

## STUDY ON THE ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF ETHNIC CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN THE COMMUNICATION OF GUIZHOU "VILLAGE SUPER LEAGUE"

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### Abstract

This study takes Guizhou's "Village Super League" (officially named "Guizhou Rongjiang [Sanbao Dong Village] Harmonious and Beautiful Village Football Super League") in China as the research object, systematically exploring the presentation, generation, application, and communication mechanism of ethnic cultural symbols in the context of modern media communication. As a public cultural event promoted by local governments and widely participated in by the general public, the "Village Super League" has transcended the single attribute of sports competition, becoming a crucial practice for the activation of ethnic cultural resources, the consolidation of cultural identity, and social exchange. Guided by the theoretical frameworks of Semiotics, Cultural Representation Theory, and Participatory Communication Theory, this study integrates methods such as field investigation, event video and new media text analysis, and social network analysis. The findings reveal that ethnic cultural symbols in the "Village Super League" are organically integrated into the event through costumes, singing and dancing, folk customs, and cuisine. These symbols are reproduced through short videos, live broadcasts, User-Generated Content (UGC), and algorithmic recommendations, generating extensive social influence and promoting the construction of cross-regional cultural identity. The results indicate that the application of ethnic cultural symbols is not only a process of cultural representation but also a key path to enhance social cohesion and shape local cultural brands. Theoretically, this study enriches the communication perspective in ethnic cultural symbol research; practically, it provides references for grassroots public cultural construction and local cultural brand shaping.

**Keywords:** Guizhou Village Super League; Ethnic cultural symbols; Modern media communication; Symbol application; Cultural reproduction

### 1. Introduction

Rongjiang County is located in the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, at the core junction of Hunan Province, Guizhou Province, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Among its total population of 385,000, ethnic minorities account for 83.9%, with the Dong and Miao being the largest groups. It boasts 1 world-class intangible cultural heritage (ICH) item (Grand Song of the Dong Ethnic Group) and 11 national-level ICH items (Rongjiang County Bureau of Culture, Sports, Radio, Television and Tourism, 2023, June 20). After lifting itself out of poverty as a whole by the end of 2020, Rongjiang's relatively isolated environment has preserved its original ethnic culture, forming a "comparative advantage" that is fully demonstrated in Guizhou's "Village Super League".

Since May 2023, the "Village Super League" has rapidly emerged as a phenomenal sports event. Its core feature lies in the "grassroots football" model, guided by local governments and voluntarily participated in by villagers, while deeply carrying the local ethnic cultural traditions of Rongjiang. Against the backdrop of the Rural Revitalization Strategy and the National Fitness Policy, the "Village Super League" differs from highly professionalized urban leagues, featuring "universal participation" — local villagers integrate culture into the event through parades in ethnic costumes, performances of the Grand Song of the Dong Ethnic Group, Miao dances, and promotion of local specialty cuisine. This integration transcends the scope of a mere sports event, turning it into a symbol of local cultural confidence and social cohesion. The integration of such local cultural elements (combined with traditional Chinese culture) enables the "Village Super League" to transcend the boundaries of sports competitions,

ethnic groups, and even nations, becoming a new driving force, window, and opportunity for promoting global mutual assistance and shaping a new development pattern and international relations (Zhang, P., & Chen, Y., 2025, p. 63).

Modern media has greatly expanded the communication influence of the "Village Super League". Short-video platforms represented by TikTok (domestic version known as Douyin) have helped the event break geographical limitations through algorithmic recommendations and secondary communication of UGC (Zhang, T., 2025, pp. 39-41). As of August 2025, over 740 "village-style" cheering events and ICH performances have been staged at the "Village Super League", with related topics generating nearly 100 billion views. In 2024, Rongjiang County received 9.4618 million tourist visits (a year-on-year increase of 24.36%) and achieved a comprehensive tourism income of CNY 10.803 billion (a year-on-year increase of 28.64%). In the first half of 2025, the county received 4.7264 million tourists (a year-on-year increase of 12.68%). The collective economic income of villages in Rongjiang rose from 58.9 million CNY in 2022 to 121 million CNY in 2024, driving over 4,000 people to increase their income locally (Chen, G., & Lu, S., 2025). Thus, the "Village Super League" has become a typical case of rural culture "gaining widespread attention" in the internet era.

