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More Than an Icon: Intersemiotic Translation of Cultural Image of Chinese Festival

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ABSTRACT

Cultural images, as quintessential carriers of profound cultural meaning within Chinese literary works, present enduring and significant challenges in translation due to their deeply embedded connotations. The translation of cultural image has long constituted a persistent challenge within the realm of literary translation practice. In response, scholarly research has explored a spectrum of strategic and technical approaches to address this complexity. However, analysis of existing research reveals a critical gap: scant attention has been paid to the nonverbal semiotic translation of cultural image. This study therefore adopts an intersemiotic translation perspective, integrating Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory to analyze the translation and meaning of nonverbal signs of cultural image. The research subject derives from an episode of the cultural program Chinese Festival Shows produced by Henan TV in China. This program serves as an exemplary case study due to its deliberate and elaborate reconstruction of traditional Chinese cultural images (e.g., mythological figures, seasonal rituals, symbolic objects) primarily through audiovisual media—a fundamentally nonverbal mode. Applying Peirce's framework, particularly his concepts of sign typology (Icon, Index, Symbol) and semiotic relations (Representamen, Object, Interpretant), allows us to dissect this complex translation process. Findings demonstrate that the program's reconstruction of traditional Chinese cultural image functions as a semiotic practice—constituting intersemiotic translation at the translational level. Examination through the lens of sign typology and semiotic relations further elucidates the meaning-generation process within intersemiotic translation.

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1. Introduction

Cultural images are culturally loaded words with distinct characteristics. They serve lyrical and aesthetic functions and are a common way of expressing cultural meaning in Chinese literary works. Cultural image is “something that indirectly conjures up an idea or a mental picture of something else in one’s mind”^[1]. It can be expressed as a word through verbal signs, or it can be presented in a visual way through non-verbal signs.

Cultural image constitutes an artistic expression that carries the common emotions, historical memories or values of a cultural group through symbols, images, allusions or natural objects in a specific culture. It is a combination of cultural symbols and deep meanings, which can arouse the resonance of people in a specific cultural background. The striking power of poetic imagery stems from its psychological ability to activate rich associations formed by an individual’s culture and experiences. Writers achieve this by selecting precise sensory details that let readers connect these associations to new emotions, creating a deep, personal understanding^[2]. Therefore, the translation of cultural images has always been a difficult point in literary translation^[3]. However, through the analysis of existing research on the translation of cultural images, it is found that almost all of them focus on the translation of verbal signs, and few studies have been published on the translation of non-linguistic signs of cultural images^[4-7].

The use of non-linguistic signs has become widespread in this technologically empowered era, often conveying meanings that linguistic signs cannot adequately express. From the perspective of intersemiotic translation, the generation of meaning through non-linguistic signs can be interpreted both as sign activity and as translational practice. Intersemiotic translation involves not only the transfer of meaning across different sign systems but also, on a deeper level, reconfigures modes of cultural expression and reception. For example, adapting a literary work into a film is not merely a mediation of content across media; it is a process that reconstitutes cultural context and aesthetic systems, directly influencing how audiences interpret the original text

and emotionally engage with it. Such translational practices prompt us to reconsider the boundaries of signs and their dynamic agency in social communication.

Furthermore, intersemiotic translation offers methodological intersections for art, literature, and media studies. Artists expand the signifying potential of signs by transforming text into installations or performance art, while media researchers can examine how intersemiotic processes shape the construction and dissemination of public issues within trans-media narratives. Explicitly connecting these practices with theoretical discourse not only enriches the scope of semiotic research but also enhances interaction within the humanities and between the humanities and social sciences. This study will explore the nonverbal translation of cultural images from the perspective of Jakobson’s intersemiotic translation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Image

Physical image and connotation are two components of cultural image. Physical image is the carrier of information and is the objective fact that forms image; connotation is the extended meaning of physical image in a certain language and cultural environment. The function of cultural image is to represent abstract concepts through concrete forms and elucidate the obscure by means of the familiar or cognitively accessible. Hu defines cultural image as the fusion of subjective emotion and objective image, with meaning originating in the former and expressed by the latter, while physical form functions as meaning’s carrier^[8]. According to Li et al., while the physiological basis and content of human thought are fundamentally similar across populations, variations in natural and social contexts result in markedly different cognitive approaches and verbal representations of the same ideas^[9].

