

Discourse Innovation and National Image Construction in CCTV's "Culture+" Micro-Variety Shows

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Abstract: Micro-variety shows have become an increasingly visible carrier of cultural communication on mobile platforms. This article examines several "Culture+" programmes released through CCTV's mobile ecosystem, including A Rich Life, Extraordinary Journey, Journey with 'Ni', and Not-So-Young Chengdu. Drawing on broadcasting criticism and multimodal discourse analysis, it argues that these programmes do more than compress traditional cultural content into shorter episodes. They rework the rhetoric of national image building by combining layered voice, image, ambient sound, embodied hosting, and small-scale narrative units. In this process, ecological space is made sensible rather than merely declared, cultural-tourism imagery is shaped through situated experience rather than brochure-style description, and cultural identity is narrated through ordinary scenes that quietly respond to external stereotypes. What emerges is a more grounded and mobile image of China, one built through concrete encounters and locally rooted stories.

Keywords: Culture+ Micro-Variety Shows, National Image, Discourse Innovation, Multimodality, Mobile Communication.

1. Introduction

Micro-variety shows sit between long-form television and fragmented short-video content. Their short running time, compact thematic design and strong platform adaptability make them especially suitable for circulation on mobile media. The policy climate has also encouraged the growth of new cultural forms. In the outline for the Fifteenth Five-Year Plan, cultural creativity, new cultural formats and the improvement of cultural supply are all given visible weight[1]. At the same time, discussions of China's international image continue to note a gap between material strength and softer dimensions such as cultural influence and environmental governance[2][14]. This makes the study of cultural micro-variety shows more than a question of format. It is also a question of how mainstream media narrate the country to audiences at home and abroad.

This article reads CCTV's "Culture+" micro-variety shows as a set of discursive experiments. It focuses on how these programmes organise voice, image, sound and narrative perspective in order to reshape ecological, cultural-tourism and cultural imagery. Compared with formulaic publicity discourse, these programmes tend to work through shorter scenes, embodied hosting and everyday cultural details. That shift matters, because it moves the representation of the nation away from abstract declaration and closer to sensory experience.

2. Multimodal Discourse and the Making of an Ecological Image

The ecological dimension is important because it is one of the places where national image has to be felt rather than simply stated. Zhang Song's discussion of broadcasting creation reminds us that spoken language in media is never an isolated script; it is tied to programme intention, emotional orientation and the larger audiovisual whole[3]. Once this point is placed alongside multimodal discourse theory[4][16], Gunthe and Leeuwen (2020) founded that the analysis of micro-variety shows can no longer remain at the

level of words alone. Meaning emerges through the interaction of narration, synchronous sound, music, camera movement and spatial composition.

2.1. Layered Verbal Discourse Thickens Spatial Perception

Ecological image is difficult to build through concept words alone. A programme can repeatedly declare that a place is "green", "clean", or "harmonious", yet such labels remain weak unless the viewer is drawn into a concrete sensory relation with the place. This is where the verbal design of "Culture+" micro-variety shows becomes significant. Unlike many traditional variety programmes that rely on one stable explanatory voice, these micro-variety shows often organise speech in layers: poetic voice-over, host reaction, short exchanges with local people, and bits of on-site utterance that retain hesitation, laughter, or breath. The result is not a single omniscient account of space but a textured field of speech.

In the Changbai Mountain section of Extraordinary Journey, for example, the programme does not explain the landscape in an entirely top-down way. A poetic line may first establish tone, giving the scene emotional contour. This is then interrupted or extended by on-site remarks and local explanation. The host's speech does not stand above the landscape as master commentary; rather, it moves inside the scene, adjusting to weather, movement, and encounter. Local speech plays an equally important role. When residents, guides, or craftspeople speak from within their own environment, they add what can be called situational credibility. Their words do not simply provide information. They signal that the scene has its own social life and knowledge system.

This matters for ecological image because space becomes more than scenery. It becomes a lived world. Nichols' work on documentary reminds us that indexical sound and situated presence help anchor viewers in a sense of actuality[5]. In these programmes, an ecological location is made believable not only by showing it but by letting viewers hear how people inhabit it. Speech here functions as orientation. The voice-over offers affective direction; the host's utterances confirm

bodily presence; local voices provide embedded knowledge. Their combination thickens spatial perception.

A further point is that these verbal layers also soften the stiffness often associated with official discourse. When the programme includes incomplete remarks, momentary surprise, or light banter, the resulting tone is less rigid than that of traditional explanation. This does not mean that value orientation disappears. Rather, value is carried in a more indirect way. Respect for nature, admiration for local ecological wisdom, and attention to environmental balance all remain present, but they are conveyed through encounter rather than proclamation. The ecological image of the nation is therefore built as something that can be sensed, inhabited, and gradually inferred.