The success of the "Village Super League" is the result of the Rongjiang County government's sixth attempt to build a regional IP. Previous five attempts to shape regional brands using different cultural symbols failed to gain widespread attention; it was only with the "Village Super League" as the core breakthrough that tremendous success was achieved. This model, integrating policy guidance, public participation, and new media, fully embodies the "innovative path of rural culture under modern media communication" (Cao, Y., 2025, p. 003). This study aims to analyze the generation and application logic of ethnic cultural symbols in the "Village Super League", which not only enriches the theory of ethnic cultural symbol communication but also provides practical experience for rural cultural construction.

Focusing on ethnic cultural symbols in the communication of the "Village Super League", this study explores the following four aspects:

First, reveal the generation logic, communication mechanism, and application model of ethnic cultural symbols in the communication process of the "Village Super League";

Second, sort out the types and manifestations of ethnic cultural symbols involved in the communication of the "Village Super League", and analyze the recontextualization and reproduction of these symbols in the modern media environment;

Third, explore the functions of ethnic cultural symbols in cultural identity, social mobilization, and economic transformation during event communication;

Fourth, summarize the enlightenment of the "Village Super League" communication model for the Rural Revitalization Strategy and cultural governance, and provide practical references for the future development of local cultural brands.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Semiotics and Cultural Representation Theory**

Semiotics serves as the core foundation for cultural communication research: Saussure's (1916) "signifier-signified" dichotomy, Peirce's (1931) triadic sign model (icon, index, symbol), Barthes' (1972) concept of "myth", and Hall's (1996) Cultural Representation Theory provide tools for analyzing the recontextualization of symbols in the "Village Super League". For example, ethnic singing and dancing and ritual activities have transformed from traditional rituals into event performances and short-video highlights; ethnic costumes have been "mythologized" as symbols of rural Guizhou in communication. Peirce's triadic sign classification can also explain the multi-layered coexistence of singing and dancing (iconic

signs), costume displays (indexical signs), and "ethnic unity" narratives (symbolic signs) in the "Village Super League".

## **2.2 Grassroots Sports and Social Function Research**

Coalter (2007) pointed out that grassroots sports have functions of social integration and community mobilization. Darby (2002) found in his research on African football that grassroots events can activate local cultural resources. The "Village Super League" reconstructs public life through a bottom-up mobilization model — most players are ordinary people, and villagers spontaneously form cheerleading teams. Through the event, social capital is accumulated, attracting investment and promoting industrial development (Bourdieu, 1984). It also serves as a platform for rural governance (Wu, X., 2024). Compared with grassroots events in Latin America and Africa, the "Village Super League" achieves more significant communication effects due to high media penetration and the integration of ethnic symbols.

## **2.3 Modern Media Communication and Participatory Culture**

Jenkins' (2006) "Convergence Culture" theory points out that in the new media era, audiences become communication nodes through UGC. In the "Village Super League", UGC (e.g., videos of ethnic costumes) and algorithmic recommendations on platforms such as Douyin form fission-style communication. Cross-platform collaboration (Weibo, WeChat) constructs a "matrix communication" pattern, upgrading the "Village Super League" from a grassroots event to a national cultural phenomenon. Participatory culture also breaks the traditional "center-periphery" communication structure.

## **2.4 Ethnic Cultural Identity and Communication**

Hall (1990) argued that identity is dynamically constructed. In the "Village Super League", ethnic groups such as the Miao and Dong strengthen internal and external identity through symbol displays: internally, they construct an "imagined community" through shared symbol practices (Anderson, 1983); externally, media endows symbols with new meanings, which aligns with national narratives such as "building a sports power" and "rural revitalization". However, there is also a risk of cultural commercialization (Wu, X., 2024).

## **2.5 Research Gaps and Innovations**

Existing research lacks systematic classification of symbols, integrated analysis of sports and multiple fields, and reflection on commercialization risks. The innovations of this study are: using semiotics to analyze the meaning mechanism of "Village Super League" symbols; integrating fieldwork and media data to explore multiple functions; highlighting uniqueness through cross-cultural comparison; and proposing a tripartite analytical framework of "government strategic promotion - ethnic cultural symbols - modern media communication" to reveal the institutional and cultural logic behind the success of the "Village Super League".

## **3. Research Methods**

This study adopts a comprehensive research approach with qualitative research as the main method and quantitative research as a supplement to systematically analyze ethnic cultural symbols in the communication of Guizhou's "Village Super League". Through literature research, field investigation, in-depth interviews, media text analysis, and data statistics, the comprehensiveness and credibility of the research are ensured.