Qu made a relatively comprehensive summary of the nature of image^[10]. He believed that the concept of cultural image can be summarized as follows: 1, The objective entities of cultural images(the physical form) include invisible materials and all external manifestations of human beings,

such as sound, wind, and human behavior. Meaning (the connotation) refers to all subjective conscious activities of the poet, such as feelings, ambitions, cognition, and illusions. 2, The essence of image is to convey implicit meanings, to express meanings in a tactful and euphemistic way, and to conceal meanings in images. Therefore, image has dual meanings, namely external meaning and internal meaning, also known as literal meaning and implicit meaning. 3, Meaning is the subject, the purpose and the carrier, while physical image is the object, the means and the carrier. 4, Image and meaning must have some connection to constitute image. 5, The same image can convey different meanings to different writers and the same writer in different time and space^[10].

It is precisely because the meaning of cultural images is regional and context-dependent that the translation of cultural images often faces some difficulties. Some untranslatability in translation is due to the heterogeneity of the semiotic space, that is, the semiosphere^[11]. The existence of semiosphere may result in the non-existence of corresponding cultural images in the translation, which will result in semantic gaps. On the other hand, even if similar images exist, they may lead to misunderstandings due to differences in deep cultural cognition. Therefore, the same cultural image carries different cultural connotations, making it difficult to balance image and meaning in the translation process. Additionally, even within the same cultural group, different contexts can result in varying interpretations of cultural images. Li concluded that translatable images are those metaphors or symbolic images that effectively convey meaning, have shallow cultural roots, and are easy to resonate emotionally^[3]. However, those cultural images with deep cultural roots, strong religious attributes, unique meanings, or extracted from allusions are not translatable.

Some scholars have proposed solutions to the translation of cultural images. Li et al. proposed two approaches, image retention and notes and image addition, to solve the problems of misplacement in the translation of words with cultural images and loss in the translation of words with cultural images^[9]. Shu believes that the intertextuality of cultural images is the key to the translation of cultural images^[12]. In the translation of cultural images, in order to fully reproduce the intertextuality in the original work, the translator can adopt the following translation strategies: either to be cautious in alienating in order to retain the intertex-

tual meaning of the original cultural image, or to be bold in domesticating in order to reconstruct the intertextual meaning of the original cultural image, or to use both alienation and domestication in a coordinated manner, with alienation preserving the image and domestication making up for the meaning.

Based on Saussure's classification of signs, Song mentioned that "the meaning of a cultural image is generated on the basis of a triangular relationship among three elements: the signifier (i.e. the physical form of the cultural image), the signified (i.e. the associated mental concept of this cultural image) and the external reality to which the signifier is related"^[1]. Lang & Numtong also believe that images can be explained from Saussure's semiotics^[13]. They explained that the concept "Yi" (connotation) which represents the underlying meaning is the signified while "Xiang" (psychical image) which refers to tangible representation or image is the signifier. They consider cultural image as the "projection of Yi onto Xiang"^[13]. Within Saussurean semiotics, the signifier and signified of cultural image constitute a dyadic relationship. However, when cultural image undergoes intersemiotic translation, it transforms into a Peircean triadic sign relation. Saussurean semiotics focuses primarily on dyadic relations within verbal sign systems, whereas Peircean semiotics encompasses triadic relations in nonverbal signs.

2.2. Intersemiotic Translation

Jakobson describes a third type of translation, intersemiotic translation or transmutation, where meaning is transferred from words (verbal signs) into an entirely different medium composed of nonverbal signs (e.g., images, music, dance)^[14]. Some scholars criticized his proposition even if he extended the concept of translation. He didn't go far enough to step out the scope of linguistic bias. He assumed that natural language should be involved in intersemiotic translation^[15]. Some researchers developed the concept of intersemiotic translation and believe it occurs not only between verbal and nonverbal signs but also among nonverbal signs^[15-19]. In its broader contemporary sense, intersemiotic translation describes any act of meaning-making that bridges different semiotic modalities, translating the content or essence of one system into the forms of another^[19,20].

