Rite in the Forbidden City: The Cultural Interpretation and Digital Reconstruction of Guangxu Emperor's Wedding

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Abstract. On the basis of the historical classics of Guangxu emperor's wedding held in the Forbidden City, we build a website to preserve and reappear Guangxu Emperor's wedding, with the purpose of promoting the rite and the royal wedding culture of Qing dynasty.

Keywords: Guangxu Emperor's Wedding, Rite, Digital Preservation, Digital Reappearance.

1   Introduction

1.1   The Value of Culture

As a country with an ancient civilization of more than 2000 years, China has a brilliant royal culture that has always taken an important part in traditional culture. Beijing, the capital of five Chinese dynasties, carries with abundant royal memories of ancient China.

At the meantime, China is a state of "Rite", and "Rite" has always been the bond of traditional society and the core of social regulations. As for Chinese wedding, it is an indispensable part in "Rite", which was recorded as "the foundation and the root" (Confucius, 2013) in *The Book of Rites* by Confucius.

Therefore, a research studying Guangxu Emperor's wedding is significant in understanding Beijing's city memories, feeling the conventions of Chinese wedding in feudal society and experiencing the value of "Rite" in Chinese traditional culture.

1.2   The Value of Digital Innovation

One type of memories is event. An event includes many elements such as background, beginning, process, outcome and influence, which make the event hard to record. If we only use traditional media such as documents and pictures to record, we will be limited

by space and time. Through building a website of Guangxu emperor's wedding ceremony, we put forward a new constructive approach for protecting and preserving traditional Chinese culture, which also provides experience of constructing and maintaining for similar websites.

2 Research Background

2.1 Royal Weddings in Qing Dynasty

Previous studies and works focus on either the general marriage system or folk wedding customs, merely royal wedding in Qing dynasty.

2.2 Guangxu Emperor's Wedding

In Qing dynasty, only the emperors who got married after ascending the throne could hold the official wedding in the Forbidden City. Therefore, there were only four of the ten emperors' weddings held in the Forbidden City, and Guangxu Emperor's was one of them. Moreover, Guangxu Emperor's wedding is extraordinarily luxurious. His wedding cost 5.52 million silver coins in total and lasted for more than a month. Its magnificence and complexity make it one of the most typical royal weddings in Qing dynasty.

The historical materials of Guangxu Emperor's wedding are well preserved. In addition to the general historical materials such as *Laws and Regulations of the Great Qing Dynasty*, *Case of Laws and Regulations of the Great Qing Dynasty*, *Pictures of Laws and Regulations of the Great Qing Dynasty* and *Records of the Great Qing Dynasty*, there are also *Red Documents of Guangxu Emperor's Wedding and Atlas of Guangxu Emperor's Wedding* which are well preserved, providing a reliable historical basis for our research.

2.3 The Digital Presentation and Preservation of Guangxu Emperor's Royal Wedding

At present, the research on using digital technology to interpret the royal wedding of the Qing Dynasty is scarce. There are related online games, which are not based on facts and lack of seriousness.

3 Previous Preservation and Presentation

In the ancient time, writings and pictures were important ways of recording and disseminating.

Records of the Great Qing Dynasty is "a compilation of all the archives and documents which were compiled by memorial to the throne, living notes and other original archives during the reign of each emperors of the Qing Dynasty" (Wang, 2009). The

specific matters of each day of Guangxu's wedding were recorded in *the Record of Emperor Dezong*. *Laws and Regulations of the Great Qing Dynasty* records the rules and regulations of various affairs respectively and is a universal compilation of the rituals and rules of the emperors' weddings. "The most detailed description of Guangxu emperor's wedding must come from *Red Document of Guangxu Emperor's wedding*" (Xu & Li, 2009). In addition to the text, there is also an Atlas of Guangxu Emperor's wedding, which records the scenes in the form of image.

4 The Method and Conception of Digital Reconstruction

As for the preservation of the memory of certain events, websites can make full use of information technology and digital technology to integrate text, pictures, audio and video, so as to make the content completer and more diverse.