### **3.1 Literature Research**

This study combs through achievements in the fields of sports communication, semiotics, and new media communication, focusing on theories such as "traffic logic", "algorithmic recommendation", and "cultural symbol reproduction". It also refers to domestic and foreign research on short-video communication, sports event mediatization, and rural revitalization to construct a theoretical framework.

### 3.2 Field Investigation

Participatory observation was conducted at the "Village Super League" and its supporting activities in Rongjiang County, focusing on recording: the mediatization characteristics of ethnic symbols (costumes, singing and dancing, rituals, cuisine) on-site; the integration of the event with new media (live broadcasts, short-video shooting); and audience interaction behaviors (mobile phone shooting, online sharing). Field notes and audio-visual materials provide an empirical basis for subsequent analysis.

### 3.3 In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 participants, including organizers, civil servants, players, cultural performers, media staff, cultural and creative vendors, and tourists. The interviews focused on topics such as the integration logic of ethnic culture, identity construction, and symbol recontextualization. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and coded using NVivo to summarize the reproduction and communication mechanisms of symbols.

### 3.4 Media Text and Data Analysis

Video and comment data related to the "Village Super League" on platforms such as TikTok and Kwai (domestic version known as Kuaishou) were collected, adopting a "qualitative + quantitative" analysis approach: qualitative analysis interprets the meaning construction of symbols, while quantitative analysis counts the frequency of symbols and their correlation with interaction metrics (likes, comments, reposts).

### 3.5 Big Data and New Media Indicator Analysis

Combining web crawling and public platform data, indicators such as TikTok topic playback volume, public opinion trends, and user interaction behaviors were collected. Social Network Analysis (SNA) was used to map the communication network, revealing key nodes and information diffusion paths.

## 4. Research Results

### 4.1 Typological Distribution and Communication Functions of Ethnic Cultural Symbols

Ethnic cultural symbols in the "Village Super League" cover costumes, music, dance, cuisine, rituals, and language, with varying frequencies and functions (Table 1).

*Table 1. Statistics on the Frequency and Communication Functions of Ethnic Cultural Symbols in the "Village Super League"*

Symbol Type	Specific Manifestations	Estimated Frequency	Communication Function
Costume Symbols	Silver-ornamented costumes; embroidered patterns; batik clothing	Over 1,000 people per day on major match days	Cultural value display; identity recognition.
Music Symbols	Grand Song of the Dong Ethnic Group; Miao Feige (Flying Songs); Lusheng performances	2-3 times per major match day	Cultural identity marking; emotional resonance.
Dance Symbols	Lusheng Dance; Wooden Drum Dance; Dong Pipa Dance	3-4 types per major match day	Visual impact; ritual atmosphere creation.
Cuisine Symbols	Pickled fish; Niubie; glutinous rice; rice rolls	Shared by cheerleaders;	Cross-cultural dialogue; social media communication.

		over 1,300 stalls on major days	
Ritual Symbols	Guzang Festival rituals; ancestor worship rituals	1-2 times per week	In-depth cultural display; sacredness construction.
Language Symbols	Dong/Miao cheering slogans; Commentary in Guizhou dialect	Ubiquitous	Group identity enhancement; cultural authenticity construction.

Note: Data sources include on-site investigation, participant interviews, and media report analysis.

Costume symbols are the most prominent: over 1,000 people wear silver-ornamented costumes and batik clothing on major match days, conveying views on wealth and historical narratives to strengthen identity recognition (Figure 1).

Music symbols (e.g., Grand Song of the Dong Ethnic Group) appear 2-3 times per major match day, forming an "auditory recognition system" to distinguish the event and trigger emotional resonance. Dance symbols (e.g., Lusheng Dance) appear 3-4 types per major match day, with visual impact suitable for short-video communication, and ritualized performances enhance the solemnity of the event (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Cuisine Symbols - Cheerleaders Displaying the Dong Ethnic Group's Glutinous Rice During Their Entrance Parade.

Source: Photographed by the researcher, July 15, 2023

Cuisine symbols (e.g., pickled fish, Niubie) are shared by cheerleaders and displayed through over 1,300 stalls on major days; Niubie (a traditional Miao dish made with partially digested forage juice from cattle stomachs and beef) has become a hot topic for secondary communication due to its uniqueness.