In recent years, the field of translation studies has expanded its scope to include various forms of intersemiotic

translation—such as visual adaptations, musical reinterpretations, comic and film adaptations, and other creative transformations. As Munday described, the scope of translation studies has broadened significantly to include various types of intersemiotic translation, even those that overlap with or involve elements of intralingual and interlingual translation^[21]. The evolving concept of translation has prompted a corresponding expansion in the definition of text. Today, texts are no longer confined to written or linguistic material; instead, they encompass diverse forms such as drama performances, sculptures, or songs^[22]. Furthermore, intersemiotic translation frequently operates on multimodal texts—works that integrate multiple semiotic systems. Crucially, multimodal texts rely on the combined use of various semiotic resources and do not necessarily require language at all. As O'Halloran et al. define it, any text utilizing more than one semiotic resource is inherently multimodal^[19].

Compared with interlingual translation, intersemiotic translation is a special language practice. As a way to interpret meaning, intersemiotic translation has unique interpretive advantages. The traditional principles and standards applicable to interlingual translation cannot be applied to intersemiotic translation. It is both a fundamental change to the existing interpretation habits and a new form of sign manipulation^[23].

Iedema^[24] argues that shifts in meaning are inevitable during intersemiotic translation. Perfect equivalence between different sign systems is generally unachievable (except potentially in fields like mathematics), but producing a functionally adequate rendition remains a realistic goal. According to O'Halloran et al.^[19], intersemiotic translation underpins cultural communication by facilitating resemiotization. This process enables scholars to conceptualize how meanings transform across disparate semiotic resources, thereby identifying specific retentions and alterations.

To address the methodological challenge of comparing disparate semiotic resources in intersemiotic translation, Aguiar and Queiroz advocate adopting a conceptual framework grounded in Peirce's sign process model^[23]. Arkad'Evna reframes translation as an adaptive process—not a “closed and permanent” artifact—focused on selectively preserving, discarding, altering, or reconfiguring meanings from the source text^[20].

Within intersemiotic translation, meaning emerges dy-

namically through interpretation during text-level semiotic processes. From the perspective of sign trichotomy, the interpretant not only realizes the generation of symbolic meaning, but also brings new meaning. Wang also analyzed the meaning generation of intersemiotic translation from the perspective of Pierce's semiotic trichotomy^[25]. He believes that the cross-semiotic conversion of intersemiotic translation has gone beyond the concept of language equivalence in traditional translation conversion and is more of an interpretive activity^[25].

2.3. Intersemiotic Translation to Meaning

Intersemiotic translation serves as a viable pathway for meaning transformation, whether in the reproduction of meaning in literary works or the reconstruction of meaning in non-literary works. For instance, many scholars take illustrations in literary works as their research subject, exploring the mechanisms of meaning transfer between images and text. Other studies discuss how non-verbal artistic forms such as painting, music, drama, and film reinterpret the meaning of literary works like poetry and novels^[26–31]. In the non-literary domain, intersemiotic translation facilitates the reconstruction of meaning in non-verbal semiotic activities. Examples include utilizing intersemiotic translation for educational purposes, enhancing readability through pictorial information, and promoting cultural dissemination and exchange^[32–40].

Intersemiotic translation offers a methodological framework for interpreting signs, yet conclusions differ regarding its effectiveness in communicating meaning. Firstly, it involves resemiotization^[27,35], enabling further meaning interpretation. Fadeev suggests replacing abstract symbols with familiar ones aids learning by fostering “a more coherent understanding”^[32]. Combining verbal and non-verbal modes enhances meaning clarity^[41] by expressing the same concepts diversely, allowing significant translation of illustrations in children's picture books^[35].

Besides, resemiotization generates new meanings. Research indicates meanings are created, not merely transferred, during intersemiotic translation^[36]. Concepts from intersemiotic and audiovisual translation illuminate processes of recontextualization and meaning reconstruction in multimodal texts, leading to acquired new meanings^[38]. Non-verbal signs, like illustrations, can supplement tex-

tual descriptions, broaden audiences, and revitalize original works^[26]. Similarly, retranslation can introduce new source text interpretations for different readerships^[28]. Digital religious infographics act as dynamic creative spaces, transforming complex information into simplified, engaging formats^[34].

Furthermore, intersemiotic translation facilitates cross-cultural communication. Short videos extensively use non-verbal signs to convey symbolic cultural meanings visually, reducing linguistic barriers^[40]. The meaning of culture-specific items is negotiated and constructed when LEGO playsets function as intersemiotic translation^[33].

