# A Comparative Study on the Artistic Expression Techniques of Chinese and British Natural Documentaries from a Cross-Cultural Perspective Taking "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" and "Wild Isles" as Examples

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**Abstract.** With the increasingly severe global environmental problems, environmental protection and climate change have become the focus of global attention, and many countries have begun to produce natural documentaries. This article focuses on "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" and "Wild Isles", and comparatively analyzes the artistic expression techniques from a cross-cultural perspective. It is found that the two documentaries have differences in vision, hearing, narrative techniques, and photographic techniques. It is most noteworthy that the forms of the two natural documentaries convey different cultural cores. "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" conveys the Chinese people's gratitude for motherly love, the cherishing of family, and the awe of life; "Wild Isles" appeals to future generations to protect nature and cherish natural resources, and reproduce a complete wild Britain for future generations. Both have achieved cultural dissemination and exchange, showing different cultural charms to the world.

**Keywords:** cross-culture, natural documentary, artistic expression technique, "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth", "Wild Isle

## 1 Introduction

With the increasingly severe global environmental problems, environmental protection and climate change have become the focus of global attention. At the same time, in order to meet people's needs for natural science knowledge and spiritual culture, natural documentaries have gradually begun to receive attention. With the continuous innovation of technology, various countries have begun to produce high-quality natural documentaries, and scholars have also analyzed them to provide theoretical references. Commonly used artistic expression techniques mainly include hearing, vision, narrative techniques, and photographic techniques.

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Chinese research on natural documentaries can generally be divided into the following three aspects. Firstly, in the research on creative characteristics, previous studies usually analyze the techniques of audiovisual, narrative, and aesthetic characteristics. For example, Ma Xiaogai and Shi Aibing believe that China's ecological and environmental protection documentaries are constantly innovating in technology, narrative, and theme, shaping the images of ecological China and humanistic China in the international context, and demonstrating the achievements and attitudes of China's ecological civilization construction[1]. Jin Jing takes "Beautiful China" as an example to show the harmonious coexistence concept and artistic creation characteristics embodied in China's natural scenery and human customs[2]. Secondly, in the research on cultural differences, previous studies usually discuss in depth the creative themes, the expression of humanistic spirit, and aesthetic orientations. For example, Tian Weigang and Lang Yuzhuo found that media reality, cultural barriers, and cultural colonization are the reasons for the existence of cultural misreading problems in cross-cultural communication, and proposed strategies for moving from cultural misreading to cultural empathy from the aspects of communication content, attention to cultural differences, and basing on common emotions[3]. Feng Xin deeply discusses the phenomena in the cross-cultural production and dissemination of Sino-foreign cooperative documentaries, the cultural "collision" arising from the selection and positioning of topics and shooting objects, and the "dialogue" attitude embodied in the text characteristics, and deeply analyzes the adjustment of the commentary and the expression of cultural individuality between the two versions[4]. Finally, in the research on cultural dissemination, previous studies usually focus on the dissemination channels, dissemination effects, and audience acceptance of natural documentaries in cross-cultural dissemination. For example, Xie Wenfeng proposed that domestic natural documentaries can integrate the transmission of ecological culture through content, narrative, and multiple media to promote their development and the dissemination of ecological culture[5]. Xie Zhi and Sun Qian explore improving audience acceptance and dissemination effects through the cultural proximity of dissemination content and changes in narrative perspectives[6]. English research on natural documentaries also generally focuses on these aspects. For example, Yatao Zhu analyzes the BBC documentary "The Green Planet" from the perspective of reception aesthetics, and through narrative strategies such as conforming to the audience's horizon of expectations, "dialogue" -style creation, and setting blanks, shows the beauty of nature and the significance of environmental protection. From an aesthetic perspective, it provides examples for the creation of natural documentaries in terms of conception, photographic techniques, horizon of expectations, and text blank settings[7].