This website is divided into four sections: wedding knowledge introduction, wedding animation, question-and-answer game and literature database. First of all, we will briefly introduce the wedding ceremony and related knowledge. Secondly, we will use animation to reappear wedding scenes, basing on the *Atlas of Guangxu Emperor's Wedding*. Thirdly, we design two interesting question-and-answer games, through which users can further master relevant knowledge. Lastly, we will integrate the existing electronic resources, and then use high-definition scanners to collect precious documents that currently do not have electronic resources to form a special database.

4.1 Website Home Page

Fig. 1. The homepage of the website

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The background of homepage is the Forbidden City' overlook, namely the eaves of Chinese palace. The deep red color symbolizes the Forbidden City's wall on which some Chinese characters "Xi" are glided to highlight theme: wedding. And two peach blossoms are embodied with the wish for a happy marriage. The headline of the homepage with traditional Chinese characters gives a sense of classical beauty. Among them, the "Rite in the Forbidden City" is put in a square, symbolizing the emperor's jade seals.

The home page navigation bar consists of four buttons: introduction, animation, game and database. Users can click on the buttons to enter the subpages.

4.2 Website Subpage-Introduction

納彩
Present Gifts To the Bride's Family
大征
Transport Gifts To the Bride's Family
妝奩
Transport Gifts From the Brides Family to the Palace

婚前礼

Before The Wedding

庙见
Worship the Ancestor Temple
朝见
the Empress Visit the Empress Dowager
庆贺和颁诏
Celebration and Declaration
筵宴
Fete the Relatives

婚后礼

After The Wedding

In The Wedding

婚成礼

册立和逢迎
Crown the Empress
合卺
Drink Cross-Cupped Wine

憶京禮城

Fig. 2. The timeline showing six processes of Guangxu emperor's wedding

Users can click the "Introduction" button to enter the first sub-page. Users will see a timeline that reflects the whole process of Guangxu Emperor's wedding, including all the names of the specific processes before the marriage, during the marriage and after the marriage. On this page, users can click on the name of a certain process to know the details.

After clicking to enter the detailed introduction page, visitors can see the detailed introduction and visual display of certain process, which vividly presents the specific process of a part of the wedding.

4.3   Website Subpage-Animation

Clicking the "Animation" button, users enter the second sub-page, where users can browse an animation that reappears the whole process of Guangxu Emperor's wedding.

Based on documents such as *Red Document of Guangxu Emperor's Wedding*, we extract the main etiquette in the process and design animation scripts. From *Atlas of Guangxu Emperor's Wedding*, we get the images of characters and scenes, then we do some re-creation and make a brief animation, taking into account knowledge introduction and visual experience. In this section, users can understand the whole process of Guangxu Emperor's wedding more intuitively.

4.4   Website Subpage-Game

Clicking the "game" button, users enter the game scene of the third sub-page. in this section, we design two games: "Wedding process" and "State of Rite". In the first game, we design 50 multiple-choice questions related to Guangxu Emperor's wedding. In the second game, we design 30 multiple-choice questions related to traditional Chinese rite. Users can see their own scores and the ranking of website users' scores after finishing the games.

4.5   Website Subpage-Database

Clicking the "Database" button, users enter the fourth sub-page, electronic resource database. In this section, we hope to integrate previous electronic resources related to the royal wedding of the Qing Dynasty. We also hope to scan the *Atlas of Guangxu Emperor's Wedding* and so on with a high-definition scanner to obtain the electronic version of the materials. Through these two work, we can construct the Electronic Document Catalogue of Guangxu Emperor's Wedding. Users can search and read the required documents by themselves. We hope that with help of this section, users can further understand relevant knowledge. And especially, scholars can find some resources to carry out relevant research.

5   Future Work

There are still some limitations in the research progress and the transformation of the research effort.

At present, we can't scan *Atlas of Guangxu Emperor's wedding* which is now stored in the Palace Museum, Beijing and is not on public display. In the future, we may try to contact the Palace Museum and get a closer look at the original book. We believe that clear images will lead to a better visual experience which attracts more visitors and helps to spread the website.

In addition, we may have some deficiencies in designing and technology, we will continue to improve the content and the design of the website. We will also open our

ears to users' opinions and suggestions in terms of visual expression and cultural interpretation in order to make progress.

Acknowledgements

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