The Intersemiotic Dialogue: Reconstructing Cultural Image through Verbal and Non-verbal Translation

Zheng Yubin

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia

Salina Binti Husain (Corresponding author)

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia

Farhana Muslim Mohd Jalis

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia

Abstract

This qualitative study explores how cultural image is translated across semiotic modes and how new meanings are generated, using the widely viewed *Chinese Festival Shows* series as a case study. Seven episodes broadcast in 2021–2022 were purposively sampled for cultural breadth and contemporary relevance. Systematic content analysis yielded twelve recurrent cultural images, which were analyzed via an integrated tripartite framework. First, images are classified into archetypal, symbolic, and conceptual types to illuminate their formal origins, culturally encoded manifestations, and emergent interpretive meanings within the audiovisual text. Second, an intersemiotic-translation model traces how these images are transposed and reconfigured across sign systems, especially between verbal references and non-linguistic visual and auditory modes. Third, the analysis mobilizes the semiotic categories of iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity to specify relations between referents and representations. Findings show that intersemiotic translation is not a simple transfer but a dynamic, generative negotiation: visual resemblance, contextual and causal association, and socially shared conventions jointly anchor and activate meaning. This interplay both preserves traditional cultural connotations and enables novel significations suited to contemporary media contexts. The study concludes that intersemiotic translation is a dynamic renegotiation of meaning that balances the partial loss of original cultural nuances with the creative generation of contextually relevant interpretations.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation, cultural image, signs, verbal

1. Introduction

Chinese traditional festivals are condensed carriers of history and collective memory, containing rich and profound cultural images. Cultural images like the "dragon" of the Dragon Boat Festival, and the "moon" of the Mid-Autumn Festival, are not only concrete objects and rituals, but also complex sign systems carrying the national spirit, philosophical concepts, and emotional structures. However, these cultural images rooted in specific contexts often face the risk of loss of meaning, misunderstanding, or flattening due to differences in symbolic systems in the process of cross-cultural and cross-media communication Zhu (2023). Traditional, purely language-centered translation models often fall short when dealing with such cultural complexes that highly rely on audiovisual experiences, ritualistic behaviors, and collective resonance. Therefore, exploring translation paths that transcend linguistic barriers is of theoretical and practical significance.

Intersemiotic translation transcends the traditional paradigm of translation studies that focuses on interlingual transformation, viewing translation as a cross-symbolic, multimodal process of meaning regeneration. In recent years, with the innovation of media technology and the rise of visual culture, intersemiotic translation practices have emerged, from picture book illustrations and film adaptations to digital multimedia (Mahasneh & Abdelal, 2022; Tsvetkova, 2024). Scholars have also paid close attention, with theoretical discussions extending from the "visual grammar" of social semiotics and Peirce's triadic theory of signs to the relevance theory of cognitive pragmatics, providing diverse perspectives for analyzing multimodal meaning construction. However, systematic and specialized intersemiotic translation research targeting the cultural image of traditional Chinese festivals remains weak. In particular, how to achieve the creative transformation and dissemination of cultural image through innovative audiovisual language and narrative strategies in contemporary media practice still requires in-depth case analysis and theoretical refinement.

From a semiotic perspective, the emergence and development of traditional Chinese culture depends on signs, and its dissemination and promotion are inseparable from the construction of a sign system(Sheng, 2023). The *Chinese Festival Shows(CFS)* series launched by Henan TV since 2021 constitutes a phenomenal case study of great research value. It deeply integrates various art forms such as dance, drama, music, film and television special effects, and live performances, transforming classical records, myths, historical anecdotes, and folk symbols into highly immersive and aesthetically compelling audiovisual images (Gu & Zhang, 2021). Through carefully designed signs transformation and recombination, the program not only preserves the core spirit and aesthetic connotations of festival culture but also endows it with new forms of expression that conform to the aesthetic and cognitive habits of contemporary audiences, especially the younger generation, triggering widespread cultural resonance and a surge in dissemination. Therefore, this paper has selected Henan TV's *Chinese Festival Show* series as its research object, aiming to systematically explore how it reconstructs meaning through creative transformation and effective dissemination of Chinese festival cultural images from the perspective of intersemiotic translation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Image and Its Translation

The study of cultural image has been explored in depth from multiple perspectives. Cultural image is generally understood as a symbol carrying relatively fixed and unique cultural connotations. It can evoke rich associations and promote effective communication among members of a specific cultural group (Xie, 1999). Its essence lies in representing the abstract with the concrete and enlightening the unknown with the known through metaphor or symbolism (Sun, 2024). From a cognitive perspective, the formation of image is based on the interaction between the objective "prototype" and the concepts, schemas, and even the entire conceptual system in the subject's cognitive system(Wen, 2002). This kind of image is deeply rooted in the unique natural environment, historical traditions, religious beliefs, ways of thinking, and values of various ethnic groups. Its forms of expression are extremely diverse; it can be an animal, a plant, a color, a number, or even an idiom, proverb, or allusion(Song & Wang, 2022). However, it is precisely because of this strong national character that the connotations of the same cultural image may be very different in different cultural contexts. For example, the "dragon" symbolizes auspiciousness and evil in Chinese and Western cultures, respectively. This constitutes the challenge of cross-cultural understanding and translation(Liu & Wang, 2022).