## 2 Research Introduction

"The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" is a natural documentary produced by China Central Television and directed by Li Wenju. The documentary was broadcast on the CCTV record channel on January 1, 2022, with a total of 6 episodes. This is a natural documentary based in China. By focusing on presenting the restoration and

rebirth of China's natural homeland in the past decade from 2011 to 2021, it searches for the "epic of life", "family legend", and "natural wonders" of the animal creatures, witnesses the changes in China's ecology, gallops freely between heaven and earth, searches for vitality in the night and day, grows in the tempering of ice and fire, sings in the intersection of the ocean and the land, and jointly shapes on the plateau of life and death. It tells the stories of animals and plants in an anthropomorphic and poetic way, depicts the rotation of the four seasons, and shows that all things have spirits and life goes on. "Wild Isles", also known as "The Natural Code of the British Isles" in the CCTV version, is a documentary about the natural animals of the British Isles and Ireland produced by the BBC and narrated by David Attenborough. The documentary uses the latest photographic techniques, focuses on the woodlands, grasslands, freshwaters, and oceans of Britain, records the wonderful and little-known life stories of the British Isles' organisms, and the world-class blue-chip natural history story reveals the importance of British wildlife to the global natural environment and makes people aware of the challenges faced in protecting them. The whole drama is divided into five episodes: Our Precious Islands, Forests, Grasslands, Freshwater, and Oceans. It premiered in the UK on March 12, 2023, and was broadcast on CCTV in August 2024. From a cross-cultural perspective, this article takes "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" and "Wild Isles" as examples to conduct a comparative analysis and try to explore what the differences in the artistic expression techniques of Chinese and British natural documentaries are and what the different cultural cores behind them are?

## 3 Artistic Expression Techniques

Through the comparative analysis of "Wild Isles" and "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth", it is found that they have different emphases in vision, hearing, narrative techniques, and photographic techniques.

### 3.1 Lens Application: Combination of High-Speed and Low-Speed, Combination of Macro and Time-Lapse

In both "Wild Isles" and "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth", a large number of close-up shots are used to highlight the details and characteristics of organisms, allowing the audience to more intuitively feel the emotions and vitality of the organisms. Panoramic shots and long-shot shots are used to show the vast natural landscapes and the habitats of organisms as well as the vitality of nature. Tracking shots are used to follow the activities of animals, allowing the audience to experience the lives of animals as if they were there.

It is worth noting that there are some differences in the specific lens processing. In "Wild Isles", more combinations of high-speed and low-speed photography are used to capture some fleeting wonderful scenes. Through slow-motion playback, the audience can carefully observe the subtle movements and behaviors of these organisms, showing the vitality of British wild animals and plants. In "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth", macro and time-lapse photography are used to focus the lens on the tiny

organisms and details in nature, allowing the audience to clearly see the wonderfulness of tiny lives and bringing a slow process of the passage of time to the audience.

## 3.2 Auditory Aspect

### 3.2.1 Content Expression and Emotion Conveyance.

In both "Wild Isles" and "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth", in terms of knowledge transmission and content expression, professional vocabulary is used to provide detailed introductions and explanations of the geological environment, climate characteristics, living habits and ecological characteristics of various animals and plants, and natural phenomena, so that the audience can learn rich natural science knowledge while enjoying the documentary. Appropriate use of some technical vocabulary, such as "4K infrared sensing photography" and "8K time-lapse photography", not only reflects the professionalism of the documentary but also enables the audience to understand the shooting techniques. In terms of emotion conveyance, it not only shows the wonderful and little-known life stories of organisms but also deeply discusses the interrelationships between these organisms and geological environment, climate and other factors, as well as the impact of human activities on them, triggering the audience's thinking about the relationship between nature and humans and inspiring the audience's love for nature and their sense of responsibility and mission to protect the natural environment.