Finally, some argue intersemiotic meaning cannot be measured by lingual translation standards. Plastina contends its implications extend “well beyond translation proper”^[35]. Equivalence, central to interlingual translation, is often unattainable intersemiotically, aligning with Eco's view that exact equivalence between different expression systems is impossible. Equivalence should not be the standard; the verbal-visual contradiction in semiotransadaptation enables multiple meanings^[22].

3. Materials and Methods

The data source for this study is the Dragon Boat Festival Show in 2022. This program is one of the Chinese Festival Shows episodes of Henan TV. Compared with other types of cultural programs, this series of programs is unique and innovative, breaking through the conventional performance mode in the presentation of cultural content. At the same time, many modern digital technologies and stage designs are organically integrated to bring a novel cultural experience to the audience. In addition, this episode received a high level of attention, and its online platform hot search index ranked among the top in all episodes of the series throughout the year.

The reason why the program is chosen as the research object is that its prominent cultural attributes have been recognized by the audience. The presentation of cultural elements during the program evokes the audience's memories of certain cultural images. The Dragon Boat Festival, also known as the Double Fifth Festival, is one of China's traditional festivals, usually celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. This festival has a long history and rich cultural con-

notations with customs including dragon boat racing, eating rice dumplings, hanging mugwort and calamus, etc. The origin of the Dragon Boat Festival is closely related to commemorating the ancient patriotic poet Qu Yuan. Legend has it that Qu Yuan committed suicide by jumping into the river on this day. People rowed dragon boats to drive away fish and threw rice dumplings to prevent fish from eating his body. In addition, the Dragon Boat Festival is also related to folk beliefs of exorcising evil spirits and avoiding disasters and praying for health and peace. Dragon boat racing and rice dumplings have become the most representative activities of the Dragon Boat Festival, showing the spirit of unity and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation.

Peirce's trichotomy of signs divides signs into “sign/representamen”, “object” and “interpretant”^[23]. In terms of cultural images, “sign/representamen” is the representational form of cultural images, such as text, artwork, music, performance and other art forms. “Object” is the object itself referred to by the cultural image. The facts, revelations, and truths generated by the “object” of the cultural image through the “sign/representamen” constitute the “interpretant”. It is worth noting that the same “object” will produce different “interpretant” due to different interpreters, and will also produce different “interpretant” due to different “sign/representamen”.

On the basis of the trichotomy, Peirce divided the relationship between “sign/representamen” and “object” into iconic, indexical and symbolic signs. Chandler borrowed Saussure's concepts of “signifier” and “signified” to further elaborate on this division^[42]. For symbolic signs(symbol), there is no similarity between the signifier and the signified, but it is based on arbitrariness and regularity. Therefore, this relationship is based on agreement and learning, such as ordinary language, numbers, codes, traffic lights, etc. In terms of iconic signs (Icon), there exists external or internal similarity between the signifier and the signified, such as portraits, cartoons, models, onomatopoeia, metaphors, program sound effects, etc. The signifier and the signified of indexical signs (Index) are not arbitrary, but are related to each other in a physical or causal way. This relationship can be observed and inferred, such as natural symbols (smoke, lightning, footprints, smells), medical symptoms (pain, rashes, pulses), and also includes measurement tools, signals, audio and video recordings, and personalized characteristics^[42]. Chandler

mentioned that although Peirce divided the relationship between signs and objects into three categories, this does not mean that the three are mutually exclusive, but that the properties of signs can be one of the three or any combination of the three^[42]. At the level of non-language-centered sign activities, the translation of cultural images is mainly manifested in intersemiotic translation, and its process can be from verbal to non-verbal signs, or from verbal to non-verbal plus verbal signs, and the other way round. The **Figure 1** is the theoretical framework of the study:

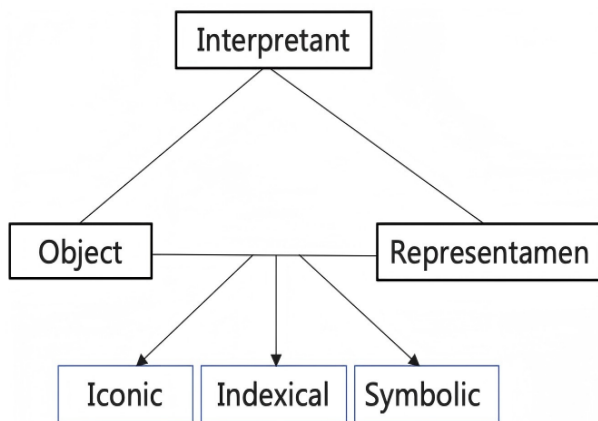


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the study.

