

# THE CONTRAST OF CHINESE ECONOMIC IMAGES BUILT BY THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MEDIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PHOTO NEWS ABOUT POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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**Abstract:** Photo news is one of the most important form of media transmission in the visual culture times, of which typical strategy of visual rhetorics is visual images. In the practice of visual rhetorics, the generation of visual images is a significant reason for the persuasive function of certain symbol. Visual images can be divided into three categories: archetype images, concept images and code images. Archetype images refer to the stereotyped forms repeatedly used in a certain tradition for a long period. Concept images can be recognized as the visual form to express specific conceptual content. Code images are mostly the combination of a series of symbols. Three kinds of visual images usually coexist in specific visual texts, echoing active dialogue with each other. The research on differences of visual images between Chinese and foreign media in Chinese economic picture news can reveal the characteristics of Chinese economic images of self-shaping and other-shaping. In this regard, this paper selects internal and external mainstream media, such as, People's Daily Overseas Edition, CNN, BBC and so on, which often publish photo news as the source of corpus, taking photo news about poverty alleviation as an example. This paper analyzes how the Chinese and foreign media present Chinese plan of poverty alleviation to the international community through visual images, thus building images of Chinese economy.

**Keywords:** Visual images; Poverty alleviation; Photo news; Economic images

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The achievements of China in poverty alleviation are remarkable. Through the efforts of the Chinese government, as well as a series of effective policy measures currently, China has entered the stage of comprehensively building a moderately prosperous society and revitalizing rural areas. It is crucial to consolidate and expand the achievements in poverty alleviation, promote sustainable development in poverty-stricken areas, and actively create the image of great power in the international community and convey the idea of poverty alleviation, in which news is playing a significant role [1].

With the advent of the era "reading pictures", it is realized that photos in news are not only used to deliver the facts, but also represent hidden language, which is the visual embodiment of implications [2]. Therefore, appropriate application of photos is beneficial for making it livelier and more infectious for poverty alleviation news. To shoulder the critical mission to show the world China's economic developments, poverty alleviation strategies and core values, it is an inevitable tendency to combine traditional text-based forms with photos, especially visual images of which to form rich visual narratives.

The research is carried out on the basis of the propositions by Liu Tao about how to classify and identify different kinds of visual images. And the analysis made on results of the research can also be combined with theories of rhetoric, semiology and communication. As China's economic growth is becoming more and more influential, it is necessary to pay attention to how China's economic images are shaped by the internal and external media. In this research, photo news is the main way to study the shaping of China's economic images with the specially chosen topic of poverty alleviation. Research objects, which are photos in poverty alleviation news from some mainstream media, including China Radio International, CCTV, BBC, Associated Press, etc., is collected. The research aims to explore the characteristics of Chinese economic images shaped by the internal and external media through distinguishing discrepancies of visual images shown by these photos.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Peter Collet, in his work *A Manual of Body Language*, wrote that 60% of the information with high dissemination efficiency is delivered with photos. And in the work *Destiny Choice: Survival Options for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* written by E.

Laszlo, he mentioned the concept of “era of reading pictures” and proposed that photos of news are combination of visual symbols with particular implications.

Visual image, a complex of reason and emotion with persuasive effects spread by photo news, is employed in studies of visual rhetorics [3]. According to Liu Tao, visual images can be divided into archetype images, concept images and code images. Archetype images refer to stereotyped images that has been repeatedly used in a certain culture for a long time and has been developed into a fixed connotation. Concept images can be used to convey specific concepts. And code images are presented by a series of symbols. Through this classification, characteristics and differences of Chinese and foreign media’s visual images can be explored in China’s economic picture news, especially in the aspect of poverty alleviation, and China’s economic images built by the internal and external media can be contrasted and analyzed.

### 3 CONTRAST OF VISUAL IMAGES PRESENTED BY THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MEDIA

#### 3.1 Archetype Images

Carl Gustav Jung thought that, as an important part of the collective unconsciousness, archetypes are primitive and innate ethnic memories [4]. Archetypes are rooted in empirical world, inherited unconsciously from complex cultural traditions to become meaningful. Archetype images, carried with cultural metalanguage, are used to convey social and cultural interpretations expressed by photos.

