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<https://doi.org/10.55463/hkjss.issn.1021-3619.60.40>

### A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of BBC Documentary Chinese New Year: The Biggest Celebration on Earth

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*Received: October 10, 2022 ▪ Reviewed: November 7, 2022*

*▪ Accepted: November 22, 2022 ▪ Published: January 5, 2023*

#### Abstract:

With the rapid development of multimedia and the internet, traditional discourse analysis, which only studies text, is gradually transferred to multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), studying image, language, color, sound, etc. Informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics, this paper tries making a multimodal discourse analysis of the BBC documentary Chinese New Year: The Biggest Celebration on Earth (CNY). Based on Kress & Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar and Zhang Delu's visual-verbal Inter-semiotic relations, the paper examines how different semiotic modes combine to provide meaning in a documentary. After a synthesis analysis, it is concluded that the employment of various modes in this dynamic discourse contributes to the spreading of Chinese culture and the representation of "Cultural China" image. It is hoped that this paper will provide a new perspective for the semiotic studies of documentaries. The study's importance lies in demonstrating how numerous modes and sub-modes are employed in the source domains as part of a larger persuasion campaign to skew public perceptions of China. Additionally, we look at the metaphorical implications.

**Keywords:** multimodal discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, BBC documentary.

### 英国广播公司纪录片中国新年的多模态话语分析：地球上最盛大的庆祝活动

#### 摘要：

随着多媒体和互联网的快速发展，传统的只研究文本的语篇分析逐渐转向多模态语篇分析，研究图像、语言、颜色、声音等。英国广播公司纪录片中国新年的话语分析：地球上最盛大的庆祝活动。本文基于克雷斯和范列文的《视觉语法》和张德禄的视觉-语言符号间关系，探讨了不同的符号模式如何结合起来在纪录片中提供意义。综合分析后得出结论，在这种充满活力的话语中，各种模式的运用有助于中国文化的传播

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和“文化中国”形象的再现。希望本文能为纪录片的符号学研究提供一个新的视角。该研究的重要性在于展示了如何在源域中使用众多模式和子模式，作为更广泛的说服活动的一部分，以歪曲公众对中国的看法。此外，我们还研究了隐喻含义。

**关键词：**多模态话语分析，系统功能语言学，英国广播公司纪录片。

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of science and technology, especially the development of multimedia and the internet, various semiotic modes, such as images, colors, sounds and gestures are involved in information transfer. Therefore, traditional discourse analysis, which studies the language, is gradually transferred to MDA. “Multimodality refers to the combination of different semiotic modes, for example, language and music in a communicative artefact or event” (Van Leeuwen, 2005:281). Multimodal discourse constructs meaning through the combination of different semiotic modes in communication. As a typical multimodal discourse with many modes, such as verbal, visual, audio modes, and other semiotics, documentary films, aiming at recording some aspects of the real world (Bordwell & Thompson, 2012), are indispensable carriers in international communication. The past twenty years have seen China’s employment of multi-media devices such as documentary to display its unique culture and history. However, many Chinese documentaries with good themes often fail to achieve the desired communication effect in the international market. Telling Chinese stories well and disseminating Chinese culture have become an important part of China’s current cultural undertaking. As an important carrier of China’s international cultural communication, BBC China-themed documentary films are important to show China’s national cultural image. It is of great value in recording China’s history, shaping China’s national image, disseminating Chinese cultural values. China and BBC co-produced some well-received documentaries since 2006, for example, *Wild China* is the first documentary co-produced by China Central Television (CCTV) and the BBC. It is made with a high artistic level, and it is the “business card” for China’s national image promoting. It reveals the great beauty of Chinese wildlife and the harmonious relationship between Chinese and nature to a world audience. During the Spring Festival of 2016, BBC launched the co-produced documentary film, *Chinese New Year, the biggest celebration on earth (CNY)*, which comprehensively demonstrates China’s most important festival — Chinese New Year and has been acclaimed throughout the world. Most studies on documentary filmic discourse are from subtitle translation, cross-cultural communication, media, rhetoric, and aesthetic perspectives, rather than linguistic perspective. Although the MDA approach has been used to analyze many kinds of discourses, for instance, posters, advertisements, newspapers, magazines and so on, there is still little research on the dynamic meaning