Zhao believes that the “symbolicity” of signs is easy to understand because of social conventions, and “iconicity” is the most interesting because it is the basis of “simulation” in human meaningful activities^[43]. Relatively speaking, the quality of “indexicality” is simple and clear and rarely discussed^[43]. For the semiosis of cultural images, since the sign’s referent, or its object, has special characteristics, such as narrative, revelatory, and rational, the connotation of the sign’s referent is more complex.

The cultural images selected in the program will be analyzed through the following stages. First, the connotation of the cultural image at the linguistic level will be analyzed according to its origin or use in the context of traditional Chinese culture. Secondly, the presentation of cultural images in the program, that is, the target text of cultural images generated after semiotic translation, will be analyzed for the composition of sign elements. Then, based on the composition of signs, the meaning of the target text will be explained on the basis of Peirce’s trichotomy of signs, which includes object, representamen(sign) and interpretant. In the target text, the object of a cultural image primarily refers to the

animate or inanimate entity represented by its connotative meaning. The representamen constitutes the semiotic elements manifested in the target text, while the interpretant is the meaningful explanation derived from the relationship between the representamen’s semiotic composition and the object. Finally, according to Peirce’s description of the relationship between representamen and object, there are iconic, indexical and symbolic relationships between signs objects, which further determines which type the representamen and object of cultural images belong to.

The theoretical framework of this study is primarily grounded in the semiotic system of Charles Sanders Peirce. It must be explicitly stated that Peirce’s philosophical approach differs fundamentally from Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic approach in terms of epistemology and methodology^[44]. Saussure regarded the sign as a relational entity defined within the language system (*langue*), emphasizing its social and structural nature. In contrast, Peirce viewed the sign as a universal philosophical category, focusing on its dynamic interpretation and logical relationships within the cognitive process (i.e., “unlimited semiosis”). Given that this study aims to investigate the dynamic generation of meaning in cross-media transformations of cultural images, Peirce’s triadic model (Representamen-Object-Interpretant) offers a more flexible and explanatory analytical tool, suitable for intersemiotic translation research that extends beyond verbal language systems.

It also should be acknowledged that Peirce’s triadic division of signs (Icon, Index, Symbol)—as part of his broader philosophical system—has been subject to extensive discussion and development within academic circles^[45]. For instance, scholars such as Yuri Lotman of the Moscow-Tartu School have critically reevaluated and expanded upon his work, placing greater emphasis on the heterogeneity of sign systems and the dimension of cultural dynamics. Despite these valuable critical engagements, Peirce’s preliminary classification remains a foundational and robust starting point for the analysis of sign activity. In applying this framework, our study does not treat it as a rigid dogma, but rather employs it as a heuristic tool—focusing on examining both the validity and the limitations of his triadic model in explaining specific phenomena of intersemiotic translation of cultural images.

4. Meaning of Chinese Cultural Images in Intersemiotic Translation

4.1. Iconic Meaning of Cultural Image in Intersemiotic Translation

The dragon occupies a critical position in traditional Chinese culture and is one of the most representative cultural symbols of the Chinese nation. The dragon symbolizes power, dignity, strength and auspiciousness. It is often regarded as the incarnation of the Son of Heaven, representing supreme authority and ruling power. In ancient times, the emperor was called the “True Dragon Son of Heaven”, and the dragon robe and dragon chair were closely related to the imperial power. Furthermore, the dragon symbolizes favorable climatic conditions and bountiful harvests, serving as a symbolic embodiment of reverential worship and spiritual supplication toward natural forces within traditional agrarian contexts.

In the performance, the actors embodied the dragon’s physical form and movements through dance, recreating the ritual tradition of dragon totem worship. Within this semiotic relationship, the cultural image of the dragon functions as the object. The representamen consists of dancers simulating the dragon’s morphology and cloud formations resembling draconic shapes, while the interpretant constitutes the meaning conveyed by the representamen—that is the target text of intersemiotic translation. Although the dragon does not exist in reality, its image has been meticulously defined through centuries of cultural sedimentation (Figure 2), which can be listed in Table 1:

Table 1. The dragon’s feature.