This difference directly leads to a complex dilemma in the translation of cultural image. Translators often face the paradox of balancing form and meaning: preserving the surface image (object) may fail to convey its deeper cultural connotations; while focusing on conveying the deeper meaning may result in the loss of the original image's unique national cultural image (Liu & Wang, 2022). Furthermore, the translation process also involves a series of problems such as cultural defaults, differences in language expression, and interference from the translator's subjective factors (Zhang, 2025). To address these challenges, translators need to fully utilize their subjectivity and creativity, flexibly balancing translation strategies. Scholars generally believe that an ideal translation should, as far as possible, consider both the surface form and the deeper connotations of the image. Specific methods may include literal translation, image substitution, annotation, or free translation, with the fundamental aim of finding a balance between foreignization and domestication to promote the effective dissemination and reception of cultural image.

The rapid evolution of multimedia and digital technologies has fundamentally expanded the expression and circulation of cultural image beyond textual representation. Such images are now pervasively embedded in a spectrum of non-linguistic semiotic systems—spanning the visual, auditory, spatial, and behavioral—and manifests across diverse forms including painting, film, architecture, dress, gesture, and music. Some academic research has begun to touch upon this interdisciplinary field. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) provides a framework for analyzing visual signs such as images and layout design; while in the field of translation studies, scholars such as Gottlieb (2005) (on the interaction between language and image in subtitle translation), or O'Sullivan (2013) (on the exploration of symbol transformation in cross-media adaptation) indirectly point to the problem of the transmission

of non-linguistic cultural expressions. At present, research on the transformation mechanism, principles and effects of cultural image from language to non-language signs, or from one non-language form to another, is still in its infancy. Therefore, exploring meaning of cultural images from the perspectives of both signs and translation is of significance to specific cultural representation and communication.

2.2 Intersemiotic Translation

The limitations inherent in the linguistic translation of cultural image necessitate an expansion of the analytical perspective to include transformations across non-linguistic sign systems. In his seminal essay On Linguistic Aspects of Translation, Roman Jakobson proposed a tripartite typology of translation, defining "intersemiotic translation or transmutation" as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems" (Jakobson, 2021). While Jakobson introduced this influential concept early on, his formulation has been critiqued for not fully transcending a language-centered paradigm. He did not elaborate the concept in detail, an inadequacy stemming from his underlying assumption that translation must necessarily involve   natural language (Marais, 2018).

Some researchers developed the concept of intersemiotic translation and believe it occurs not only between verbal and nonverbal signs but also among nonverbal signs themselves (Marais, 2018; Petrilli, 2003; Torop, 2000). 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 (Arkad'Evna, 2019).

Research on intersemiotic translation has evolved beyond purely linguistic concerns to focus on meaning reconstruction across diverse semiotic systems. Within literary studies, one prominent strand investigates the interplay between text and image. For example, the work of Fan and He (2020) on the illustrated editions of Aesop's Fables and Mahasneh and Abdelal (2022) analysis of the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series argue that translation must account for the transposition of meaning within and across non-verbal sign systems to achieve a coherent whole. Another key research avenue examines cross-media adaptation. Studies here treat adaptations as intersemiotic translations that generate new cultural meanings, as seen in Ciancitto (2023) analysis of Alice in Wonderland illustrations and Tsvetkova (2024) comparative study of film versions of Hamlet. Similarly, research by Du and Li (2020) highlights the role of non-verbal arts in interpreting classical Chinese poetry, while Lass (2023) examines the foundational role of the playtext in theatrical semiosis.

Beyond literature, intersemiotic translation is analyzed for its varied social and communicative functions. In educational contexts, it is seen as a tool for fostering artistic literacy (Fadeev, 2020) and for culturally instructive design, as in translating cultural items into LEGO playsets (Yu & Zhu, 2024). Its informative purpose is evidenced in studies on infographics for public understanding (Mowafy, 2024) and in summarizing specialized medical research (Plastina, 2022). The social-inclusive function is central to research framing museum audio description for the visually impaired as intersemiotic translation (Bartolini, 2024; Manfredi & Bartolini, 2023).   Furthermore, in cultural and promotional communication, scholars analyze how multiple semiotic systems interact to construct meaning in contexts such as pandemic-era

advertising (Muñoz, 2022), conference logos (Wu & Li, 2022), and the dissemination of cultural symbolism through primarily visual media, like Li Ziqi's videos, to minimize linguistic barriers (Sun & Liu, 2022). Collectively, this body of work demonstrates that intersemiotic translation is a dynamic process of meaning reconstruction rather than mere reproduction, offering significant methodological insights for both academic research and practical applications across multiple fields.

To understand how meaning is constructed and conveyed in intersemiotic translation, scholars have drawn upon a range of theoretical frameworks, with social semiotics and Peircean semiotics being particularly prominent. A significant body of research applies the social semiotic perspective developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) to analyze multimodal meaning-making. Their "grammar of visual design," which adapts Halliday's systemic functional metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, textual) to visual analysis, provides a key descriptive framework. Scholars utilize this paradigm—examining representational, interactive, and compositional resources—to investigate how meaning is realized and transposed across modalities in contexts such as illustrated texts and multimodal discourse (Plastina, 2022; Ciancitto, 2023; Chen et al., 2023).

Another major theoretical strand is rooted in Charles Peirce's triadic model of the sign (representamen, object, interpretant). Researchers employ this framework to classify and analyze non-verbal signs, exploring the iconic, indexical, and symbolic dimensions of meaning in intersemiotic processes. For instance, Mahasneh and Abdelal (2022) use it to decode illustrations in children's literature, while Zheng and Zhang (2023) apply it to analyze the layered meanings of Chinese idioms and allusions. Ding (2024) further extends this logic, examining painting as a communicative act reliant on both iconicity and indexical reasoning.