construction of documentaries from MDA. Therefore, this study selects this documentary as a corpus to analyze how the meaning of national cultural image is represented. Studies on multimodality have developed since the mid 1990’s and there have been numerous researches since then. Halliday’s SFL provides a platform for interpreting and analyzing multimodal texts involving language and other resources (O’Halloran, 2011), while *Visual Grammar* (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) provides theoretical guidance for SF-MDA. Scholars adopted the social semiotic approach to develop MDA theory and have made great achievements. SF-MDA proposes an approach to elucidate the intersemiotic relationships in multimodal texts, and a framework for analyzing the meaning generated from the integrated use of semiotic resources in texts and communicative events artifacts. Then, this model has been undertaken by other researchers and applied to various semiotic resources across various media and social settings (O’Halloran, 2004), for instance, displayed art, visual images (O’Toole, 1994; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006), music and sound (van Leeuwen, 1999), movement and gesture (Martinec, 2000). Additionally, it is a trend for MDA that the research objects shift from static discourses such as the study of picture books, posters to dynamic discourses such as videos and films. For example, O’Halloran (2004) studied visual semiosis in film; Baldry and Thibault (2006) introduced the detailed transcription methods and annotation of dynamic multimodal texts. However, the research on dynamic multimodal discourse is still in its initial stage. It is the only a recent development that researchers have been showing an increasing interest in documentary films from the perspective of multimodality. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a multimodal discourse analysis of the documentary *Chinese New Year*, to help publicity filmmakers with some available suggestions on how to make the most of the visual and verbal modes to publicize Chinese culture, and the translation of subtitles of documentary materials in a more efficient way. This study also intends to examine how the documentary appeals to the world audience and achieve the effect of disseminating Chinese culture.

### 1.1. Theoretical Framework: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

#### 1.1.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is an approach regarding language as social semiotics which is originated and developed by Michael Halliday (1978,

1994).

In SFL, Halliday (1994) categorizes three general functions of language, which can also be called three metafunctions: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual functions, and the ideational metafunction has two subfunctions, experiential and logical. Halliday (1978) was the first linguist to regard language as a resource.

Resources of ideational metafunction can interpret the experience of the world and establish the logico-semantic relationships between clauses. It is made up of transitivity and voice system. In a transitivity system, there are six types of process: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process (Halliday, 1994).

Interpersonal metafunction focuses on enacting complex social relations. It reflects that, in a social context, language is not only used to interpret experience and reality, but it can also express the speaker's attitude, maintain relationships and influence the recipient's response and behaviors. In Halliday's (1994) view, "the most fundamental types of speech role, which lie behind the more specific types that we may eventually be able to recognize, are just two: giving and demanding."

The textual function represents the way how the other two kinds of meanings to combine into a coherent text information (Halliday, 1994). The three metafunctions are the universal features of all languages that organize the linguistic system.

### 1.1.2. Visual Grammar (VG)

Enlightened by Halliday's (1994) view that language is a social semiotic with meaning potential, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) argue that images, like all semiotic modes, also interplay and have the function to convey meanings in communication.

Inspired by Halliday's SFL theory and three metafunctions, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) put forward the theory Visual Grammar in their book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, to provide a multimodal framework for the analysis of visual images. They hold that images can simultaneously fulfil the three metafunctions as language does, and creatively propose three metafunctions of images corresponding to that in SFL: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning.

The corresponding relationship between the three metafunctions in SFL and VG is shown in Table 1. Corresponding to ideational metafunction in SFL, representational meaning in VG means that the visual modes can reflect people and their feelings, the events in the real world, and the relations.