##### 3.1.1 The internal media: rainbow

In China, there’s a widespread saying that rainbow comes after a storm. In Chinese culture, the rainbow not only reminds people of the hardships in the process, but also allows people to witness and enjoy the beautiful results. In the photo released by CCTV on December 27, 2023, the rainbow, in the middle of the photo, is fantastic and noticeable. This shows that there’re lots of problems in poverty alleviation work, but great accomplishments have been achieved, which is worthy of people’s happiness. (Figure 1 shows)

##### 3.1.2 The internal media: the great wall

The Great Wall is one of the most prominent defensive structures in Chinese history, built to protect the country from external invasions. From this perspective, when associated with poverty alleviation, it can be interpreted that poverty alleviation, as a way of becoming stronger, can protect people from sufferings.

And the construction of the Great Wall was a challenging and arduous process, undertaken in harsh natural environments with significant obstacles, requiring immense patience, perseverance, and unwavering courage. Therefore, it can also symbolize the tortuous road to poverty alleviation and people’s crucial spirits and efforts. (Also seen the following Figure 1).



**Figure 1** The Old Village Is Reborn

##### 3.1.3 The internal media: sweat

Sweat is seen as a symbol of hard work and great efforts. It represents personal or collective dedication in achieving goals or completing tasks. Sweat is the product of diligent labor. Therefore, it is regarded as a recognition of diligence, paying tribute to professionalism.

In the photo published by CCTV on February 15, 2020, the woman’s cheeks were wet with sweat. However, she’s still trying to

present their products, which is quite appealing and touching. As shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** Overcome Problems in Poverty Alleviation

### **3.1.4 The external media: dragon**

In the recognition of foreigners, the Chinese national totem is closely connected with the dragon. And dragon, as a mysterious animal, it is similar to Chinese long history full of unknown possibilities. In addition, crucial roles were played by China's cultural export and depictions of the image of China as a dragon in some foreign films and animations.

For example, there's a red dragon in the photo posted by Associated Press on January 6, 2024. And the reporters also portrayed China's economic growth as a flying dragon. As shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** China Seeks for Economic Development with Unique Icon

### **3.1.5 The external media: the national flag and the national emblem**

The national flag and the national emblem are important identities of a country, symbolizing widespread recognition in the international community. Both of the five-starred red flag, as the national flag of China, and the national emblem of the People's Republic of China represent China's modern images and appear in major events or meetings in the world.

When the external media try to tell Chinese story of poverty alleviation, they usually use photos of the five-starred red flag and the national emblem of the People's Republic of China to represent China and stress the roles China's government and Communist Party of China have played. As shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4** China Held Summary Commendation Conference of Poverty Alleviation

### 3.2 Concept Images

According to Qian Zhongshu, images can be used to express specific concepts, which is similar to metaphor. Therefore, concept images can be defined as reflections from photos to cultural contents.

#### 3.2.1 *The internal media: inheritance*

In China, inheritance is a significant concept deeply rooted in people's heart and can inspire a sense of cultural identity and moral responsibility. In poverty alleviation, inheriting agricultural traditions, handcrafted techniques and sense of responsibility which makes generations and generations of Chinese persist in and contribute to China's great poverty alleviation work.

And always implementing successful poverty alleviation policies and projects is also a kind of inheritance, which is essential for ensuring the continuity and sustainability of poverty alleviation. By inheriting successful poverty alleviation models, policies, and lessons learned, duplication of work can be avoided, resulting in increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

In the east of Xizang, local people are trying to get rid of poverty through their unique painting skill making colorful and beautiful handicrafts. In the news reported by Xinhua News Agency on November 12, 2023, the first photo chosen is a group photo. The middle old man is Gamadle, the tenth-generation inheritor of the Tangkaga Magachi painting school, and young people around him are his students who determine to pass the skill on. As shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5** Images of Poverty Alleviation in Eastern Xizang: "Painting Charm" Helps Poverty Alleviation

#### 3.2.2 *The internal media: bright color*

In China, bright colors usually carry diverse good meanings. For example, yellow represents wealth and harvest in Chinese culture. It



is closely associated with kindness, fertility and the power of soil, and is considered an auspicious color that brings good luck. Green symbolizes life, hope, and growth. It is connected with the natural environment and agricultural development, and is considered a color that symbolizes health and luck.

