

From "Safe Fruit" to Christmas Window: The Symbolization of Christmas in China and the Construction of Consumption Ceremony

Leyi Hong

School of Culture and Media, Jiangxi Institute of Technology, Nanchang, 330000, China
q657588924@outlook.com

Abstract. The reconstruction of Chinese culture caused by the cross-cultural communication of Western festivals has been widely discussed, but academia still lacks a systematic explanation of the core mechanism of Christmas localization and the interactive logic of commodity symbols and consumption rituals. Based on the symbolic consumption theory and structural theory, this paper integrates the literature and empirical data at home and abroad in the past 15 years, focusing on the localization and transformation of Christmas in China and the integration of consumer culture. The research shows that Christmas has transformed from a traditional religious festival to a secular cultural phenomenon with both consumption attributes and social functions. The core consumer groups are 18-35-year-old youth and college students. Commodity symbolization realizes the value transition through the three-level path of "meaning binding - media diffusion - consumer identity". There is a dynamic correlation between the two. Based on this, this paper proposes that cross-cultural Festival communication should pay attention to the localization of symbols and the adaptation of consumption ritual scenes, taking into account the differences in group needs and cultural inclusiveness, so as to provide practical reference for the sustainable development of festival consumption culture.

Keywords: Christmas, commodity symbolization, consumption ceremony, localization, cross-cultural communication.

1. Introduction

Under the impetus of the great wave of globalization, the boundaries of cross-cultural communication have been constantly melting. Western festivals, as vivid carriers in the field of cultural dissemination, have triggered intense collisions and deep integration of diverse cultures in Chinese society. Since Christmas was introduced to China, it has gradually lost its religious sanctity and evolved into a secular cultural phenomenon that takes commodity consumption as its core content and also has social and entertainment functions. Judging from the local innovation presented by "Peace Fruit", the atmosphere created by the Christmas window display, the convenience demonstrated by online consumption, and the immersive experience provided by offline scenarios, its localized form has become increasingly distinct. The "2023 China Festival Consumption Trend Report" clearly indicates that during the Christmas season, the proportion of online retail sales of physical goods in the total annual festival consumption reached 18.7%, among which the youth group contributed 79.3% of the consumption share. In fact, behind this phenomenon lies a very profound cultural logic and changes in consumption.

Academic circles have carried out many explorations around the spread and evolution of Christmas in China. Shaozhize sorted out the evolution track of Christmas from "foreign winter solstice" to commercial festivals. Some scholars focused on the reconstruction of cultural localization and pointed out that its religious attribute was weakened and its social consumption attribute was highlighted. Other studies analyzed market characteristics and consumer decision-making logic through consumption data. Most of the existing relevant studies focus on the secularization and commercialization of Christmas in a single dimension, or are limited to the isolated analysis of cultural localization and consumption behavior. There is no systematic explanation of the specific path of commodity symbolization, the construction process of consumption ceremony, and the

dynamic relationship between the two. In view of this, this study establishes "commodity Symbolization" and "consumption ritual construction" as the dual core content, relies on the symbolic consumption theory and structural theory, integrates the literature data and empirical results, deeply analyzes the cultural evolution mechanism of Christmas in China, and reveals the promoting effect of commodity symbols on consumption rituals and the strengthening effect of consumption rituals on the value of symbols, to provide the corresponding theoretical supplement and empirical reference for the study of cross-cultural Festival communication.

2. Case Study--Mechanism and Functions

In the process of cross-cultural communication, Christmas has gradually transformed from an original foreign religious symbol into a consumer cultural phenomenon with local characteristics. The key to this transformation lies in a complete set of symbol operation processes. This section will conduct a detailed analysis at three levels in the logical sequence of "meaning binding - media diffusion - consumer identification": The first is to analyze the binding methods of commodity symbols with Chinese local culture and values. The second is to explore the role of multiple media in the diffusion of symbols and cognitive penetration. The third is to reveal the formation mechanism of consumer identity with Christmas symbols and the core motivation behind it, thereby presenting the operation mechanism and core function of Christmas symbolization in China in a complete way.