Table 1. Three metafunctions in SFL and VG

SFL metafunction	VG metafunction
Ideational meaning	Representational meaning
Interpersonal meaning	Interactive meaning
Textual meaning	Compositional meaning
SFL metafunction	VG metafunction

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) distinguish two kinds of representations: narrative representation and conceptual representation. In narrative representation, participants are connected by a vector, they are "represented as doing something to or for each other" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Four processes are involved in narrative representation: action process, reaction process, speech process and mental process, and the conversion process. The distinguishing feature of a narrative image is the presence of a vector, while conceptual structures never have vectors. The conceptual image represents participants "in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). They divide the process into three subordinate processes: classificatory, analytical and symbolic processes (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

### 1.1.3. Zhang Delu's Visual-Verbal Inter-Semiotic Relations

Zhang Delu (2009) holds that one single mode is insufficient to clearly convey the meaning of speakers in communication, thus, other modes are employed to achieve the goals of reinforcement, complement, synergy, etc. Based on Halliday's SFL (1994) and Lim's (2004) integrative model, Zhang (2009) puts forward a synthetic theoretical framework for MDA, which comprises four levels, culture level, context level, content level and expression level. The cultural aspect is the key aspect that makes multimodal communication possible. The cultural level is made up of ideology including human's mind-sets, life philosophy, living habits etc. The meaning of the construction process is realized under a particular culture. The context level consists of field, tenor and mode. e. There are two parts of content level: the semantic level and form level. The semantic level covers the three metafunctions of discourse. The form level means different modes are related to each other and collectively embody the meaning of discourse. Expression level is the media system, the material form of a discourse existing in the natural world, including language and non-language systems.

According to Zhang (2009), exploring how different modes combine with each other to realize the meanings speakers want to express is the main subject of MDA. Zhang (2009) distinguishes two kinds of relationship, i.e., complementary relationship and non-

complementary relationship. A complementary relationship means that in a discourse, a single mode cannot fully express its meaning, and it needs other modes to supplement for completeness in meaning. It is a typical multimodal discourse mode, which can be further categorized into reinforcement relations and non-reinforcement relations. Reinforcement relation means in a multimodal discourse, one modality serves as the main form of communication with other modalities just highlighting the expressive effect. Non-reinforcement relation indicates that communicative modes are indispensable and complementary in meaning construction, especially the combination of visual and auditory modes. It can be further divided into three sub-types: coordination, coalition, and intersection.

## 2. Research Methods

### 2.1. Research Questions

Bearing in mind these objectives, the following research questions have been formulated for this study:

I. How is China's national cultural image represented by visual mode in the BBC documentary — CNY?

II. How is China's national cultural image represented by verbal mode BBC documentary — CNY?

III. How do the verbal texts and visual modes of the BBC documentary film CNY combine to represent China's national cultural image?

### 2.2. Data Description

The BBC documentary film CNY, lasting about 160 min, was selected for this study, which was co-produced by the BBC and China Central Television (CCTV). The documentary was broadcast on BBCII in 2016 during the Chinese New Year. It consists of three episodes: Migration, Reunion and Celebration. The first episode, "Migration," talks about Chinese around the world going back to their hometowns through different transportation means, such as train, plane, and motorbike, for celebrating the Chinese traditional festival — the Lunar New Year, or Spring Festival. The second episode, "Reunion," is about several Chinese customs during Spring Festival, including making dumplings, pasting spring couplets, watching Chunwan Gala on CCTV, playing fireworks, etc., with their whole family members together. The third episode, "Celebration," shows the happy and peaceful atmosphere around China during Spring Festival and introduces dining traditions and some folk customs of China.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Methodology

The documentary film CNY was released on YouTube. To conduct the study, figures from the three episodes of the documentary were collected by Premier,

which is the best way to keep the integrity of information, and 21 figures were carefully selected, and 10 clauses were transcribed by Nvivo for analysis. All the figures selected can most represent China's national cultural image.

This research adopted a qualitative research approach to investigate how meaning in the documentary filmic discourse is represented by using combining verbal elements (the subtitles in the documentary) and visual elements to portray the cultural China's image in a BBC China-theme documentary — CNY. Multimodal discourse analysis is used to analyze the data. Therefore, this study employed three types of analysis: verbal analysis and visual analysis, as well as their intersemiotic relations. SFL is to be used both as the basic theoretical framework and as a functional analytical tool to investigate how language is used in a documentary film and to conduct verbal analysis. Visual analysis is used to investigate the visual images in the documentary film by applying Visual Grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

## 3. A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of a BBC Documentary Chinese New Year

### 3.1. Analysis of Visual Images

This paper focuses on representational meaning and interactive meanings of visual images.