2.2. Camera Movement and Sound Design Make Space Mobile

The visual and sonic organisation of these programmes extends that verbal work. Research on micro-variety shows has already highlighted the importance of spatial narration in new media contexts[6]. In “Culture+” micro-variety shows, the camera rarely treats landscape as inert background. Instead, establishing shots, travelling shots, and detail shots turn space into an active narrative element. In *Extraordinary Journey*, for instance, images of peach groves, mountain ridges, water surfaces, and village pathways do not merely illustrate what the host says. They shape pacing. Slow panoramic movement opens perceptual distance; closer details invite tactile attention; alternation between large landscape and small human action creates a sense that environment and daily life belong to the same rhythm.

This mobility is crucial. A static postcard image may be beautiful, but it does not by itself generate a convincing ecological narrative. What these programmes often do is show ecological space in transition: wind crossing water, mist moving through a valley, footsteps entering a path, hands touching an object shaped by local environment. Such movement keeps the landscape from becoming a frozen symbol. It appears instead as a process. From the standpoint of national image, that processual quality matters because ecology is presented not as decorative surplus but as a living condition.

Sound plays an equally important role. When wind, insects, footsteps, water, or workshop noise are allowed to remain audible, the scene acquires depth. Ambient sound prevents over-packaging. It reminds the viewer that the place has material texture beyond the frame. In mobile viewing environments, where attention is often intermittent, such sound can be especially powerful because it restores immediacy. The listener does not simply receive information about nature; they hear the place exert itself.

The interaction between sound and voice is particularly important. In stronger sequences, background music does not overwhelm ambient noise, and narration does not flatten the acoustic field. Instead, music, environment, and speech are layered in a controlled but not overly polished way. This gives the programme a form of moderated roughness, one that feels more proximate than the smooth authority of older television rhetoric. The ecological image produced here is therefore neither purely visual nor purely verbal. It emerges from multimodal coordination. The nation is imagined ecologically through sounds, trajectories, and sensorial cues that make environmental value perceptible.

3. Narrative Discourse and the Extension of Cultural-Tourism Imagery

If ecological image depends on multimodal arrangement, cultural-tourism image depends more clearly on narrative position. In recent years, studies of tourism-oriented variety programming have shown that cultural-tourism representation is moving away from scenic display alone and toward experience, emotion and value interpretation [7][9][10]. “Culture+” micro-variety shows take this further by tightening the episode around one place, one task or one cultural motif. The result is not a panoramic guidebook but a concentrated encounter.

3.1. Situated Hosting Turns Tourism into Experience

One striking change lies in the role of the host. In these programmes, the host rarely stays outside the scene as a detached explainer. More often, the host enters the activity and lets speech grow out of participation. *A Rich Life* offers a clear example. The official programme page presents the episode set in Zhaosu, Xinjiang, around horse bathing in the river, riding skills and local food. What matters analytically is not just the itinerary, but the way narration changes once the host becomes a participant. Description gives way to response: admiration, surprise, bodily fatigue and informal conversation all become part of the programme’s discourse.

This shift has consequences for cultural-tourism imagery. Once the host speaks from within the site rather than above it, the programme no longer resembles a scenic brochure. The host’s speech serves as an affective bridge. Viewers are invited not only to know that a place is meaningful, but also to sense why it is meaningful to those who encounter it on location. The discourse becomes more local, more contingent and more persuasive precisely because it is less polished.

3.2. Focused Storytelling Releases Cultural Value

TheThe brevity of the micro-variety form encourages narrative concentration. Rather than trying to summarise a city or region in a comprehensive manner, many episodes build around one motif, one route, or one practice. This concentrated narrative economy is not merely a result of shorter duration; it is part of the form’s persuasive power. By limiting explanatory ambition, the episode can deepen one thread and let significance emerge from sequence.

Extraordinary Journey is exemplary in this respect. Across its episodes, the programme does not attempt a complete account of every destination. Instead, it follows a small number of trajectories: entering a mountain area, moving through a village, watching light change on water, listening to local narration, and allowing the host’s experience to accumulate slowly. The result is a form of depth through restraint. Because less information is forced into each episode, the selected material can breathe. Cultural-tourism value is not asserted as a catalogue; it is released through mood, process, and association.

A similar logic appears in food-making and craft-learning segments in *Guangdong Travelers*. Their value does not lie in offering a complete historical lecture, but in following concrete stages of making, watching, asking, failing, and trying again. Process itself becomes narrative. Through process, local knowledge and intangible heritage are

translated into something graspable. The audience does not merely hear that a regional tradition matters; they observe how knowledge is embodied, corrected, and transmitted.

This focused narrative structure also allows cultural value to appear in ordinary labour. Mainstream cultural discourse has sometimes privileged finished symbols over the everyday practices that sustain them. Micro-variety shows often reverse that tendency. They give attention to the middle zone between abstract heritage label and final product: kneading, waiting, stirring, explaining, tasting, repeating. This attention to procedure humanises cultural value. It makes tradition visible as work rather than as distant aura.

From the perspective of national image, that is significant. A nation's cultural-tourism image becomes more persuasive when it is grounded in habits, skills, and local rhythms. The audience is more likely to trust an image that grows from observable activity than one built solely from elevated adjectives. Focused storytelling therefore does not reduce complexity; it redistributes it. Complexity is relocated from broad description to the internal detail of a smaller narrative unit.

