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Can Sound Be “Seen”? ——A Post-print Version of Xinhua Vision’s Micro-Innovation in Two Sessions Reporting

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Abstract

The annual Two Sessions represent the first major “military parade” and competition for China’s journalism community each spring. Year after year, the highly ritualized Two Sessions coverage presents a challenge for editors and reporters: how to make it fresh and outstanding?

Full Text

Preamble

Special Feature: Two Sessions Media Convergence — ChinaXiv Partner Journal

Can Sound Be “Seen”? — Micro-Innovations in Xinhua Vision’s Two Sessions Coverage

By Yin Dongxun

The annual Two Sessions represent the first major “military parade” and competition for China’s journalism community each spring. Year after year, the highly ritualized Two Sessions coverage presents a challenge for editors and reporters: how to make it fresh and outstanding?

Xinhua Vision is a visual reporting brand operated by Xinhua News Agency’s Photography Department, where visual expression is its strength. Amid fierce competition, Xinhua Vision took an unconventional approach this year, achieving victory through surprise by launching a series of micro-innovations focused on reporting “sound.”

1. Adding Drawings to Photos: Bringing Two Sessions Voices to Life

As the Two Sessions began, Xinhua News Agency photographers captured increasingly rich photographic materials, while text reporters provided a growing wealth of speeches and statements. Editors carefully collected these materials, providing them to illustrators whenever they met three essential conditions. Liu Qian, the illustrator, is a professionally trained artist with a quick wit and a style that is cute, sweet, and humorous. Whenever editors presented specific ideas, she consistently delivered pleasant surprises.

After the first batch of samples was completed, this eye-catching innovation received affirmation from Photography Department leadership, along with suggestions for improvement—such as adding a splash of color to the white line drawings. Following further revisions and refinements, the piece titled *Bringing Two Sessions Voices to Life Through Drawings* was first published on the Xinhua News Agency client. On the client's homepage, the “animated” cover image for this series was particularly eye-catching, garnering nearly 2 million views (statistics as of 8:00 AM on March 17). The piece was subsequently reposted by 25 WeChat public accounts including the official Xinhua News Agency WeChat, and reprinted by dozens of websites including Xinhua Net, People's Daily Online, The Paper, Sohu, NetEase, Jinyang Net, Sina, and Oriental Headlines, further expanding its reach. One netizen commented: “So magical!” “Creative—Xinhua News Agency is once again at the forefront of cross-media convergence in the new media era.” “These animated GIFs are super cute—they help everyone understand the main content while grabbing attention, playful yet serious.”

Creating a successful photo with added drawings requires three indispensable conditions: a distinctive Two Sessions statement that aligns with the mainstream narrative, a statement that lends itself to simple line drawing representation, and an available news photo of the person involved to serve as the “canvas.”

The Two Sessions bring together thousands of people in a super brainstorming session, rich in news value through participants' insightful views on national development and people's livelihood. How can we bring what's in their minds before readers' eyes? With this question, the Xinhua Vision team proposed a bold concept during topic planning—integrating photography and drawing, using simple line drawings to outline the visions in participants' minds. This presentation form of drawing on photos can be called “photo drawing.”

One featured quote read: “Culture is not merely knowledge; the best way to learn culture should be through experience.” — Feng Jicai, member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and honorary chairman of the China Folk Literature and Art Association.

After the Two Sessions concluded, Xinhua News Agency launched *150 Seconds! See All of Xinhua News Agency's Two Sessions Coverage That Dominated*

Screens, reviewing the highlights of this year's coverage, with photo drawing featured prominently.

2. Dreams in Bloom: Representative Luo Yunlian's "Solo"

During pre-session topic planning, we reviewed materials from the China Photo Archive and noticed a group of "invisible people" at the Two Sessions—hidden behind microphones: the ethnic language translation team.

In certain workrooms at the Great Hall of the People, they provide simultaneous interpretation of the conference in seven languages: Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur, Kazakh, Korean, Yi, and Zhuang. This arrangement demonstrates respect for China's linguistic diversity. Yet in published photos, their presence is fleeting. What exactly is their work like?