Beyond these frameworks, other theoretical lenses contribute to the discussion. From a philosophical and cultural semiotics perspective, H. Wang (2021, 2022) examines intersemiotic translation as a process of meaning regeneration and variation, influenced by translator cognition and target cultural contexts. From a pragmatic-cognitive standpoint, Z. Wang (2023) proposes Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory as a viable framework for interpreting multimodal translation, focusing on how meaning is represented, inferred, and optimized across different modes. These diverse theoretical approaches—spanning social semiotics, Peircean semiotics, philosophical inquiry, and cognitive pragmatics—provide complementary tools for analyzing the complex dynamics of meaning in intersemiotic translation.

While research on intersemiotic translation covers both literary and non-literary texts, studies of literary works have paid comparatively little attention to the intersemiotic translation of cultural image. Existing scholarship has largely focused on interlingual transfer and narrowly defined translation strategies, prioritizing verbal mediation over non-linguistic semiotic modes. Adopting a non-linguistic semiotic perspective on cultural images therefore both broadens the remit of intersemiotic translation research and multiplies the channels through which cultural image is disseminated. Crucially, this approach also clarifies the mechanisms by which meanings are generated and negotiated across different sign systems and multimedia contexts.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research paradigm, focusing on the Henan TV program *CFS* series. It aims to analyze the condensed and creatively presented Chinese cultural image within the program, and to delve into the mechanisms of meaning generation and transformation achieved through intersemiotic translation in the cross-media and intersemiotic communication process. The choice of qualitative research stems from the research question's reliance on in-depth understanding, meaning interpretation, and cultural context. Its advantage lies in its ability to provide a "thick description" of complex and dynamic symbolic practices, revealing the cultural logic and meaning network behind the data.

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

The sample selection followed the principle of purposive sampling since the *CFS* series has become a phenomenon. Its influence continued until 2022 and beyond, providing a concentrated and high-quality text group for observing the modern transformation of traditional culture. This study focuses on the period of outbreak and maturity from 2021 to 2022, and selects 7 episodes as the final analysis sample based on the following criteria: (1) Internet dissemination popularity: comprehensive consideration of the number of views, bullet screen interaction, media comments and social media discussion of each episode on mainstream video platforms (such as Weibo and Douban), and careful selection of the representative works; (2) Diversity of festival themes including: the traditional Chinese festivals such as Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Qixi Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival and Double Ninth Festival, in order to examine the characteristics of cultural image production under different festival contexts. Through repeated observation of these seven episodes, the study employed content analysis for initial screening and annotation, ultimately identifying and extracting 12 cultural images with high recognizability, recurring occurrences, or core narrative functions. These images form the micro-foundation for the in-depth semiotic analysis in this study.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

To address the complexity of cultural image and its intersemiotic translation, this study abandons a single theoretical perspective and instead constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework integrating cultural studies, translation studies, and semiotics, aiming to form a comprehensive explanatory power. The typological analysis of cultural image adopts and expands Liu (2018) classification of image, placing the cultural images extracted from the program into the following three categories for positioning and analysis: (1) Archetypal image: referring to prototype symbols rooted in the collective unconscious of a nation and possessing a universal psychological response basis; (2) Symbolic image: referring to cultural symbols formed in a specific historical and cultural process and possessing a relatively stable signifier-signified relationship; (3) Conceptual image: referring to a meaning structure characterized by metaphorical thinking and formed through a systematic mapping from iconic representation to conceptual signification. This classification helps to clarify the cultural origins and meanings of the images, laying a cognitive foundation for subsequent translation analysis.

This analysis of the translation process draws upon Aguiar & Queiroz's model of intersemiotic translation, which views translation as a preservative transformation of meaning between different symbolic systems (not just between languages). In the CFS program, a cultural image might be translated from classical texts (linguistic signs) into dance movements (body/visual signs), and then merged with digital landscapes (image signs) and background music (auditory signs) to form a composite semiotic text. This study will use this model to trace in detail how cultural images are "translated" from linguistic or static art forms such as poetry, allusions, and historical records into dynamic, multi-sensory, and interactive audiovisual variety show language. To gain a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed and understood in intersemiotic translation, this study introduces Peirce's triadic theory of semiotics as a micro-analytic tool. Peirce categorized the relationship between symbols and objects into three types: (1) Iconicity: signs (representamen) refer to objects through similarity, such as the dancers' makeup and costumes in the program mimicking the image of Tang Dynasty pottery figurines; (2) Indexicality: signs (representamen) and objects have a factual or causal relationship, such as the rain and willow branches in the "Qingming" program indicating a specific solar term and atmosphere; (3) Symbolicity: the relationship between signs and objects based on social and cultural conventions, such as the "dragon" symbolizing the Chinese nation and the color "red" representing auspiciousness.

4. Findings

4.1 Typology of Cultural Images

Based on the data analysis of the Chinese Festivals, twelve archetypal cultural images associated with traditional festivals were identified (Table 1).Among these archetypal cultural images, some exist as concrete, visible "images" in the objective world, such as the carp, the color red, and the moon. Others take abstract yet perceptible forms through their association with other "images." While their core meaning remains stable and anchored to shared cultural references, their form acts as a flexible schema that can be adapted and translated across different media. This is especially crucial in visual texts, where meaning is often open and fluid. By invoking such archetypal images, the text embeds itself within a specific cultural framework, offering viewers a recognizable sign system through which the image can be interpreted and also be emotionally resonant.