Dragon's Feature	Resembles
Antlers (角)	Deer (鹿)
Talons (爪)	Eagle (鹰)
Paws (掌)	Tiger (虎)
Neck (颈)	Snake (蛇)
Belly (腹)	Sea-monster (唇)
Forehead (头/额)	Camel (驼)
Scales (鳞)	Fish (鱼)
Ears (耳)	Ox (牛)

The sign composition of the representamen includes clouds, dressed dancers, the scorching sun, loess, etc. Regarding the performers' attire, the tassels adorning the costumes evoke the dorsal spines of the dragon, while the head-

dress designs are crafted to mimic the dragon’s antennae and whiskers (Figure 3). In terms of bodily movements, the dancers exhibit open palms with subtly curved fingers, emulating the distinct morphology of dragon claws. As illustrated in Figure 4, the performers align in a linear formation, with the lead dancer initiating vertical leaps or lateral swings; at times, they coalesce into a circular arrangement, rotating synchronously on the spot. These choreographed motions vividly simulate the dynamic postures of a dragon in flight. Furthermore, the dragon’s aerial locomotion is represented through additional semiotic elements, such as circular traces in yellow sand reminiscent of the creature’s coiled body, and drifting clouds (Figure 5) that symbolize the dragon soaring across the heavens.



Figure 2. The dragon in Chinese culture.



Figure 3. Dancers with dragon-like costumes.



Figure 4. Dancer in the sands.



Figure 5. Dancers flying under floating dragon-like clouds.



Figure 8. Mugwort therapy.

The cultural image of mugwort also appears many times in the program. Unlike the dragon, mugwort is a cultural image that physical exists. Therefore, the representamen and object of mugwort in the program can be either the same sign or different signs. The interpretant is the meaning out of signs to be expressed by different mugwort representamen. According to the mugwort signs presented in the program, the composition of the signs has different attributes. It can be seen from **Figure 6** that the two-dimensional mugwort illustration grows in the form of 3D animation to simulate the growth of the object. In **Figure 7**, the sign of mugwort is presented in the physical form of its object itself. In this case, the object and the representamen have the highest degree of iconicity. As for the mugwort sign in **Figure 8**, the mugwort is made into medicine after air-drying. It does not have the similarity of the mugwort object in morphology, but from a functional perspective, it still can be regarded as an iconic sign since it has the medicinal value of mugwort itself.

Mountains and rivers, a common image in literary works, are also used in the program of the Dragon Boat Festival Show. From the perspective of the sign triangle, the object of the image of rivers and mountains refers to the mountains and rivers in nature. The representamen of this cultural image is the landscape in different forms. The interpretant is composed of the meaning expressed by the signs of rivers and mountains in different forms. In **Figures 9** and **10**, the representamen of the cultural image of mountains and rivers is made by shooting the real scenery. The mountains where the Great Wall is located and the rushing Yellow River are shown through the representamen. In **Figure 11**, it can be seen that the representamen of mountains and rivers is the integration of landscape paintings and ancient costumes by the technique of “superimposition”. Like photos or videos, paintings are also iconic signs which represent the objects.



Figure 6. Growing 3D mugwort.



Figure 9. The Great Wall and mountains.



Figure 7. Mugwort.



Figure 10. The Yellow River.



Figure 11. Painting of mountains and rivers integrated with costume.

4.2. Indexical Meaning of Cultural Image in Intersemiotic Translation

The proverb “There is no smoke without fire” is an interpretation of the indexicality of signs. Similarly, it can be seen in **Figure 4** that the flying yellow sand can infer a relatively harsh living environment. Besides, the scorching sun in the sky and the nearly dried-up river on the ground in **Figure 5** also indicate a harsh environment. In addition, although the clouds in the sky are morphologically similar signs that recreate the image of the dragon, the clouds themselves have a certain physical connection with rain, so they also have a certain indexical nature. The Dragon Boat Festival occurs on the fifth day of China’s fifth lunar month, marking the onset of summer when temperatures rise and rainfall intensifies. Traditionally, this period was perceived as a “toxic month and inauspicious day” (毒月恶日) – a time associated with heightened susceptibility to epidemics and calamities. Within Chinese cosmology, the dragon embodies a divine water deity governing rivers, lakes, and seas, possessing the power to summon winds, command rains, and regulate waterways. Consequently, dragon boat races and ritual offerings during the festival represent appeals to the dragon spirit: to seek protection from floods and disasters while securing blessings for agricultural and communal wellbeing.