For example, the photo released by CCTV on December 20, 2019 presented broad sky, bright green and yellow farmlands and neatly arranged houses with red roofs. The combination of these beautiful colors and wide field of vision made it seem more charming and bustling with life. As shown in Figure 6.

Another example is a photo posted by CCTV on February 15, 2020. In this photo, a beam of warm yellow light shone through the roof, and a mass of green shoots were growing in the sprinkling shining water. It's a scene with a riot of color and animation. As shown in Figure 7.



**Figure 6** We've Gotten Rid of Poverty!



**Figure 7** Overcome Problems in Poverty Alleviation

### **3.2.3 The external media: change**

For foreign media, it is more important to show the changes have happened in China, rather than the ideas and cultural concepts the government intended to convey. And through presenting modernized and beautiful scenery, economic growth can be clearly felt. Therefore, photos of much external news about Chinese economy, in particular, poverty alleviation, focused on the overview of poverty-stricken areas, combined with depictions of the past lives there to stress the amazing changes.

For instance, BBC used to post a photo of a village with high level of modernization which used to be troubled by severe poverty on October 11, 2021. The beautiful buildings, clear and blue sky and dense plantations made people impressive and shocked (Figure 8). It's also true of Figure 9, a photo released by Associated Press on March 23, 2022.



**Figure 8** China Welcome Changes!



**Figure 9** China Calls for More Attention to Areas in Poverty

### 3.3 Concept Images

Code images are derived from real things, specially carrying cultural sentiments and common social beliefs, which made them have relatively stabilized meanings. They can not only be recognized as a single symbol, but also appear in the form of a series of symbols, which are called collective images. Particularly, collective images coexist to form a complete jigsaw of implications.

#### 3.3.1 *The internal media: related people*

The focus of photos chosen by the internal media are mostly related people, including peasants, handicraftsmen and responsible cadres. And the cases are usually several people in a photo or several single photos.

Firstly, peasants have held a significant position and symbolic meaning in Chinese society and culture for a long history. As the largest population group in China, they remind people of the vastness of rural areas, the importance of agriculture, and the power of hard work, often being portrayed as the cornerstone of China's economic and social development. Secondly, handicraftsmen who are not only trying to get rid of poverty depending on their own unique skills, but also spreading valuable Chinese handicraft culture. Thirdly, cadres who are responsible for poverty alleviation play a crucial role in implementing relevant policies and projects. And they represent the government's efforts in poverty alleviation and shortening the gap between urban and rural areas.

For example, the photo chosen by the news published on May 16, 2019 by China Radio International with the title of *On the Road of Consolidating the Achievements of Poverty Alleviation* focused on local officials who were reviewing the results of improving agriculture equipment. All of them immersed themselves in the thoughtful and deep conversation, which showed the government's concerns on poverty alleviation (Figure 10).





**Figure 10** On the Road of Consolidating the Achievements of Poverty Alleviation

And some photos about poverty alleviation are centered on people who are strive to get rid of poverty through their own efforts, such as, peasants and handicraftsmen. The news on May 19, 2017 reported by CCTV used a series of photos of working people to tell Ganzhou's story of poverty alleviation and collectively make impressions of hard labor and harvest to imply development of local economy (Figure 11).



**Figure 11** To Witness Poverty Alleviation in Ganzhou Old Area from Three Screenshots

### 3.3.2 The internal media: poverty alleviation products

Poverty alleviation products refer to agricultural and sideline products and special handicrafts, which can show others the main way local people overcome poverty and become better off. In this way, the significance of agriculture and the efforts made by local people to improve their living conditions can be highlighted.