Ritual symbols (e.g., Guzang Festival rituals) appear 1-2 times per week, constructing the sacredness of the event (Figure 3). Language symbols (e.g., Commentary in Guizhou dialect) are ubiquitous, strengthening cohesion and authenticity. All types of symbols present the characteristic of "high-frequency symbols attracting attention and low-frequency symbols building depth", jointly forming the foundation of cultural communication.



Figure 3. Ritual Symbols - Cheerleaders Displaying the Activity of the Miao Ethnic Group's Maoren Festival During Their Entrance Parade.

Source: Photographed by the researcher, July 15, 2023

#### 4.2 Multi-Sensory Classification System and Communication Laws of Ethnic Cultural Symbols

Symbols can be divided into four systems: visual, auditory, behavioral, and gustatory (Table 2). Table 2 further details the classification and communication features of these four symbol systems.”

Table 2. Classification System of Ethnic Cultural Symbols in the “Village Super League”

Symbol System	Symbol Category	Specific Symbolic Elements	Communication Features	Typical Cases
Visual System	Costume Symbols	Silver-ornamented costumes; embroidered patterns; batik clothing; Hundred-Bird Robe	High visual recognition; suitable for image communication; rich cultural connotations	Miao women cheering for teams in costumes
	Color Symbols	Miao five-colored clothing; Dong indigo dyeing; ethnic color patterns	Strong emotional impact; prominent memory points; clear cultural symbolism	Ethnic color schemes on village team uniforms
	Architectural Symbols	Drum Tower models; Wind and Rain Bridge elements; stilted house (Diaojiailou) decorations	Cultural landmarking; strong spatial appeal; traditional craftsmanship display	Ethnic architectural elements around the venue
Auditory System	Music Symbols	Grand Song of the Dong Ethnic	Strong appeal; emotional distinct	Opening performances;

		Group; Miao cultural Feige; Lusheng characteristics; cross- melodies; Dong cultural resonance Pipa songs		halftime Grand Song shows
	Language Symbols	Commentary in Guizhou dialect; Dong/Miao cheers; bilingual broadcasts	Group identity enhancement; cultural authenticity; linguistic diversity	Dialect commentary; mother-tongue cheers
	Natural Sounds	Clinking of silver ornaments; Lusheng sounds; audience cheers	Strong sense of presence; effective atmosphere creation; direct emotional transmission	Clinking of silver ornaments when players enter
Behavioral System	Ritual Symbols	Ancestor worship; blessing rituals; welcome etiquette	In-depth cultural display; sacredness construction; tradition continuation	Pre-match ethnic blessing rituals
	Dance Symbols	Lusheng Dance; Wooden Drum Dance; Fanpai Wooden Drum Dance; Golden Pheasant Dance	Strong visual impact; universal body language; high transmissibility	Halftime multi- ethnic dance performances
	Competitive Symbols	Traditional sports; folk games; interactive sessions	High participation; direct cultural experience; high enjoyment	Audience- participated bamboo-pole dance
Gustatory System	Traditional Food	Pickled fish; Niubie; glutinous rice; oil tea; rice wine	Strong experientiality; memorable; high social media sharing value	Cheerleaders sharing food; on- site food stalls
	Dining Practices	Long-table banquets; toasting songs; shared meals	Strong sociality; rich cultural atmosphere; high interactivity	Post-match long- table celebrations

Note: Data sources include on-site investigation and social media topic analysis. Niubie refers to a traditional Miao dish made with partially digested forage juice from cattle stomachs and beef.

The visual system (costumes, colors, architectural symbols) has high recognition and constructs a "sense of presence"; the auditory system (music, language, natural sounds) deepens immersion and conveys authenticity; the behavioral system (rituals, dances, competitive activities) promotes the transformation from "passive viewing" to "active experience"; the gustatory system (food, dining methods) retains cultural memories through "taste clusters" and social rituals. The four systems collaborate to form a communication closed

loop characterized by "visual symbols attracting attention, auditory symbols creating atmosphere, behavioral symbols promoting participation, and gustatory symbols retaining memories" (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Video Communicators Sharing Local Cuisine and Streaming Live.