### 3.2.2 Documentary Narration and Literary Narration.

"Wild Isles" adopts documentary narration and uses rich vocabulary to vividly depict the natural scenery and wild animals of the British Isles, making the audience feel as if they are on the scene. In the synchronous narration, David Attenborough, through the intonation and rhythm control, conveys his admiration and amazement for the natural landscapes and organisms of Britain. In the ten-minute behind-the-scenes footage at the end, through the narration, the audience's attention is guided, the key elements in the picture are highlighted, and the plots that are not fully shown in the picture or need further emphasis are supplemented and expanded, making the story more complete and rich and helping the audience better understand the meaning behind the picture. "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" adopts literary narration and poetic expression, using rich and beautiful vocabulary to depict the natural landscapes and animals and plants in detail, vividly showing their vibrant scenes. The poetic sentences add a strong humanistic sentiment and romantic color to the documentary and are more artistic. Chinese culture is also incorporated into the narration, expressing Chinese culture and emotions from the perspective of animals. In addition, in terms of soundtrack, similar expression techniques are used, and different symphonies or sound effects are selected according to different occasions to show the vitality of the current animals and plants.

### 3.3 Narrative Techniques: Multi-Line, Time, Storytelling Narration and Anthropomorphic Narration

Both "Wild Isles" and "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" adopt multi-line narration and time narration methods, interweaving the stories of different organisms and the ecological landscapes of different regions, making the content of the entire documentary more abundant and full while showing the living states and behavioral changes of organisms in different seasons and time periods. In addition, both documentaries adopt storytelling narration, connecting the survival states and interrelationships of various animals and plants by telling vivid natural stories, making the entire documentary highly story-telling and attractive. In "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth", anthropomorphic narration is also adopted, telling the stories of animals and plants in an anthropomorphic way, endowing them with human emotions and behavioral characteristics, making them more vivid and easy for the audience to resonate.

### 3.4 Photographic Techniques

#### 3.4.1 Aerial Photography, 4K Infrared Sensing Photography, 8K Time-Lapse Photography Technology.

Both "Wild Isles" and "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" use aerial photography to show the rich and diverse geological landforms and natural landscapes on the vast land from a bird's-eye view, presenting a grand and spectacular natural picture for the audience. The 4K infrared sensing photography is used for ultra-long standby to record the secret lives of animals at night, and the 8K time-lapse photography technology compresses the long-term natural change process into a short time for presentation. The underwater shooting technology also presents the mystery and colorfulness of the ocean world for the audience.

#### 3.4.2 Thermal Imaging Camera, Remote Control Shooting Device, Powered Hang Glider.

In "Wild Isles", a thermal imaging camera is used to shoot the night activities of animals, and special effects are used to show the material transmission network, giving the audience a special visual experience. In "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth", a remote control shooting device is used to reduce the interference of shooting on animals, so that the lens can get closer to the animals and capture more precious and vivid moments. The powered hang Glider is used to achieve long-term aerial tracking shooting of the migrating wild geese, allowing the audience to directly see the medium and close-up shots of a single wild goose in flight, and at the same time bringing the audience's perspective, as if following the wild geese to fly against the wind, migrate together, and overlook the earth.

# 4 Discussion

## 4.1 "Wild Isles": Protecting Nature, Awe of Nature, Saving Nature

In terms of cultural transmission, "Wild Isles" presents the magnificent natural landscapes and shows the diversity of life. At the same time, it more vividly and intuitively reveals the current real situation of nature and a series of severe ecological problems faced by shooting wild natural animals, emphasizing the great responsibility and sacred mission of humans in protecting nature and appealing to everyone to contribute their own strength to protecting nature.

### 4.1.1 Presenting the Fragile Natural Environment.

It shows the current situation of British wild animals and plants for the audience and directly expresses the fragility of nature. Britain is one of the countries with the most serious depletion of natural resources in the world. Through the commentary, emotions are expressed more vividly, allowing the audience to resonate more. "Most of our puffin colonies are in decline. Overfishing and climate change mean the sand eels they depend on are increasingly hard to find. It's a clear example of just how fragile and fragmented our nature is. Though rich in places Britain as a whole is one of the most nature-depleted contries in the world. Never has there been a more important time to invest in our wildlife to try and set an example for the rest of the world and restore our once-wild isles for future generaation."