Table 1: Collected archetypal cultural images

CFS Episode	Archetypal Cultural Image	Abstract	Concrete	Self-image	Other-image
2021 Spring Festival	鲤 鱼（carp）		ü	ü	
2021 Spring Festival	红 （color red）		ü	ü	ü
2021 Lantern Festival	灯 笼 (lantern)		ü	ü	
2022 Qingming Festival	春 （spring）	ü			ü
2022 Qingming Festival	清 明 (Qingming)	ü			ü
2022 Dragon Boat	龙 （dragon）	ü		ü	
2022 Dragon Boat	丹 心 (loyalty)	ü			ü

2021 Qixi Festival	红　　(red)		ü	ü	ü
2021 Qixi Festival	飞 天 (flying in the sky)		ü	ü	
2022 Mid-autumn	月 亮 (moon)		ü	ü	
2022 Double Ninth	登 高 (ascend a height)		ü	ü	
2022 Double Ninth	菊 花 (chrysanthemum)		ü	ü	

Conceptual cultural image constitutes the deep structure of archetypal cultural image. It is not a simple reproduction of the archetype, but rather a generation and transcendence of meaning through metaphorical transformation. Archetypal cultural image primarily carries the "physical image" dimension of cultural signs, that is, their concrete and perceptible external form; while conceptual image corresponds to the "meaning" dimension, pointing to the abstract concepts and emotional structures internalized within the signs. Chinese traditional cultural image continuously undergoes semantic reconstruction through diachronic repetition and interpretation, forming dynamic and open conceptual schemas. Therefore, Multiple conceptual image systems can be derived from a single archetype. For example, in *the 2021 Spring Festival* program, the color "red" can be represented by red lanterns, Chinese knots, fans, and other objects. In *the 2021 Qixi Festival* program, the cultural archetype of "red" includes red ropes, red umbrellas, and red flowers. The former constitutes the conceptual image of "festivity", while the latter conveys the conceptual image of "love".

Compared to conceptual images, which possess dynamic interpretability, symbolic cultural images exhibit greater stability in meaning. Symbolic cultural images refer to a system of signs that have been formalized in long-term socio-cultural practices and carry specific discourses of identity. They do not remain merely at the surface level of signifiers, but rather, through institutionalized use and historical dissemination, their signified is continuously deposited into a deep meaning structure with emotional and cultural identity functions. The construction of symbolic images is closely linked to socio-historical contexts, the evolution of cultural traditions, and the shaping process of collective memory. In *the 2022 Mid-Autumn Festival* program, the symbolic cultural image of the "moon" appeared multiple times; both its symbolic and conceptual meanings actually derive from its metaphorical meaning. Furthermore, symbolic cultural images characterize the coexistence of multiple signs, collectively generating new conceptual meanings. For instance, in Figure 1, signs such as the moon, street signs, roads, and luggage appear together, forming a semiotic cluster that conveys the conceptual meaning of "nostalgia." Similarly, in Figure 2, when the moon is combined with signs like astronauts and cosmic space, it constructs the conceptual meaning of "human exploration of the universe."

Figure 1: Moon as symbolic cultural image

Figure 2: Moon as symbolic cultural image

4.2 Intersemiotic Translation of Cultural Image

In the initial model proposed by Aguiar & Queiroz (2013), the sign corresponds to the semiotic source (i.e., the translated work); the translated sign refers to the object represented in that semiotic source, while the interpretant—understood as the effect produced—aligns with the semiotic target (the translator's sign; see Figure 3).
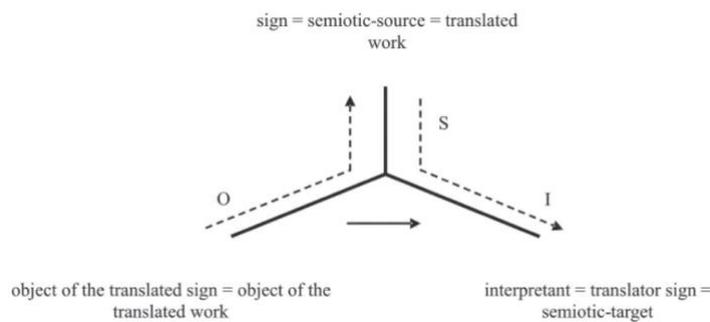

Figure 3: Translation Model 1

When applying the intersemiotic translation model to the sign relations of cultural image, these three components can be systematically presented in Table 2.

Table 2: sign relationship of cultural images

Object	Sign(Representamen)	Interpretant
Object of the translated sign	Semiotic-source	Semiotic-target
Object of the translated work	Translated work	Translator sign
Cultural Image (CI)	Lingual form of CI	Chinese Festival Show

Based on the framework outlined in Table 2, a clear correspondence can be observed among

the three dimensions of the sign within translation activity. The cultural image functions as the Object—that is, the object of the translated sign in semiosis and, correspondingly, the object of the translated work within the translation process. The linguistic form of the cultural image operates as the Sign, which corresponds to the semiotic source in semiosis and aligns with the translated work at the translation level. The *Chinese Festival Show*, as the target text generated from the translation of the cultural image, embodies the translator's cognitive reconstruction of both the object and the sign. Thus, it constitutes the Interpretant within the sign relation, serves as the semiotic target in semiotic activity, and represents the translator's sign in translation practice.