#### 3.1.1. Representational Meaning of Visual Images

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) hold that any semiotic must be able to represent objects and their relationships in a world outside the representational system. Corresponding to ideational metafunction in SFL, representational meaning means that the visual modes can reflect people and their feelings, the events in the real world, and the relations. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) distinguish two kinds of representations: narrative representation and conceptual representation. The distinguishing between a narrative visual image and a conceptual image is whether a vector exists.

#### 1) Narrative Representations

Participants are connected by a vector are "represented as doing something to or for each other" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Such vectorial patterns are called narrative representation. It is used to present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements. The distinguishing feature of a narrative visual image is the presence of a vector.

In this documentary film, narrative representations primarily include two processes: the action process and reactional process. For action processes, "the actor is the participant from which the vector emanates, or that itself, in whole or in part, forms the vector" (Kress &

van Leeuwen, 2006). In action process, there are two kinds of process, transactional process and non-transactional process. Transactional processes have both actors and goals, whereas non-transactional action processes do not have goals. In the reactional process, the vector is realized by an eye line or the direction of glance of one or more represented participants. The reactional process involves “reactor” and “phenomenon” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

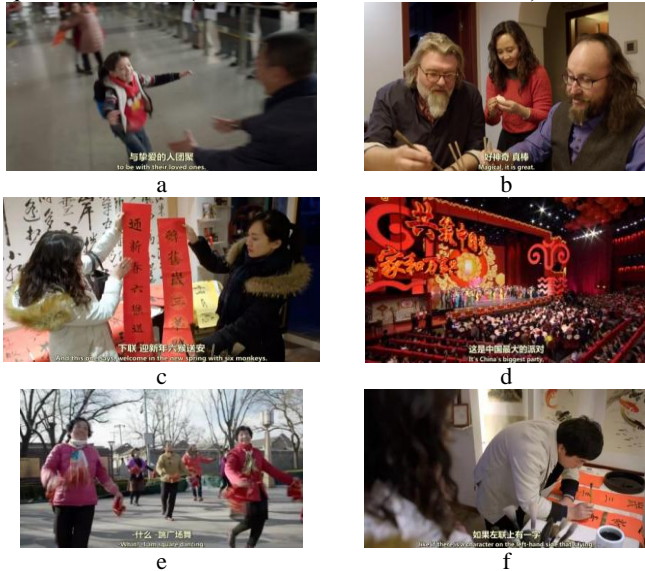


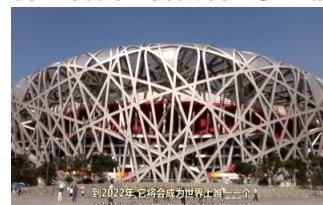
Figure 1. Action processes

Figure 1 contains action processes, Chinese ordinary people and foreigners are actors, young and old, male and female. Their arms, hands, chopsticks and legs form vectors. The actions are either transactional or non-transactional processes: including hugging their loves ones in the airport, making dumplings, wonderful performances on the live stage of the Spring Festival Gala, square dancing, holding or writing spring festival couplets. They are coming home, gathering with family members, and celebrating Chinese New Year together. The variety of actors and colorful activities not only reflect the love, expectations and enthusiasm of people around the world for the Chinese New Year but also demonstrate the improvement of Chinese lives, vitality of Chinese culture as well as inheriting of culture, for instance, making dumplings and Chinese calligraphy. Figure 3 represents reactional processes, eye lines forming vectors. In Figure 3a, Mr. Ye, who works in Beijing West Station, is gazing at a person. The firmness in his eyes shows that he attaches great importance to the work of safely transporting all the passengers to their hometowns. Figure 3c reflects the harmonious relationship between men and animals. Figure 3d, a family photo, displays the happiness and satisfaction in their hearts, which is a reflection of the prosperity of people’s spiritual lives brought about by the rapid development of China’s economy. Figure 3e portrays the foreigners’ expectations and curiosity about the Chinese New Year.