Source: Photographed by the researcher, July 15, 2023

#### **4.3 Integration of Empirical Data and Theoretical Framework**

Ethnic cultural symbols in the "Village Super League" form a complete cultural communication system based on diversity, characterized by multi-sensory integration and driven by both empirical data and theory. Quantitative data (e.g., nearly 100 billion topic views) confirms the core status of symbols; qualitative data (e.g., identity marking and cross-cultural dialogue functions of symbols) explains the subjective effects of communication. Theoretically, the "four-dimensional symbol system" integrates diverse symbols, and methods such as semiotics ensure rigorous interpretation. Ultimately, it is concluded that the "Village Super League" realizes the transformation of cultural inheritance from "passive display" to "active experience" through multi-sensory symbol communication, preserving the authenticity of symbols while endowing niche cultures with mass communication value through sports and media.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Theoretical Implications: Expansion of Semiotics, Cultural Representation, and Participatory Communication Theories**

The four-dimensional symbol system of the "Village Super League" constructs an "immersive representation" model — for example, gustatory symbols transform audiences from "watching culture" to "experiencing culture", and behavioral symbols promote the shift from "passive acceptance" to "active participation", confirming the hypothesis that "experiential representation is more conducive to cultural identity formation". Moreover, the four-dimensional symbols present a hierarchical structure of "basic layer (visual/gustatory) - core layer (auditory/behavioral) - deep layer (rituals)", avoiding fragmented communication and realizing the progression of "cognition - identity - inheritance".

Symbols reconstruct meanings through UGC and algorithms — for example, Niubie has transformed from daily food to a "Rongjiang cultural card", confirming Jenkins' (2006) "Convergence Culture" theory. Meanwhile, "symbol adaptability" affects reproduction effects: visual and gustatory symbols easily trigger UGC, while auditory and ritual symbols rely on official guidance, supplementing the "symbol adaptability" dimension of participatory communication theory.

Symbols in the "Village Super League" upgrade sports events to "cultural empowerment platforms" — for example, "silver-ornamented squads" and "halftime Grand Song performances" turn the event into a "cultural celebration", driving economic growth. This echoes Bale's (2000) view that "sports are media for local cultural expression" and further points out that "in-depth symbol integration" is the core prerequisite for cultural empowerment, opening up a new "culture-economy" research perspective.

### **5.2 Practical Implications: Enlightenment for Rural Cultural Revitalization and Cultural Brand Construction**

The "Village Super League" takes the ethnic symbol system (e.g., Miao, Dong) as the core of its IP rather than a single event, suggesting that other regions should sort out their "symbol resource libraries" before integrating carriers. Additionally, the "government-public" collaborative model (government building infrastructure, villagers presenting symbols) avoids cultural rigidity and scattered communication, adapting to the "culture-industry" linkage needs of post-poverty rural areas.

The "Village Super League" integrates symbols into high-participation event contexts — for example, embroidered symbols allow young people to intuitively experience traditional craftsmanship, and the Grand Song of the Dong Ethnic Group attracts teenagers to learn through communication popularity. This transforms symbols from "heritage" to "life experience", enhancing the willingness to participate in ICH inheritance.

The "Village Super League" faces the risk of symbol simplification (e.g., rituals turning into performances). A "hierarchical protection" strategy can be adopted: protect the authenticity of core symbols (e.g., complete ritual processes, full versions of the Grand Song), and allow moderate innovation of non-core symbols (e.g., batik patterns, food flavors) to balance protection and communication value.

## **6. Conclusion**

The "Village Super League" has constructed a multi-dimensional ethnic cultural symbol system, activating Rongjiang's cultural heritage — high-frequency symbols (costumes, cuisine) attract attention, while low-frequency symbols (rituals) build cultural depth. In the modern media environment, symbols form a cross-regional communication closed loop through "UGC + algorithms", with different symbols adapting to differentiated paths. Symbols achieve the functional synergy of "cultural identity - social mobilization - economic transformation", driving tourism and collective economic growth. The "Village Super League" model provides a replicable path for the living inheritance of ethnic culture and rural brand shaping, breaking the "passive protection" of ICH and forming a collaborative brand logic of "government - market - public". Theoretically, it expands the communication perspective in ethnic symbol research and the cultural dimension in sports communication research. In summary, the "Village Super League" is an inevitable result of the "value reconstruction" of ethnic cultural symbols in the modern media environment, constructing a new paradigm of "sports empowering culture and culture driving rural development" and providing enlightenment for rural cultural revitalization.

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