To illustrate, in the case of the "dragon" in Chinese culture: the object denotes the mythical creature characterized by deer horns, a serpentine body, and eagle claws; the sign is the lexical form "dragon" in English or "龙" in Chinese; and the interpretant manifests as the visual representation in the *Chinese Festival Show* episode. As seen in Figure 4, the cloud formations and character arrangements both function as interpretive realizations of the dragon image, thereby materializing the semiotic target in sign activity and constituting the translator's sign within the translation process.
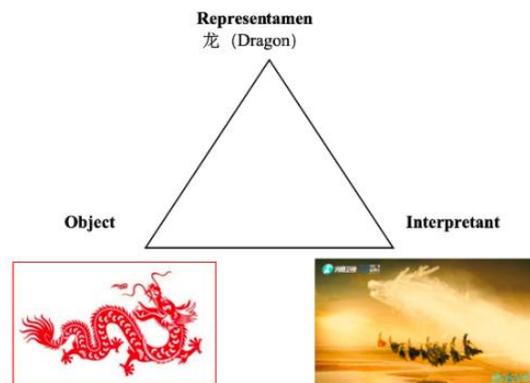

Figure 4: sign relationship of dragon

In the second model proposed by Aguiar & Queiroz (2013), the sign (or representamen) corresponds to the semiotic target, i.e., the translator's sign; its object refers to the semiotic source (the translated work), while the interpretant denotes the resulting effect on the interpreter (see Figure 5).
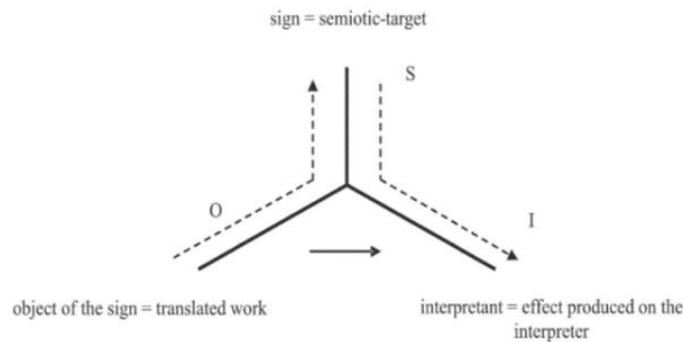
sign = semiotic-target

S

O

I

object of the sign = translated work

interpretant = effect produced on the interpreter

Figure 5: Translation Model 2

Table 3: sign relationship of cultural images

Object	Sign	Interpretant
Object of the sign	Semiotic-target	Effect produced on the interpreter
Translated work		
Lingual form of CI	Chinese Festival Show	Meaning out of the show

Within the framework of this semiotic translation model (the second model), the verbal form of the cultural image corresponds to the Object, the Chinese Festival Show serves as the Sign (representamen), and the Interpretant is derived from its effect on the interpreter—that is, the meaning conveyed by the Chinese Festival Show. Taking the cultural image of the dragon as an example: the representamen at this stage is the audiovisual presentation in the Chinese Festival Show; the object is the Chinese word "龙" (dragon); and the interpretant constitutes the meaning and cognitive effect evoked by the sign of the dragon in the program (Figure 6).

Representamen

Object
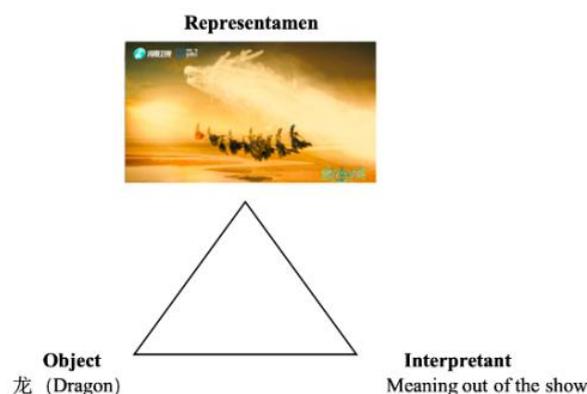龙 (Dragon)

Interpretant
Meaning out of the show

Figure 6: sign relationship of dragon

From the above analysis, we can see that both models involve intersemiotic translation. In the first model, the non-verbal cultural image is expressed through verbal form, that is, the object is presented in the form of symbolic items, which belongs to the first intersemiotic translation. In the second model, the verbal cultural image is expressed through another non-verbal cultural image, which belongs to the second intersemiotic translation. In fact, in both activities, translated work and semiotic target appear separately. Therefore, if the two intersemiotic translation models are merged, the cultural image can be regarded as the object, the verbal form and non-verbal form of the cultural image are both representamens, and the program meaning is the interpretant.

Based on the preceding analysis, it is evident that both models fundamentally involve intersemiotic translation. In the first model, a non-verbal cultural image is mediated through a verbal form, whereby the object is articulated via symbolic linguistic items—a process that constitutes the first level of intersemiotic translation. In the second model, the verbal form of a cultural image is, in turn, re-expressed through another non-verbal cultural representation, corresponding to the second level of intersemiotic translation. Notably, across both activities, the translated work and the semiotic target emerge as distinct yet correlated entities within the semiotic process. Consequently, if the two intersemiotic translation models are integrated, the cultural image may be regarded as the **object**, both its verbal and non-verbal manifestations can be treated as **representamens**, and the meaning generated within the program functions as the **interpretant**. As shown in the Figure 7:
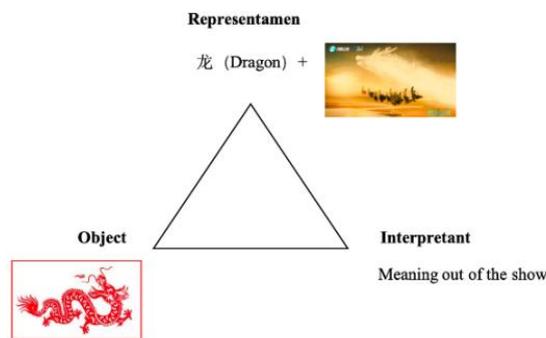