## 2) Conceptual Representations

Distinct from the narrative process, conceptual representation has no vectors. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) divide the conceptual representation into three subordinate processes: classificatory, analytical, and symbolic process. The analytical and symbolic processes are the main processes in the documentary. Participants in the analytical process are related to “a part-whole structure” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Two kinds of participants are involved in this process: one Carrier (the whole) and any number of possessive attributes (the parts). Symbolic processes are “about what a participant means or is” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Two types of processes are involved: Symbolic Attributive and Symbolic Suggestive. The former one means there are two participants: the Carrier and the Symbolic Attribute. The latter one means there is only one participant, the Carrier (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

In the documentary film, China’s national cultural image of its long history and modernity, China’s rapid development, and its exchange and integration with the world are also portrayed through the architecture, Chinese red, lanterns, transportation system, environment, etc. Figure 2 shows conceptual representations with no vectors. Namely, Figures 2a, 2d, 2e, 2f are the analytical process, which is the relationship between the part and the whole. Figure 2a is the Bird’s Nest, standing for China’s capital city, Beijing’s holding of the two Olympic Games. Figure 2d is an ancient building that depicts the long and glorious history of China. Figure 2e is a beautiful night view of Beijing with dense traffic and multiple high-rise buildings, showing the audience a modern and prosperous China. Figure 2f is a monitoring map of Beijing West railroad Station during the New Year travel peak with a large flow of people. order to ensure safety, monitoring personnel always monitor the traffic situation at the station to ensure that passengers go home safely for the Chinese New Year, indicating the “people first” Chinese culture. On the one hand, it shows the progress of China’s science and technology. Managing the flow of takes a huge amount of technology. Figures 2b, 2c are symbolic processes. Figure 2b, big red lanterns hang high, not only representing “Chinese red,” symbolizing auspiciousness, joy, peace and reunion, the lights are also the symbol of the people’s hope for a better life. Figure 2c is the “Silk Road” ice sculpture building in Harbin, which symbolizes the integration and connection between China and the world.



a



b

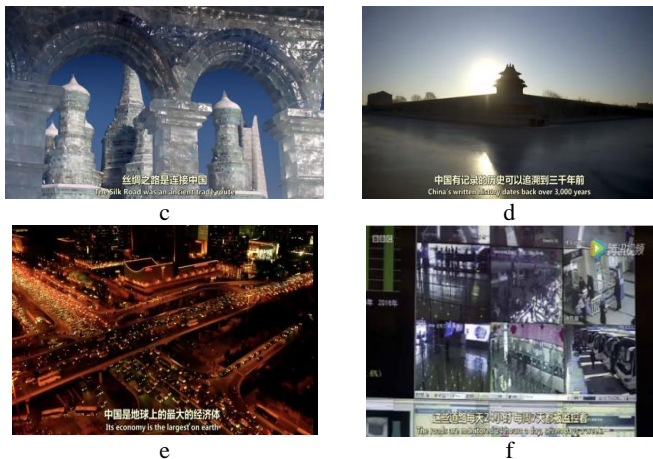


Figure 2. Conceptual representations with no vectors

### 3.1.2. Interactive Meaning of Visual Images

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) propose four aspects to realize the interactive meaning of images: contact, social distance, attitude, and modality. The analysis of the interactive meaning of images in the documentary will focus on contact, social distance, and attitude.

#### 1) Contact

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) put “image acts” forward, assuming that an image can be used to doing something for the viewer by performing either the act of “demand” or “offer.” The image of “offer” means there is no direct eye contact between the represented participants and viewers, and that represented participants only transfer information to the viewers. The image of “demand” means that the represented participants look directly at the viewer. Then, the vector is formed by the represented participants’ eye lines, so a social relation or contact is established.

In Figures 3c, 3d 3e and 3f, the represented participants have direct gazes at the audience. They are demanding something from the viewers, belonging to “demand” images.