### 4.1.2 Gratitude for the Gift and Shouldering the Responsibility of the Times.

How lucky it is to have these precious resources. We should be grateful for the precious wealth given by nature and remind everyone that they should shoulder the responsibility and mission of protecting wild animals and plants and nature. "A lot has changed in my lifetime. And today the wildlife we still have faces greater threats than ever before. Our seabirds remond us that here in Britain and Ireland, we are very fortunate to have some of nature's greatest spectacles right on our doorstep. Because this is our home, it can only be our responsibility to restore and protect our wild life. Perhaps you can be the first to pass these wild isles into the next generation in better shape than you inherited them."

## 4.2 "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth": Gratitude for Motherly Love, Valuing Family, Respecting Life

In terms of cultural transmission, "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" shows the vast natural landscapes of China, praises nature and respects nature. In addition, to a large extent, it cleverly introduces strong humanistic colors by taking advantage of the unique perspective of animals, deeply excavates the profound emotions and values behind the animal world, brings in the Chinese perspective, and conveys the sincere feelings of the Chinese culture for motherly love, family, and life.

### 4.2.1 Gratitude for Motherly Love.

The greatness of motherly love also shines brightly in the animal world. Animal mothers are willing to pay any price to protect their children. In Chinese families, mothers play many roles. They are the core of family emotions and the guides for children's growth. For a family, the mother takes care of all the big and small things in the family, pays attention to everyone's emotions, and coordinates relationships. A mother's love for her child is also selfless and meticulous. She is the best enlightenment teacher for children on their growth path. "But the little golden monkey is no longer afraid because it has the armor to resist the severe winter, that is, its mother. The ice and snow can cool everything on the earth, but it cannot change the temperature of love." "The female wolf devotes all her love to her children. She wishes that all the storms in the world will lean towards her so that her children will always have a sunny day above their heads."

### 4.2.2 Valuing Family.

The warmth of the family is also vividly reflected in animal groups. They support each other and survive together and strive for the continuation of the family. For a couple, the family always needs to be jointly managed by both parties. It is not only the responsibility of both parties but also the manifestation of love. They work together to create a beautiful family. Moreover, home is a kind of eternal belonging and spiritual strength for every Chinese. "The couple returns home hand in hand. This is the life in the northern forests of China. Love and responsibility are intertwined. A couple exchanges promises with each other, embraces the beautiful wish of creating new life, and moves forward hand in hand." "As time and space change and the earth changes with each passing day, the feelings that the Chinese people have for home, as embodied in the wild geese, have never changed."

### 4.2.3 Respecting Life.

The preciousness of life is manifested in every survival moment of animals. They struggle tenaciously in a difficult environment, showing the tenacity and perseverance of life. Even if their own strength is too small, they must do their best to write their own life chapter in a short life. This is also related to traditional Chinese thought. "With the aspiration of a swan, show the leap of a fine horse", "As heaven changes through movement, a gentleman makes unremitting efforts to perfect himself". These all remind us to work hard to realize our self-worth and ideals. "I will go to death generously. I will survive the disaster. The small lives converge together and burst out with infinite power. Even if it is like an ant trying to shake a tree, we must let the heaven and earth remember our names." "The cycle of heaven and earth, life goes on. This is a cruel plateau. This is a plateau of hope. This is a plateau of life."

## 5 Conclusion

Both "Wild Isles" and "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" show the beauty of nature and the life stories of wild animals and plants through the form of natural documentaries and express the praise and awe of nature. "Wild Isles" appeals to future generations to protect nature and cherish natural resources and reproduce a complete wild Britain for future generations by showing the magnificent landscapes of nature and the living characteristics of wild animals and plants. "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth" expresses the unique emotions of the Chinese people in the form of a combination of language and non-language through the stories of animals. The documentary allows us to deeply feel the emotional resonance between humans and animals while enjoying the beauty of nature and triggers gratitude for motherly love, the importance of family, and the awe of life. From a cross-cultural perspective, the content presented in natural documentaries is based on natural landscapes and has not been overly artificially intervened. Whether it is "Wild Isles" or "The Power of Nature: Creatures on the Earth", through the expression of different artistic expression techniques and the combination of audiovisual.

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