And by showcasing the imagery of agricultural products, it is helpful to promote the products with the focus of the quality and abundance, leading to increasing sales and good reputation. This, also, is a way to demonstrate the achievements of poverty alleviation they have made.

For example, fresh and plump tomatoes were presented in the photos of the CCTV news on January 20, 2023, from which people can not only see local peasants' sweat and labor, but also be touched by their happy and fulfilling lives (Figure 12). And the photo of colorful and well-designed stalls and booths released by Xinhua News Agency on May 23, 2023 also showed how local people were trying to promote their products and even form their own brand "Zhenziwei". They're also fully utilizing the trend of helping rural revitalization to publicize their products and the unique brand (Figure 13).



**Figure 12** The Key to Poverty Alleviation Is Hard Work



**Figure 13** The Brand Created by Rural Revitalization, the Feelings Stored by Poverty Alleviation

### 3.3.3 The external media: combination of construction and people

When portraying China's economic images, especially telling the story of poverty alleviation in China, foreign media usually tend to prioritize showcasing the development of infrastructure and living conditions. They often combine these with people who are enjoying the achievements or few laboring people to demonstrate improvements in infrastructure and social welfare. This emphasizes material improvements and economic growth, highlighting advancements in national development, while, to some extent, unavoidably ignoring the efforts made by local people.

For example, Associated Press used to release some photos about China's economic growth because of measures about poverty alleviation which showed that a man riding an electric vehicle with the vast background of some high buildings under construction. This actually stressed great economic developments witnessed in China and the necessary role China's government is playing in improving people's living conditions. However, it's hard to seek for hints of hard work made by local people. (Seen Figure 14 below)





**Figure 14** China Pledges More Help for Rural Area to Get Rid of Poverty

## 4 CONCLUSION

### 4.1 Summary

Although visual images are divided into archetype images, concept images and code images, and are studied separately, there're overlaps in definitions of these three parts. For instance, farmlands can not only be seen as a kind of archetype images bearing people's expectation and attachment, but also be regarded as a code image representing farming culture and Chinese identities.

Overall, the internal media focus on people-centered philosophy, which means that the visual images used in related photo news are about people, including peasants, handicraftsmen and party and government cadres. Therefore, domestic media stress the great efforts people made and valuable spirits people brought into full play. This can help portray China's economic images as setting the starting point and goal of improving people's living conditions.

Besides, domestic media pay a lot attention to spiritual concern and actively spreading positive energies. For example, they usually use bright colors, people's smiling faces, positive spirits and so on to enhance people's happiness and cultivate core values of socialism. It's beneficial to prove that China's positive factors, such as putting people's well-being in the first place and focusing on unity and cooperation, can help to shape the economic image of a people-centered, stable and sustainable country that values people and has international influence.

While the external media pay more attention to the achievements of poverty alleviation China has made, therefore, the photo news on this topic is centered on the scene after poverty alleviation, such as, improved primary construction, full harvest of products and picturesque scenery. This can help to portray China's images as a country of high-speed economic development and emphasizing the problem of unbalanced development.

### 4.2 Suggestions

News media should strive for a comprehensive and objective perspective in reporting Chinese economy. Coverage should reflect various aspects, including development progress and challenges of the Chinese economy, which means highlighting not only the successful stories but also the difficulties and how people solved them. This will present a more realistic portrayal of China's economy and avoid one-sided and hypocritical reporting.

Providing scientific explanations and ample data support is also necessary when reporting on the Chinese economy. By offering detailed analysis, it helps people home and abroad to better understand the trends and situations of China's economy.

It is essential to focus on the impact of economic development on the lives and well-being of the people, eliciting resonance and

emotional connection from the public. By telling stories of poverty alleviation in particular area and narratives of individuals, it brings economic development closer to people's needs and expectations. This helps shape an economic image of a people-centered, welfare-oriented, and sustainably developing country.

Shaping the image of China's economy will benefit from media having a global perspective and engaging in international dialogue. By covering China's economic issues from fully learning about perspectives of international media and participating in global platforms, it can foster diverse perceptions and international recognition of China's economy images.

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