The golden monkeys in Figure 15 have direct eye “contact” with the audience, expecting a more harmonious relationship with humans. Recently, China has attached great importance to the protection of animals and the environment. The number of golden monkeys has increased a lot under the care of the rangers.

Two foreign hosts in Figure 3e came to China to experience the lively Spring Festival Eve and taste traditional Chinese food. They are gazing at an audience from worldwide. The gaze forms a vector that connects them and the audience, establishing an imaginary relationship. Their eyes and smiling faces show that they were happy and looking forward to the Spring Festival and invite the audience to experience the traditional Chinese Spring Festival culture and taste Chinese food with them. The “demand” images bring closer the emotional relationship with the audience and

strengthen the communication effect.

The participants in Figures 3a, 3b, 3f and 4 do not gaze at the audience, thus, these images are “offer” images, providing information. For instance, Figure 3f portrays the couple’s excitement of going home.



Figure 3. The participants

#### 2) Social Distance

The choice of distance can show different social relationships between represented participants and viewers, which can be realized by size figure. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) define three kinds of social distance: close-up shot, medium shot and long shot.

Figures 3a, 3b, 3e, and 4 with only the heads and shoulders of the participants are close shots, generating close relationships with the audience who are involved in the activities through a personal distance. For instance, Figure 4 portrays the ranger mr Yu who is collecting the golden monkeys’ poo and marking them on the bags to be able to recognize every individual monkey’s poo to ensure they are healthy.



Figure 4. Ranger, Yu.

He is responsible for their daily feed and health, and is now accepted as their family member. This shows that China attaches great importance to animal protection.

Figure 5a is a medium shot, showing the participants immersed in the activities and joyful atmosphere of the

Spring Festival. Figures 1d and 5b are long shots. Figure 1d unfolds the audience the whole picture and the lively atmosphere of the Spring Festival Gala. Figure 5b using long shot displays over 100 thousand passengers delayed at the Guangdong train station during Spring Festival migration. However, no matter how cold the weather is, how hard the journey is, Chinese travel to thousands of miles to their hometown every year, just for a reunion and a New Year's Eve dinner. It shows the Chinese's identification and attachment to their homes and relatives. The greater the social distance, the lower the degree of the viewers' participation. The long shots present a panoramic view of Chinese Spring Festival celebrations or migration during this period in this documentary. When hosts and Chinese are portrayed, most of the images use close-up or medium shots. The close-up shot has an emotional appeal to the audience, producing visual impact and enhancing the communication effect, while medium shots show the interaction between participants.



Figure 5. Medium and long shots

### 3) Attitude

In visual images, attitude means perspective or point of view. The selection of perspective implies the possibility of expressing attitudes toward represented participants, thus, establishing some relationships between represented participants and viewers. There are two basic dimensions for attitude: horizontal and vertical angle. The horizontal perspective contains frontal angle and oblique angle, indicating involvement and detachment, respectively (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In the documentary film, most of the images employ horizontal frontal angle, which means involvement, for example, Figures 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 15, 16, 17 and 20. Images of frontal angle make viewers feel that they are involved and that they belong to the world or event portrayed in the image with the represented participants. Figure 6 is from the oblique angle, indicating detachment. In the image, the man is immersed in writing Spring Festival couplets, while viewers watch at a certain distance as observers without disturbing him. The vertical perspective can be classified into high angle, eye-eye angle and low angle to show superiority, equality and inferiority toward the represented participants (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Figures 2e and 5b are taken from a high angle as the audience is overlooking the represented participants from high above. In the documentary film, high angles are adopted to display the bird view of magnificent migration in airports or train stations during the festival architecture (as shown in Figure 5b) and a panoramic

view of transportation situation or a beautiful night view of the city (as shown in Figure 11).

## 3.2. Analysis of Verbal Resources

The language in the documentary mainly includes the subtitles in both English and Chinese. The meaning of verbal elements is analyzed from three metafunctions in SFL put forward by Halliday (1994): the ideational meaning, the interpersonal meaning and the textual meaning. This paper focuses on the ideational meaning, the interpersonal meaning of verbal resources.