2.1. Local Binding of Symbolic Meaning

The symbolization of Christmas goods began with the localization transformation of Western symbols and the local creation of new symbols [1]. Its core logic lies in closely binding goods with Chinese cultural psychology and values. In the Western context, Christmas gifts like "Thanksgiving gifts" and Christmas decorations with "religious narrative" characteristics are re-encoded after being introduced to China to adapt to the local context, and this is precisely a typical paradigm of symbol reconstruction in cross-cultural communication [2,3]. The "Peace Fruit" can be regarded as a typical example. It emerged in college campuses after 2000, closely binding apples with the meaning of "peace and smooth sailing" through homophonic means. After Christmas packaging, it was endowed with festive attributes, allowing the price of ordinary fruits to increase by 3 to 5 times. By the Christmas season of 2023, its sales volume reached 120 million jin, among which the proportion of customized gift boxes exceeded 40% [4]. Santa Claus has also transformed from a "religious messenger" into a symbol of "gift of joy", with a recognition rate exceeding 83%. The Christmas display window has broken free from its mere function of showcasing goods and has become a core element of "atmosphere creation". In the core areas of business districts in first-tier cities, its recognition rate exceeds 75%, and 72% of the respondents indicated that the situation of window display would affect their decision to enter the store. This kind of binding is deeply rooted in the social tradition of "reciprocity" and the cultural psychology of "praying for good fortune and blessings", thus achieving the leap of commodities from use value to symbolic value.

2.2. Media Diffusion and Cognitive Penalty

When the symbolic meaning is bound, it needs to be widely spread with the help of multiple media to form social cognition [5]. Commercial media and social media jointly build a matrix of collaborative communication, which can produce a communication effect of $1+1>2$. Commercial media takes marketing as the core content, and through the decoration and promotion activities of offline stores, the Christmas symbols and consumption scenes are deeply bound together. Business circles such as Wangfujing in Beijing and Nanjing Road in Shanghai will start the decoration work in November every year [6]. The Christmas window exhibition held by Shanghai Guojin Center in 2023 attracted more than 500000 people to visit, and the reading volume of its microblog topics reached 280million. Social media is based on the spontaneous dissemination of users. 78.3% of the youth group will share Christmas scenes through platforms such as the circle of friends and little red

book, and 62.5% of the respondents said that the content shared by others will enhance their consumption willingness [7]. Social media, with its decentralized dissemination method, has enabled the Christmas symbol to break through the limitations of geographical circles. The recognition rate of the Christmas symbol among young people in second - and third-tier cities has risen from 58% in 2018 to 76.4% in 2023, and it has already permeated every aspect of daily life and every texture of social interaction.

2.3. Formation of Consumption Identity

The ultimate goal pursued by symbolic diffusion is consumer identification, that is to say, consumers should accept the symbolic meaning and confirm its value through consumption, thereby promoting the solidification of symbolic value [8]. The consumption identity of Christmas symbols stems from a dual motivation: on the level of social identity, young people integrate into specific circles by purchasing peace apples and participating in gatherings and other activities, thereby gaining a sense of belonging. At the level of emotional satisfaction, consumers can obtain a sense of ritual and pleasure through symbolic consumption, thereby alleviating various pressures in life.

Relevant data shows that 60% of consumption motivations stem from social needs, 30% from the need to create an atmosphere, and only 5% are related to religion. 82.7% of college students give peace fruits to maintain relationships with friends, and 75.3% believe that Christmas decorations can enhance their sense of happiness. This has thus formed a circular mechanism of "meaning binding - media diffusion - consumer identification - symbol reproduction". It is evident that the core driving force behind the consumption of Christmas symbols is not religious attributes. The deep longing for social connection and the instinctive demand for emotional comfort have long been intertwined into a dual engine in the wave of symbol dissemination. It is precisely this combined force that enables the meaning of Christmas symbols to break through the barriers of circles and spread widely, ultimately settling into a stable consumer recognition.

3. Development Dilemmas

Although the symbolization of Christmas has formed a complete operation system in the process of localization, under the dual influence of commercial expansion and social development, many practical predicaments have gradually been exposed.