The meaning of the cultural image of mugwort is also conveyed through some indexical signs. As can be seen from **Figure 7**, the signs include actor, backpacks and a large amount of growing mugwort. The combination of these signs can be inferred to be the act of picking mugwort. And this behavior is one of the traditions of the Dragon Boat Festival. People also hang mugwort on the porch, the purpose of which can be explained from the signs in **Figures 8 and 12**.

The woman in the middle of **Figure 12** is smelling the scent of mugwort with her right hand, and holding a sachet in her left hand. The sachet indicates the properties of medicine, so the medicinal value of mugwort can be inferred.



Figure 12. Smelling the scent of mugwort sachet.

Danxin(loyalty), an abstract cultural image, is expressed in the form of narrative. The character of the narrative is Huang Zhong, a famous general in Chinese history and respected by later generations for his loyalty. In this sign relationship, Danxin(loyalty) is the object, the representamen is the narrative story, and the interpretant is the meaning expressed by the narrative. Due to the abstractness of the cultural image, it is difficult to match it with an iconic sign. While the connotation of this cultural image can be expressed in an indexical way by showing the protagonist of the story.

Figure 13 depicts the general with silver-white hair and beard, indicating his advanced age. His upright posture—head held high and chest out—along with the firm grip on his recurve bow, conveys an aura of dignity and unwavering resolve. The city walls and gate behind him symbolize his heroic defense of his homeland and people. **Figure 14** shows a close-up shot of an arrow in mid-flight, captured using the cinematic motion blur technique. The arrow is streaked with aerodynamic haze, emphasizing its extreme velocity while simultaneously demonstrating that despite his age, Huang Zhong retains formidable combat strength. **Figure 15** reveals the battlefield shrouded in smoke, scattered with burning debris and upright swords—all visual signs reflecting the brutal intensity of the conflict. In **Figure 16**, General Huang stands triumphantly atop disproportionately large armor, long blade in hand, a composition that powerfully signifies his decisive victory in this campaign.

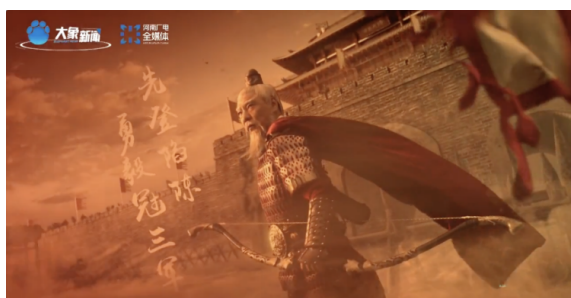


Figure 13. General Huang defending the homeland.



Figure 14. The arrow with the character “忠 (Zhong)”.



Figure 15. Debris of the battle.



Figure 16. General Huang winning the battle.

4.3. Symbolic Meaning of Cultural Image in Intersemiotic Translation

According to Pierce, symbolic signs are arbitrary and conventional. Therefore, they reflect more the summary of knowledge and experience in social activities. For example,

different color signs have different symbolic meanings. In the process of presenting the image of mugwort, the program used a lot of green elements like green clothing and sachets for symbolic meaning in addition to the green color of mugwort itself (Figure 12). This is mainly because green symbolizes vitality and health in the Chinese cultural context. Red is also a common color in traditional Chinese culture. In addition to meaning joy, it can also express loyalty. The literal meaning of Danxin(loyalty) refers to a “red heart”. Therefore, the red cloak which is more prominent than the background color in Figures 13 and 14 symbolizes Huang Zhong’s loyalty. Body language also belongs to symbolic signs before it evolves into a universal indexical sign. The person in Figure 17 (Qu Yuan, a patriotic poet, the main character of the Dragon Boat Festival commemoration) is making a bow, which means a more formal and serious way of communication between people in ancient China in order to express respect and courtesy to others.



Figure 17. Qu Yuan making a bow.