Figure 7: intersemiotic translation and semiosis of dragon

4.3 Meaning of Cultural Image Based on Object-sign Relation

In the intersemiotic translation of the cultural image of "lantern," iconic signs constitute the primary representation of meaning. As common customary signs in festival culture, behaviors such as viewing lanterns and hanging lanterns have long carried specific cultural practices and collective memories. In *the 2021 Lantern Festival* program, various lantern forms such as hanging lanterns and Kongming lanterns appeared (Figure 8&9), whose designs closely replicate the visual characteristics of traditional lanterns, establishing a semiotic representational relationship based on formal resemblance. It is noteworthy that these lantern

signs are not singular material forms: some are physical signs, while others are constructed as virtual image signs using electronic visual technology. Both participate in the cross-media translation and meaning reconstruction of the cultural image of "lantern," reflecting the intersemiotic transformation process from traditional cultural objects to contemporary visual representational systems.

Figure 8: Hanging Lantern as CI

Figure 9: Kongming Lantern as CI

The iconic representation of the abstract cultural image of "red" relies entirely on its attachment to concrete carriers for external manifestation. The actualization of this image is invariably dependent on material or visual symbols with which it is integrated. In *the 2021 Spring Festival* show, the cultural image of "red" (Figure 10) was articulated through a series of emblematic objects—red lanterns, Chinese knots, and red fans, among others. This archetypal image re-entered the process of intersemiotic translation in the same year's *Qixi Festival* show (Figure 11). There, the target text was constructed from signs such as red strings, red umbrellas, and various red flowers, which collectively functioned as the visual translation and semantic extension of "red" across distinct cultural contexts and affective frameworks.

Figure 10: color red as CI in 2021 Spring Festival show

Figure 11: color red as CI in 2021 Qixi Festival show

In semiotics, an index refers to the referential relationship established between the object and its representamen based on causal or logical connections. In the case of the object as a cultural image, its representamen can guide the audience to associate specific attributes or connotations of that image. For example, in *the 2021 Spring Festival* show, the cultural image of "carp" was presented using virtual reality technology (Figure 12). The three carp in the video, as representations of this image, did not exist in isolation, but rather together with a series of indexical symbolic images—such as a golden palace and Tang Dynasty maidens—to form a semiotic scene. These dominant signs collectively point to the affluent life of Tang Dynasty China, thus narrowing the originally diverse connotations of "carp" and focusing them on the conceptual image of "abundance."

Figure 12: carp as CI in 2021 Spring Festival show

In *the 2022 Qingming* show, the directors employed a series of symbolic images to collaboratively reconstruct the archetypal image of "spring." These images not only possess iconicity but also carry strong indexicality—that is, they allow the inference of season-related timing, scenes, and cultural connotations associated with spring. In Figure (13-16), signs such as azaleas, begonia, and tender green willow branches are all plant-specific signs of spring; the scene of a farmer leading oxen for plowing indicates the typical spring farming activities in southern China. By organically integrating dynamic and static signs of life, these symbolic images collectively construct a vibrant spring landscape, thereby vividly and concretely realizing the conceptual imagery of "lush vitality."

Figure13: azaleas as part of CI Qingming

Figure14: begonia as part of CI Qingming

Figure15: willow branches as part of CI Qingming

Figure16: farmer and ox as part of CI Qingming

The reconstruction of the cultural image "dragon" relies on the combined effect of indexicial and iconic signs in *the 2022 Dragon Boat* show. As shown in Figure 17, the swirling yellow sand can be seen as an indexicial sign of a harsh environment; similarly, indexicial are the blazing sun in the sky and the nearly dried-up riverbed on the ground (Figure 18), all three pointing to a harsh and arid living environment. While the morphology of the clouds in the sky primarily reproduces the external features of the "dragon" through iconic signification, their inherent meteorological linkage with rainfall in natural experience also instills them with an indexical dimension—signifying a latent association with precipitation. In the traditional Chinese cultural system, the dragon is regarded as a deity who controls rivers and regulates wind and rain, possessing the symbolic function of summoning wind and rain and ensuring water conservancy. Therefore, the above symbols—including signs indicating drought and cloud-shaped signs suggesting the potential for precipitation—weave together the deep conceptual image of "favorable weather for crops" through juxtaposition and interaction, completing the intersemiotic translation from concrete visual signs to abstract cultural meaning.

Figure17: Iconic signs of CI dragon

Figure18: Iconic signs of CI dragon

While both use the archetypal image of "red," its symbolic combination in the *2021 Qixi Festival* show evoked a conceptual image different from that of the Spring Festival. Red ropes, red flowers, and red umbrellas, as symbolic signs, explicitly symbolize marriage and affection in the Chinese tradition of love narratives (Figure 19&20). These red symbols, along with other symbolic elements such as love locks and butterflies, form an image cluster, further reinforcing the concept of "unwavering loyalty" in love.

Figure 19: color red as CI in 2021 Qixi Festival show

Figure 20: color red as CI in 2021 Qixi Festival show

The concept of "faithful love" is also reflected in the show's semiosis of the "flying in the sky" archetype. On the one hand, the figures, as symbolic signs, point to specific love myths and legends; on the other hand, the "flying in the sky" archetype extends into new dimensions of meaning through its combination with other symbolic signs. The ancient astronomers Zhang Heng and monk Yi Xing and their images (Figure 21) appearing in the program, as highly conventional cultural signs, seem unrelated to the theme of love in their original connotations of scientific exploration. However, when these signs are juxtaposed with symbols of love myths such as flying Chang'e, and the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl, they collectively reconstruct a theme that transcends love—curiosity and exploration of the universe. The generation of this conceptual image is precisely the result of the negotiation and fusion of meanings among different symbolic signs in a specific context.