3.1. Symbolic Alienation

The excessive dominance of commercial logic in symbol production has led to the weakening of emotional significance and cultural connotations, and symbols have become marketing tools. Baudrillard once issued a warning that in a consumer society, symbolic value often surpasses use value. However, excessive subordination to commercial interests can erode the original emotional and cultural significance it possesses [8]. Some merchants create consumer traps by setting inflated prices and excessive packaging [9]. 40% of consumers believe that Christmas products have "inflated premiums". In the 2023 holiday consumer rights protection report, the proportion of complaints related to "price fraud" and "excessive packaging" reached 32.6%. A certain brand's two-piece peace fruit gift box is priced at 99 yuan, and the packaging cost actually exceeds 60%. This alienation has led to a decline in the emotional value satisfaction of Christmas consumption from 78% in 2019 to 65.3% in 2023, and 37.8% of consumers said that "the festival atmosphere has faded", which poses a serious threat to the healthy development of consumption rituals.

3.2. Group Differentiation

The consumption ceremony shows a clear group differentiation. The participation rate of young people aged 18 to 35 in first-tier cities has reached 72%, while in the lower-tier markets and among those over 45 years old, the participation rate is less than 30%. The participation rate of college students exceeded 85%, while that of middle-aged and elderly people was less than 15%. In terms of

awareness, the awareness rate in first-tier cities has reached 91.2%, while in fourth-tier and lower regions it is only 58.7%. The acceptance rate among people under 30 is 82.3%, while that among those over 50 is only 23.5%. The main reasons for this differentiation include: differences in cultural identity, with 68.4% of the middle-aged and elderly population preferring traditional festivals; In terms of consumption capacity and concepts, the average Christmas spending per young person in first-tier cities is 896 yuan, while in the lower-tier markets, 56.7% of people think that the cost performance is "low". The differences in dissemination channels: Christmas symbols are mostly spread through social media, while the middle-aged and elderly groups have relatively fewer opportunities to access such information. Eventually, this leads to the ritual being confined to a specific circle, and its social influence is limited.

3.3. Lack of Sustainability

Sustainable development is confronted with dual challenges. On the one hand, there is a lack of symbolic innovation; on the other hand, environmental protection issues are relatively prominent. In terms of symbols, the focus is still on traditional elements such as peace fruits and Santa Claus. Most of the innovations merely remain at the level of packaging improvement. 48.6% of the respondents indicated that "the styles are repetitive and lack novelty" [10]. In terms of environmental protection, Christmas consumption has given rise to a large number of disposable goods, generating over 200,000 tons of plastic decoration waste annually, with a recycling rate of less than 5%. In 2023, the packaging waste of Ping An fruit reached 18,000 tons, among which the proportion of non-degradable materials exceeded 70%. Globally, 68% of consumers tend to choose natural and reusable goods, and 72% will avoid over-packaged goods. However, in the Chinese market, the proportion of related goods is only 18.3%, which is obviously out of line with the trend of sustainable consumption.

4. Optimization Suggestions

In response to the predicaments faced by the localization development of Christmas, such as symbolic alienation, group differentiation, and insufficient sustainability, this section, based on the previous analysis, puts forward targeted optimization suggestions.

4.1. Balance Commercial Logic and Cultural Notation

The Christmas symbol is deeply integrated with local culture. By combining Christmas decorations with traditional patterns such as auspicious clouds and meanders, merchants need to break away from the traditional marketing thinking mode and deeply explore the convergence points between Christmas culture and local culture [10]. For instance, in the marketing of peace fruits, the feature of "emotional transmission" can be emphasized. By customizing blessing cards and using simple packaging, the core meaning can be restored. For example, a certain cultural and creative brand in Beijing launched a "Intangible Cultural Heritage paper-cut Peace Fruit Gift Box", priced at only 49 yuan, but its sales exceeded 100,000 units. The "Palace Museum Co-branded Christmas Decorations" launched by a certain brand have received a warm response in the market. The media should enhance their guiding role in the cultural aspect. The special program "The Cultural Core of Festival Consumption" produced by CCTV Finance has achieved 120 million views, effectively promoting the return of consumption cognition to a rational track.

4.2. Expand Group Coverage

Optimize symbols and scenarios for different groups: Launch high-quality and cost-effective products in the lower-tier markets. For instance, Pinduoduo's "Family-style Affordable Christmas Decorations", priced at 29.9 yuan, achieved sales of over 500,000 units. The "bulk piece fruit" sold in supermarkets has a unit price of only around 5 yuan, and the sales growth rate in the lower-tier markets has reached 67%. For the middle-aged and elderly group, the combination gift box of "Peace Fruit + Fu character" was launched, and the purchase proportion of the middle-aged and elderly group

reached 32%. Through community gatherings and traditional media communication, the participation rate of elderly groups in community activities in many places has reached 45%, and the audience rating of popular science programs on local TV stations has increased by 23%. Through the adaptation of traditional scenes and communication channels, the inclusiveness of festival ceremonies has been significantly enhanced [11].