### 3.2.1. The Ideational Meaning

The ideational meaning in SFL refers to the use of language to construct and represent experiences of the outside world or the inner world. It is mainly realized by the transitivity system, which is determined by six types of process: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process (Halliday, 1994). A material process is a process of doing something, composed of the Actor, the Process and the Goal. The mental process is composed of two kinds of participants: the Senser and Phenomenon. The relational process is used to express the process of attributive or identifying.

To study the meaning construction of verbal modes, some transcripts of the figures above are collected, mainly the subtitles in the documentary.

- I. It's China's biggest party.
- II. At Chinese New Year, lanterns represent the light of hope.
- III. The silk road was an ancient trade route, linking China to the Mediterranean Sea.
- IV. China's written history dates back over 3,000 years.
- V. Its economy is the largest on earth.
- VI. It is a big job moving all the people to their hometown.
- VII. We are standing in the biggest rail control center in Asia's whole.
- VIII. That's amazing! That's a really good job.
- IX. We are just hours away from ringing in the New Year.
- X. So join us tomorrow for more Chinese New Year's celebrations.

Table 2. The distribution of mood type

Process Type	Number of Process	Percentage
Material Process	2	20%
Mental Process	8	80%
Relational process	0	0
Behavioral process	0	0
Verbal process	0	0
The existential process	0	0
Total	10	100%

### 3.2.2. Material Process

In the ten sentences above, only (7) and (10) belong to the material process, while the rest belong to the

relational process.

Table 3. Material process

Actor	Process	Goal/Recipient	Circumstance of Place
(7) We	are standing		in the biggest rail control center in Asia's whole
(10) (you)	join	us (Recipient)	
Actor	Process	Goal/Recipient	Circumstance of Place

In sentence (7), there is no goal, while witnessing the biggest rail control center with the hostess, the audience knows that with China's advanced science and technology, people can go back home with railways safely. In sentence (10), the Actor is you, us as Recipient, with no Goal. The hosts invite viewers to celebrate and experience Chinese New Year with them, sharing the joy.

In relational clauses, there are two distinctive modes: identifying and attributive.

Table 4. Relational process - identifying

Identified/Token	Process	Identifier/Value
(1) It	is	China's biggest party
(2) lanterns	represent	The Light of hope
(3) The silk road	was	an ancient trade route
(4) China's written history of	dates back	over 3,000 years

Table 5. Relational process - attributive

Carrier	Process	Attribute
(5) Its economy	is	the largest on earth
(6) It	is	a big job moving all the people to their hometown
(8) That	is	amazing
(9) We	are	hours away from ringing in the New Year

The relational process is widely used in various discourses due to its function, defining the relationship between interactive and representative actors. The sentences of the relational process in the above examples not only explain the Spring Festival (sentence 1) and the culture related to it (sentence 2) but also indicate that China has a long and glorious history (sentence 4), showing the cultural values of the China represented by the traditional customs of the Spring Festival: "Home" has a unique status and is the spiritual belonging of Chinese. Thus, the transport system must ensure to move all people to their homes (sentence 6). Simultaneously, these textual modalities indicate China's openness and connectivity with the world (sentence 3), the rapid development of China's economy (sentence 5), people's expectations for the new year (sentence 9), and China's great achievements in animal protection (sentence 8).

### 3.2.3. The Interpersonal Meaning

Since the main purpose of declarative sentences is to provide information, from Table 2, it is found that this

documentary is more inclined to use declarative sentences when introducing the key information of Chinese Spring Festival culture to the audience, for instance, among the above ten sentences, except sentence (10), the rest are all declarative sentences. Sentence (3) through the Silk Road tells the audience that China has established close ties with the world since ancient times. Sentence (4) shows that China has a long history. An example of an imperative sentence is (10), the function is to invite and encourage the audience to experience Chinese New Year, sharing the amazement.