Figure 21: ancient astronomers as part of CI flying

Figure 22: the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl as part of CI flying

Lanterns, as common folk signs, often correspond to diverse aspects of life with their different colors. In Figure 9, the Chinese characters inscribed on the lanterns—though inherently symbolic signs—function not primarily as carriers of specific linguistic meaning, but rather operate indexically, pointing to the Kongming lanterns released into the sky and the wishes they carry. The variety of lanterns forms a coherent cluster of symbolic images, with the signs reinforcing each other and ultimately pointing to the conceptual image of "the yearning for a better life."

5. Discussion

From the perspective of semiotics, the representational mechanism of archetypal images presents a spectrum from concrete to abstract, from independent to dependent, with its representational levels and meaning generation methods also differentiating accordingly. For archetypal images with stable visual forms (such as the moon, chrysanthemum, and dragon), their iconicity is directly reflected in the correspondence between the representamen and the object in terms of morphological structure. These images often possess independent iconic representational capabilities, meaning that the archetype and the iconic signs highly overlap in form and meaning, and their cultural connotations are often directly embodied in the formal expression of the image itself.

For abstract spatiotemporal concepts such as solar terms (e.g., Qingming Festival) and seasons (e.g., spring), they do not possess a fixed form. Their iconicity relies on the systematic weaving and structural mapping of symbolic groups across the perceptual dimension. For example, the image of Qingming can construct a perceptual network isomorphic to the climate and cultural memory of that season through signs such as drizzle, willow branches, and kites in terms of visual perception, movement, and atmosphere. The image of spring, on the other hand, relies on signs such as crabapple blossoms to form a dynamic cognitive coordinate system. The iconicity of such cultural images transcends mere external morphological similarity, delving into the translation of spatiotemporal experience and conceptual frameworks. Their meaning is highly dependent on the overall context activated by the combination of signs.

Furthermore, there exists a type of archetypal image that combines perceptual dimension with morphological detachment, such as "red." Its iconicity can only be anchored to the local characteristic of color attributes, unable to extend to specific forms; therefore, it must rely on other sign carriers (such as lanterns, clothing, and flowers) to be presented. In the meaning construction of such cultural images, iconicity only provides a perceptual basis; the generation of its complete cultural connotation often requires further collaboration between indexicial and symbolic signs. For instance, in festive contexts, "red" relies on symbols such as lanterns and Chinese knots to signify "celebration," whereas in narratives of love, it draws upon clusters of signs like red threads and red flowers to metaphorically symbolize "marital union." This illustrates how the same archetypal image, through its recombination within different semiotic clusters, can give rise to multiple—and even dynamic, fluid—conceptual meanings.

Thus, the representation of archetypal images is not a homogeneous process, but rather differentiates into three types—independent and self-sufficient, system-dependent, and context-reconstructed—based on the image's own morphological stability and meaning-carrying methods. This continuum not only reveals the semiotic path of cultural images from formal representation to meaning generation, but also highlights the interaction and collaboration of iconicity, indexiciality, and symbolicity in meaning construction. In images where form and connotation overlap, iconicity itself is sufficient to convey archetypal meaning; in images with fixed forms and open connotations, iconicity constitutes the foundation of expression, and its meaning can be expanded and deepened through combination with other symbolic images; while in images with detached forms, iconicity serves only as a starting point, and the final meaning generation depends on the network constructed by indexicial and symbolic signs, thus forming a flexible and culturally interpretive expressive system.

6. Conclusion

Intersemiotic translation theory offers a new analytical approach to the cross-media dissemination and meaning generation of cultural images. It transcends the traditional meaning transmission model centered on linguistic signs, expanding its scope to the dynamic transformation between linguistic and non-linguistic symbolic signs. Within this framework, this study, using the *CFS* series as its subject, attempts to construct a three-tiered analytical model encompassing archetypal images, symbolic images, and conceptual images, thereby

revealing the formal transformation and meaning reconstruction that cultural images undergo during intersemiotic translation.

The transformation of cultural image from linguistic form to audiovisual form is essentially a dual operation of the sign carrier and the expressive system at the levels of translation and semiotic practice. In this process, the sign attributes of cultural image—namely, iconicity, indexiciality, and symbolicity—constitute a multidimensional mechanism for meaning generation. Iconicity, through similarity in form, structure, or perception, evokes the audience's intuitive experience and emotional resonance; indexiciality, through causal, spatiotemporal, or logical connections, constructs a specific contextual framework and narrative thread for the image; and symbolicity, relying on shared social and cultural conventions, activates deep-seated cultural memory and collective identity. These three sign relationships often intertwine and coexist in the translation of the same image, complementing and reinforcing each other, jointly propelling meaning from deficiency and deviation towards rebirth and complete transmission.

Therefore, intersemiotic translation is not only a formal transformation across symbols, but also a practice of negotiating and reproducing meaning. It may result in the partial loss of original cultural connotations during the transformation, or it may give rise to interpretations that fit the new context. This perspective prompts us to understand the dissemination and evolution of cultural image in a more systematic and dynamic way—viewing it as an open process of representation that is constantly translated, interpreted, and reconstructed within a multi-symbolic network.

References

Arkad'Evna, L. O. (2019). "a sensible image of the Infinite": intersemiotic translation of Russian classics for foreign audiences. *Russian Journal of Linguistics, 23*(2), 399–414.