4.3. Promote Symbol Innovation and Green Transformation

Symbol innovation should closely follow the development trends of The Times, launching digital products such as virtual Christmas gifts and online decorations. The "WeChat Christmas Virtual Greeting Card" launched by Tencent has been sent out 80 million times. Combining national trends with intangible cultural heritage skills creates culturally innovative symbols. In terms of green transformation, IKEA prioritizes the use of natural and reusable raw materials. The sales growth rate of its "recyclable Christmas decorations" has reached 92%. Activities such as the "Decoration Recycling Program" and the "Eco-friendly Product Zone" were carried out, and the sales proportion of the eco-friendly zone on e-commerce platforms reached 23%. These symbol innovations that fit the digital trend, cultural heritage, and green development not only enrich the connotation of the Christmas symbol, but also keep it dynamic and attractive in the consumer market, perfectly echoing the core demands of the development of the times for symbol innovation [12].

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the localization and evolution of Christmas in China, with the core analysis centered around the dynamic correlation between the symbolization of commodities and the construction of consumption rituals. Research has found that Christmas has formed the characteristics of a "younger and more urbanized" consumer group, with college students becoming the core force. Commodity symbolization is achieved through the path of "meaning binding - media diffusion - consumer identification", among which the recognition rate of core symbols exceeds 78%. The consumption ritual chain of "decoration - gift-giving - dining together" has been deeply integrated with local culture, and locally improved products and Chinese dining together have become the mainstream forms. Commodity symbols promote the formation of consumption rituals, and consumption rituals in turn reinforce the value of symbols. This circular mechanism provides a typical sample for the dissemination of cross-cultural festivals and verifies the applicability of the symbol consumption theory in cross-cultural contexts.

This research also has certain limitations. It relies on secondary data, with some primary research for support. In the future, more detailed analyses can be conducted for specific groups or specific symbols through methods such as questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Christmas can be compared with other foreign festivals, such as Valentine's Day and Halloween, to explore the common rules and distinctive features of the symbolization and ritual construction of cross-cultural festivals, providing a more abundant empirical reference basis for related research.

With the continuous deepening and development of digitalization and green consumption trends, Christmas symbols and consumption rituals will present more diverse forms. Their localization process will also continue to provide vivid samples for cross-cultural communication research, which is worthy of further attention and in-depth exploration.

References

- [1] Baudrillard Consumer Society. 3rd Edition. Nanjing University Press, 2008.
- [2] Miller D. Unwrapping Christmas. Oxford USA Pod, 1995.
- [3] Shao Z. From "Foreign Winter Solstice" to "Christmas": The Festivalization of Jesus' Birthday in Modern China - An Investigation Based on Shenbao. Academic Issue, 2012 (12): 10.

- [4] Li H. Research on the 4I Marketing Strategy of Chinese Style Fragrance Brands in the Olfactory Economy: Taking the Scent Library as an Example. *Electronic Business Review*, 2025, 14 (6): 2344-2349.
- [5] Chandler D. *Semiotics: The Basics*. 2007.
- [6] Yi S, Liang W. How Traditional Commercial Enterprises Can Innovate and Transform: The Construction of a Value Co-creation Platform Network Based on Service-oriented Logic. *China Industrial Economy*, 2023 (1): 171-188.
- [7] Lu C. *Research on Cultural Identity in the Consumption of Z-Generation National Trend Brands*. Southwest University, 2021.
- [8] Giddens A. *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration: Elements of the theory of structuration*. Practicing History. Routledge, 2004: 121-142.
- [9] Originality Document. *Survey Report on College Students' Christmas Consumption Status*. 2025
- [10] Chen Y Z. Electricity generation under the theory of symbol consumption: shopping behavior research. *Journal of Electronic Business Review*, 2025, 14 (8): 1863-1868.
- [11] Sheng J. *The Acceptance and Influence of Christmas in Contemporary Chinese Society*. Hubei University of Technology [2025-12-11].
- [12] Alexander J C, Seidman S. *Culture and society: contemporary debates*. 1990.