Verbal signs are the most commonly used signs among symbols. Along with other types of signs, the use of verbal signs can play a synergistic role in supplementing explanations. Verbal signs demonstrate a heightened efficiency in the conveyance of meaning. As illustrated in Figure 14, the Chinese character “忠” (zhōng), meaning “loyalty,” is engraved inside the arrow. This character corresponds precisely to the given name of the historical figure Huang Zhong, thereby constituting a linguistic pun. The verbal sign here functions on two levels: it denotes both the agency of the arrow—identifying it as having been shot by Huang Zhong—and simultaneously connotes the virtue of loyalty embodied by the figure himself.

In Figure 8, the caption in the picture explains that the record of moxibustion therapy originated in the Shang Dynasty. The use of this symbolic sign makes the meaning of signs such as the characters and moxibustion in the pic-

ture clearer, allowing readers to understand that the idea is about the fact that doctors began to use moxibustion to treat patients a long time ago.

The symbolic signs in **Figure 11**, the Chinese character “盛世太平 (prosperous and peaceful era)” written in ancient Chinese hand writing style (**Figure 18**), combined with the iconic landscape signs, as well as Qu Yuan’s body language in **Figure 17**, shows that what is being expressed here is an aspirational ideal: the preservation of sacred geography, national tranquility, and societal security, articulating a Confucian-governed utopia where territory, state, and people exist in perpetual harmony. Therefore, when iconic signs or indexical signs are not enough to convey a relatively complete meaning, the symbolic signs can be used to explain.

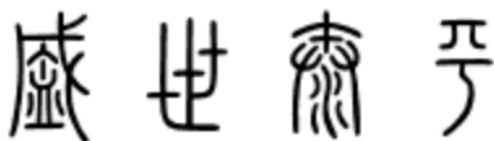


Figure 18. Ancient handwriting of “盛世太平”.

5. Conclusions

In summary, this study explores the translation and meaning of cultural images from the perspective of semiotics and intersemiotic translation. The study believes that the behavior of reproducing Chinese traditional cultural images through festival shows is the phenomenon of semiosis, which belongs to intersemiotic translation activities from the perspective of translation. By analyzing the cultural images that appear in the program at the linguistic and cultural levels, the connotation and denotation are explored to some degree. Secondly, based on Pierce’s trichotomy of signs, semiotic analysis is given on the cultural images that appear in the program. Besides, the sign relationship between the object and the representamen is referred to interpret the meaning of the cultural image. Examining the semiotic activities of cultural images from the perspective of intersemiotic translation allows cultural communicators to not only consciously adopt the translator’s perspective and fully exercise their agency, but also provides practical pathways for sign system transformation. For the audience, the intersemiotic translation of cultural images helps bridge linguistic barriers to some extent, conveying the connotation and denotation of culture in a more accessible and acceptable manner.

In terms of iconicity, the intersemiotic translation of cultural image involves the representamen imitating the object—replicating both its external morphology and mapping its intrinsic qualities. However, when the cultural image constitutes a fictional sign within human society, this mimetic relationship may invert, whereby the object comes to simulate the representamen. For example, the cultural image of the dragon, although the program imitates the object of the dragon through different representamen, due to its fictionality, this object also imitates the dragon in the cognitive schema formed by people in historical experience, and this cognitive schema is the representamen. Intersemiotic translation is the conversion between verbal (non-verbal) signs and non-verbal signs. Therefore, different representamen in the program are expressions of the extensional meanings of different cultural images.

The connotation of cultural images can also be presented through the indexicality of symbols. Some indexical signs construct meaning independently, while some indexical signs can directly or indirectly construct meaning together with iconic symbols. In the festival show, the acquisition of meaning of cultural image is based on a certain narrative background and sign reasoning. The use of non-verbal signs in symbols can further enrich cultural meanings, such as the expression of color and body language, while the use of verbal signs can work together with indexical signs or iconic signs to help improve the effect of interpretation of meanings.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Y.Z. and S.B.H.; methodology, Y.Z. and F.M.M.J.; formal analysis, Y.Z. and S.B.H.; investigation, Y.Z. and S.B.H.; resources, Y.Z.; data curation, Y.Z. and S.B.H.; writing—original draft preparation, Y.Z.; writing—review and editing, Y.Z., S.B.H. and F.M.M.J.; visualization, Y.Z. and S.B.H.; supervision, Y.Z., S.B.H. and F.M.M.J.; project administration, S.B.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The data of the study is available from the official website of Henan TV App by searching relevant keywords related to Chinese festivals.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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