4. Cultural Image and the Contest Over Interpretation

The cultural dimension of national image is never neutral. It is shaped within broader struggles over who gets to define a country and through what kinds of stories. Stuart (1997) firstly proposed a comprehensive definition of Cultural studies and argued that representation is selective and hierarchical[12]. Said's critique of Orientalism likewise reminds us that non-Western societies are often framed through inherited stereotypes rather than through self-articulated experience[13]. Against this background, "Culture+" micro-variety shows are significant not because they directly refute external narratives in overtly argumentative language, but because they reorganise attention and interpretation at the level of everyday cultural scenes.

4.1. Media Attention Works as Value Framing

The cultural dimension of national image is never neutral. It is bound up with the question of who gets to define cultural significance and by what means. Communication studies has long noted that mass media not only transmit information but also confer status and shape climates of attention[8][11]. In the context of "Culture+" micro-variety shows, this insight helps explain why programme selection matters. When mainstream media repeatedly choose to centre local artisans, regional customs, dialect-inflected speech, or understated urban scenes, they are not simply documenting them. They are elevating them as worthy objects of common attention.

This value-framing function is especially visible in the role of hosts and guests. Their importance does not lie solely in institutional authority. It also lies in their function as intermediaries who convert cultural materials into shared relevance. When a host lingers over an ordinary craft, or when a guest shows genuine curiosity about a local practice, the programme grants that practice visibility and present-tense importance. In this way, media attention does not only disseminate culture; it actively reshapes the hierarchy of what counts as culturally meaningful.

This is a subtle but significant point for a doctoral-level argument. The issue is not that the programme simply

"promotes traditional culture." That phrase is too broad. More precisely, the programme redistributes symbolic attention. It helps move some practices from the margin of everyday perception to the centre of mediated value. Such redistribution matters in an era when visibility is uneven and when global cultural hierarchies often privilege already dominant images of modernity.

The value-framing work of these programmes is also tied to tone. Their effectiveness often depends on avoiding both solemn overstatement and shallow novelty. When the tone is relaxed but serious enough to sustain respect, audiences are more likely to accept the programme's invitation to re-evaluate the ordinary. Cultural image is then reconstructed not through rhetorical excess but through careful attention to what had been overlooked.

4.2. Small Stories Recode Cultural Identity

The most effective "Culture+" micro-variety shows respond to stereotypes not by arguing against them directly, but by telling different stories. Their cultural politics lies less in overt confrontation than in the gradual construction of cultural leadership-what Gramsci theorises as hegemony-through everyday practices, visibility and shared meaning [15]. Rather than staging explicit rebuttal, they often let alternative images accumulate through small, concrete, and localised scenes. In this sense, they operate as what might be called low-intensity counter-discourse. The counterforce lies not in confrontation alone but in replacing thin images with thicker ones.

Journey with 'Ni' and Not-So-Young Chengdu are useful here in different ways. The former draws on intercultural motifs and Silk Road symbolism, suggesting that cultural connection can be narrated through travel, performance, and scene rather than through abstract civilisational slogan. The latter turns toward the city and works with everyday Chengdu life: tea, food, neighbourhood texture, and the atmosphere surrounding a global sports event. What matters in both cases is scale. The programmes do not begin from a grand thesis about China. They begin from manageable situations. Through those situations, viewers encounter sociability, craft, urban ease, or local confidence.

This narrative smallness is politically meaningful. Stereotypes often survive because they flatten the everyday. They turn a country into a few repeated abstractions. Small stories work against that flattening by restoring density. When viewers watch people cook, chat, walk, repair, wait, or laugh in recognisable situations, the represented culture becomes less available to caricature. Identity is no longer carried only by major symbols. It is dispersed across ordinary gestures and local forms of speech.

There is also an important temporal aspect. Grand narratives often demand instant recognition: the audience is told what the nation means. Small stories work more slowly. Their persuasive force comes from accumulation. No single moment needs to bear the whole burden of representation. Instead, cultural identity takes shape across repeated modest scenes. This slower form of meaning may actually be better suited to mobile media than didactic compression, because it offers viewers memorable fragments rather than overpacked argument.

From the perspective of discourse, then, these programmes reconstruct cultural image by changing the unit of representation. The relevant unit is no longer the nation as a single statement. It is the scene, the encounter, the craft

process, the local meal, the urban afternoon, the shared joke. Such units may look minor, but together they recode how the nation becomes imaginable.

5. Conclusion

The value of CBox “Culture+” micro-variety shows does not lie in size or spectacle. Their contribution lies in the way they reorganise discourse for mobile circulation. Through multimodal ecological narration, situated cultural-tourism storytelling and culturally grounded micro-narratives, they make national image more concrete, more experiential and less dependent on abstract proclamation. What these programmes finally offer is not a finished image of China, but a different way of building one: from local scenes outward, from embodied experience upward, and from small stories toward larger recognition.

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