Table 5 The distribution of mood type

Mood Type	Number of Mood	Percentage
Declarative	9	90%
Interrogative	0	0
Imperative	1	10%
Total	10	100%

### 3.3. Analysis of the Visual-Verbal Inter-Semiotic Complementarities

In terms of image-verbal relations, this paper will follow Zhang Delu's Synthetic Theoretical Framework of MDA. According to Zhang (2009), exploring how different modes combine with each other to realize the meanings speakers want to express is the main subject of MDA. Zhang (2009) distinguishes two kinds of relationship, i.e., complementary relationship and non-complementary relationship. A complementary relationship means that in a discourse, a single mode cannot fully express its meaning, and it needs other modes to supplement for completeness in meaning. It is a typical multimodal discourse mode, which can be further categorized into reinforcement relations and non-reinforcement relations. Reinforcement relation means in a multimodal discourse, one modality serves as the main form of communication with other modalities just highlighting the expressive effect. Non-reinforcement relation indicates that communicative modes are indispensable and complementary in meaning construction, especially the combination of visual and auditory modes. It can be further divided into three sub-types: coordination, coalition, and intersection.

The main role of the verbal elements in the documentary is to clearly express specific information that cannot be expressed through images. Language can express meaning in the most direct way, and the subtitle commentary in the documentary assumes the main function of the textual mode. For example, when the audience sees the "Silk Road" ice sculpture building in Harbin in Figure 9, they do not know the specific information it represents. The subtitle "The silk road was an ancient trade route, linking China to the Mediterranean Sea" explains the meaning of the building to the audience. The visual mode and the



verbal mode in Figure 9 are complementary non-reinforcement relation, indicating that different communicative modes are indispensable and complementary to each other in the meaning representation of “Cultural China” image. The overall meaning of communication is incomplete without any one modality. The visual mode in Figure 10 is: the little boy in the airport ran to a man excitedly, with the subtitle “to be with their loved ones,” which belongs to the complementary reinforcement relation. That is to say, the verbal mode is the main form of communication, while the image only highlights the expressive effect, which reinforces the Chinese’s expectation of reuniting with their families during the Spring Festival and deepens “Cultural China” image — home identity. The relations of visual mode and verbal mode in Figure 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 also belong to this type. The visual image with “Chinese red” and performance on the stage reinforces the festive and peaceful atmosphere.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has performed a multimodal discourse analysis of the BBC documentary Chinese New Year: The Biggest Celebration on Earth. The theoretical framework of this study includes Halliday’s Functional Grammar, Kress and Van Leeuwen’s Visual Grammar, and Zhang Delu’s synthetic theoretical framework of MDA. Aiming to explore how the “Cultural China” image in this documentary is represented, the author has adopted a qualitative method and analyzes selected data from three aspects: the visual mode, the verbal mode and the relationship between these two modes. The relation between verbal mode and visual mode is a complementary relationship. They combine to provide the audience a whole picture of Chinese New Year. After a synthesis analysis, it is concluded that the employment of various modes in this dynamic discourse contributes to the spread of Chinese culture and shapes China’s national cultural image. The inclusion of various multi-modal metaphors taken from these documentaries may result in misconceptions of Chinese culture. Additionally, Chuxi and the Chinese New Year celebration are oversimplified in Chinese New Year: The Biggest Celebration on Earth to simply be a PARTY, failing to convey to viewers the fundamental value of family. If documentary makers adopt a cognitive approach to culture, those misinterpretations might be avoided. This study provides valuable suggestions for translating subtitles of documentary materials in a more efficient way, so to contribute to the spread of Chinese culture and make Chinese stories well to the world. It is hoped that this paper will provide a new perspective for semiotic studies of documentaries, as well as a new angle for the audience to appreciate this documentary. The limitation of this study is that it mainly discusses the relationship

between visual mode and textual mode, while documentary films also involve other modes, such as sound, color, etc. and further in-depth research is needed.

#### Acknowledgments

The authors offer their gratitude to the school principal and teachers for facilitating the data collection of this research.

#### Authors’ Contributions

All the authors were involved in conducting this research by doing literature review, designing the research, collecting, and analyzing data, and reviewing the paper as one research team.

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