dissemination, and social transformation of Central Plains culture, achieving interconnectivity, information co-construction, and resource sharing. Key priorities include the protection and study of UNESCO sites such as the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, Yin Ruins in Anyang, and the Historic Monuments of Dengfeng. Development of the Heluo Cultural Ecological Protection Zone, the Yuzhou Jun Porcelain Intangible Heritage Demonstration Base, and historic cities, towns, and villages should be promoted to form a comprehensive cultural protection network.

Second, emphasis should be placed on inheritance and innovation, building platforms for the creative development of Central Plains culture. Leveraging resources such as the hometowns of the Yellow Emperor (Xinzheng), Laozi (Luyi), Zhuangzi (Minquan), Fuxi (Huaiyang), and Nüwa (Shexian), the region can forge a “Root-Seeking Central Plains” cultural brand.

Third, traditional media such as television and radio can still play an important role by producing special programs and documentaries that systematically introduce the history, connotations, and distinctive features of Central Plains culture.

3.1.2. Breakthroughs in Emerging Technologies

On one hand, new social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin (TikTok) can be used to release engaging cultural content that attracts younger audiences—such as the viral success of the official Douyin account “My Hometown Henan.” On the other hand, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies can be applied to create immersive cultural experiences, as seen in the Longmen Grottoes VR project, which allows visitors to experience the awe of ancient art. Additionally, online literature and games themed around Central Plains culture can use storytelling and interactivity to embed cultural elements into popular digital entertainment.

3.2. Integration of Online and Offline Channels

3.2.1. Building Online Communication Networks

First, establish official websites and platforms that consolidate Central Plains cultural resources and provide comprehensive, authoritative information. Official accounts should be set up across major online platforms to disseminate updates about cultural events and academic findings.

Second, utilize live streaming and virtual exhibitions to host online cultural activities and academic lectures, enabling broader participation. Using 3D modeling and digital technology, audiences can explore rare artifacts and artworks anytime, anywhere.

3.2.2. Expanding Offline Cultural Activities

Using 3D First, organize diverse cultural exchange activities such as exhibitions, lectures, folk festivals, and art competitions featuring expert commentary. For example, the Henan Museum’s themed exhibitions on Central Plains culture, complemented by professional guides, allow visitors to experience its unique charm. Regional events like Central Plains Culture Festivals and Cultural Weeks can further showcase its appeal.

Second, strengthen the educational system. Collaborate with primary and secondary schools to create experiential learning programs and study corridors; Build academic hubs in higher education, establishing specialized colleges and

interdisciplinary courses; Promote industry–education integration and cultural innovation incubation in vocational education; Develop social education ecosystems through upgraded public spaces and new media channels. Supporting policies, evaluation mechanisms, and regional coordination should be implemented to ensure sustainable innovation.

Third, promote cultural–tourism integration by developing historical–cultural tourism zones such as the Central Plains Historical–Cultural Area, Ancient Capitals Tourism Area, Funiu Mountain Leisure Zone, and Taihang–Tongbai Ecological Red Tourism Area. Signature routes should include World Heritage tours, Kung Fu experiences, and ancestor-worship journeys, establishing Henan as a world-renowned cultural tourism destination.

Fourth, improve the cultural industry chain by upgrading traditional sectors—broadcasting, publishing, arts and crafts, performing arts—and expanding into creative industries, animation, digital publishing, and mobile media. Promote the construction of cultural industry demonstration parks such as Kaifeng Songdu Ancient City, Mount Song in Zhengzhou, and Longmen in Luoyang.

3.3. Integration of Domestic and International Perspective

3.3.1. Theoretical Innovation and Deep Exploration of Cultural Connotations

From both historical and contemporary perspectives, deepen theoretical research to clarify the intrinsic connections among Central Plains Studies, Central Plains Civilization, Civilization, and Modern Civilization. Produce artistic works inspired by Central Plains culture, cultivate experts specializing in Central Plains Studies, and refine region-specific academic achievements to form a multidisciplinary intellectual foundation.

3.3.2. Regional Cooperation and Cultural Outreach

Collaborate with neighboring regions to co-create cultural brands such as the Yellow River Cultural Belt, achieving resource integration and complementary advantages for broader influence. Participate actively in strategies like the Belt and Road Initiative, aligning Central Plains culture with cultural strategies to expand its reach.

3.3.3. Tripartite Collaboration for Global Communication

Governments, enterprises, and citizens should form a “trinity” of cooperation in promoting the international dissemination of Central Plains culture. The government should play a leading role by updating communication concepts, improving institutional frameworks, increasing funding, and cultivating talent; Enterprises should innovate within cultural industries, producing high-quality cultural products; Citizens should enhance media and information literacy, creatively generating culture-friendly content.

3.3.4. Integrating Local and Global Perspectives to Shape Cultural Discourse

Rely on local scholars, academia, and cultural traditions while engaging global scholarship through cultural pluralism and civilizational dialogue. Promote thematic exhibitions and artifact exchanges abroad to present refined local culture in international contexts, enhancing the global recognition of Central Plains cultural identity.

3.3.5. Innovation in Translation and Global Cultural Expression

Translation of Central Plains cultural classics should

balance academic rigor and audience accessibility, employing strategic translation, cross-media adaptation, and international collaboration to convey the philosophical essence of these texts to a global audience. For example, in 2018, the Henan Provincial Government launched the “Translating Henan” project, producing bilingual book series that present the province’s cultural essence—including traditional medicine, ancient capitals, martial arts, Tai Chi, agricultural civilization, and the origins of characters—in an accessible way to international readers.

4. Conclusion

As the core representative of Central Plains culture, Henan is leveraging its exceptional cultural resources to build a comprehensive and multidimensional communication system. This system driven by technology, supported by media integration, and reinforced by social collaboration, is transforming cultural dissemination from one-way transmission to co-creative participation. Such an innovative model not only opens new pathways for the inheritance and development of Central Plains culture but also provides a valuable practical paradigm for global dialogue and exchange among civilizations. Research on the communication of Central Plains culture is thus a crucial measure to revitalize regional culture, activate the contemporary vitality of cultural heritage, and strengthen civilizational exchange. It contributes to transformation from a nation rich in cultural resources to a powerful narrator of civilization, realizing a new model of civilizational dialogue that blends ancient and modern. With continuous technological advancement and collective societal effort, the communication pathways of Central Plains culture will become increasingly diverse and effective, making even greater contributions to the inheritance and flourishing of civilization.

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