Bartolini, C. (2024). Translating artworks: Interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic translation in museums. *Babel, 70*(5), 637–657.

Ciancitto, S. (2023). Illustrating Alice in Wonderland in the New Millennium: New Meanings for an Evergreen Children's Classic. *Translation Matters, 5*(1).

Fadeev, A. (2020). Acquisition of artistic literacy in multimodal learning via intersemiotic translation. *Punctum International Journal of Semiotics, 6*(1), 133–159. https://doi.org/10.18680/hss.2020.0007

Gottlieb, H. (2005). Multidimensional translation: Semantics turned semiotics. EU-high-level scientific conference series, MuTra,

Gu, Y., & Zhang, X. (2021). 传统文化觉醒:符码体系与视听场域的再生产——基于河南卫视"中国节日"系列节目的文化观察[Awakening of Traditional Culture: The Reproduction of Symbolic Systems and Audiovisual Fields—A Cultural Observation Based on Henan TV's "Chinese Festivals" Series]. (China Television)(07), 30–34.

Jakobson, R. (2021). On linguistic aspects of translation. In *The translation studies reader* (pp. 156–161). Routledge.

Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2020). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Routledge.

Kress, G. R., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication. Bloomsbury Academic.

Lass, R. (2023). Intersemiotic translation in the theatre: Creating a stage production. *Translation Matters, 5*(1).

Liu, L., & Wang, Y. (2022). 高译《狄公案》的文化意象翻译及创造性叛逆[On the Translation of Cultural Images and Its Creative Treason in Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee(Dee Goong An)Translated by Robert Hans van Gulik]. JOUＲNAL OF CHONGQING JIAOTONG UNIVEＲSITY(Social Sciences Edition), 22(01), 106–112.

Liu, T. (2018). 意象论:意中之象与视觉修辞分析[On Image: "Image" in Meaning and Visual Rhetoric Analysis]. Journalism Bimonthly(04), 1–9+149. https://doi.org/10.20050/j.cnki.xwdx.2018.04.003

Mahasneh, A. A., & Abdelal, R. (2022). Resemiotization of illustrations in children's picture books between english and arabic. *Sage Open, 12*(2), 21582440221093364. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221093364

Manfredi, M., & Bartolini, C. (2023). Integrating museum studies into translation studies: towards a reconceptualization of the source text as sensory experience in museum audio description and the notion of experiential equivalence. *Translation Studies, 16*(2), 261–276. https://doi.org/10.1080/14781700.2023.2208129

Marais, K. (2018). *A (bio) semiotic theory of translation: The emergence of social-cultural reality.* Routledge.

Mowafy, M. (2024). Meaning does not have to be rendered in words: Intersemiotic translation in digital religious infographics. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 14*(2), 361–377. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v14i2.74898

Muñoz, M. C. (2022). Re-contextualising advertising through re-creation: the recycling and translation of advertisements in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Translation Matters, 4*(1).

O'Sullivan, C. (2013). Introduction: Multimodality as challenge and resource for translation. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, (20), 2–14. https://doi.org/10.26034/cm.jostrans.2013.398

Petrilli, S. (2003). The intersemiotic character of translation. *Translation translation, 41*, 51.

Plastina, A. F. (2022). Remaking meaning through intersemiotic translation: the case of online medical journals. *The Journal of Specialised Translation, 38,* 32–54. https://doi.org/10.26034/cm.jostrans.2022.082

Sheng, X. (2023). 河南卫视"中国节日"系列节目的符号建构与传播研究[Research on the semiotic construction and communication of Henan TV's "Chinese Festival" series]. *West China Broadcasting TV, 44*(04), 171–173.

Song, Z., & Wang, Y. (2022). 功夫片中文化意象的翻译策略探析——以《一代宗师》为例[On the Translation Strategies of Cultural Image in Kungfu Films: A Case Study of the Grandmasters]. *Sichuan University of Arts and Science Journal, 32*(06), 46–50.

Sun, M. (2024). 山东优秀非遗文化意象翻译方法探析[Study of Translation Methods for Cultural Imagery of Shandong's Distinguished Intangible Cultural Heritage]. Ludong University *Journal(Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 41*(06), 77–82. https://doi.org/10.20063/j.cnki.CN37-1452/C.2024.06.010

Torop, P. (2000). Intersemiosis and intersemiotic translation. *European Journal for Semiotic Studies, 12*(1), 71–100. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004490093_016

Tsvetkova, M. V. (2024). FILM ADAPTATION AS A PHENOMENON OF INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION. A CASE STUDY OF TWO FILM VERSIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET. Imagologiya i komparativistika.

Wen, X. (2002). 认知语言学的研究目标、原则和方法[On the objectives principles and methodology of cognitive linguistics]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* (bimonthly), (02), 90–97+160.

Zhang, L. (2025). 跨文化视域下英语翻译中的文化意象转换策略[Cultural Image Conversion Strategy in English Translation from a Cross-Cultural Perspective]. *Journal of Xidian University (Social Science Edition), 35*(03), 136–141. https://doi.org/10.16348/j.cnki.cn61-1336/c.2025.03.001

Zhu, Y. (2023). 译介学视域下唐传奇文化意象英译策略探析———以《虬髯客传》为例 [A Medio-Translatological Study on the Chinese-English Translation Strategies of Cultural Images in Tang Tales: Taking The Man with the Curly Beard as an Example]. *JOURNAL OF ZHEJIANG INTERNATIONAL STUDIES UNIVERSITY,* (02), 80–88.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Copyrights