We assigned reporter Chen Yehua to interview these silent workers in detail. His reporting gave us deeper understanding of the ethnic language translation team's responsibilities: besides simultaneous interpretation in seven languages, they also translate conference documents and provide translated versions of major conference documents to 20 news media outlets in eight provinces and autonomous regions.

Bringing Two Sessions Voices to Life Through Drawings could be considered a "chorus"—broadly selecting "Two Sessions voices" from various sectors, allowing different vivid melodies to converge under the main theme of the Chinese Dream. Could we then catch a "live fish" by telling one person's story in depth and performing a "solo" well?

Coincidentally, the story of Representative Luo Yunlian began spreading in the media. During the March 8 deliberation of the Sichuan delegation at the Fifth Session of the 12th National People's Congress, Luo Yunlian, Party secretary of Yuli Township's Gulu Village in Hanyuan County, Ya'an City, Sichuan Province—who came to Beijing from a "village on a ladder" to attend the Two Sessions—specially brought several photos of the post-earthquake reconstruction in the Lushan disaster area to show President Xi Jinping the new look of the disaster zone. The president stood up to receive the photos, examined them carefully, and said: "Very happy to see the rebirth from the ashes!"

Luo Yunlian's birthplace, Gulu Village, sits at the junction of Ya'an City, Leshan City, and Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, with an average elevation of over 2,000 meters. To this day, it has no road access, making it a veritable "ladder village." As Party secretary of Gulu Village, Luo Yunlian has long harbored an unfulfilled dream—to build a decent road for the people of Gulu Village. In recent years, even as she worried about road construction, Gulu Village with its rugged and dangerous mule paths gradually became popular among outdoor enthusiasts, who came in admiration, reaching over a thousand visitors per day at peak times. As the "ladder village" gained popularity, Luo Yunlian developed new ideas: "Building a cableway and relying on the Dadu

River National Geopark, we can completely forge a new path of distinctive rural tourism!”

Photo storytelling is our specialty. What made this instance different was that Representative Luo Yunlian’s photo story integrated hand-drawn illustrations—we added simple line drawings to each photo. Sometimes adding birds to the mule paths of “ladder village” to indicate high altitude, sometimes turning walnut trees on hillsides into “money trees,” sometimes drawing future farmhouses on an empty plot... The animated simple drawings gave wings to Luo Yunlian’s dreams and let the light of those dreams illuminate readers before their screens.

Hand-drawn Story / I Come from a Village on a Ladder was first published on the Xinhua News Agency client, receiving nearly 4 million views and being reprinted by Xinhua Net, China Workers’ Net, China Youth Online, Dazhong Net, Oriental Headlines, and China Ethnic Religion Net. Netizens who saw the report commented: “So beautiful, so pristine.” “I want to walk in that ladder village someday too...”

3. Digging Deeper: Listening to the Voices of “Invisible People”

Delegates and committee members are the “protagonists” of the Two Sessions, but for the sessions to be successful, they cannot do without “supporting roles” such as conference staff.

The Two Sessions are held at the Great Hall of the People, but the themes connect with millions of households, also giving rise to UGC (user-generated content) products like “I Have a Question for the Premier” and “My Suggestion for the Two Sessions.” What do these “invisible people” behind their keyboards look like?

During pre-session coverage, reporters Lü Xun and Lü Shuai specifically walked through streets and alleys to find these “invisible people” and record their voices.

We interviewed people of different identities—university teachers, artists, entrepreneurs, designers, farm owners, and delivery workers—shooting their environmental portraits and authentically recording their livelihood expectations, creating the piece *Two Sessions Expectations / Voices from the Streets and Alleys*.

At that time, Two Sessions coverage was still in the warm-up phase, and our piece took the lead, receiving over 10 million views on the Xinhua News Agency client and being forwarded by dozens of media outlets including People’s Daily Online, China National Radio, China.com.cn, China Youth Online, China Economic Net, Baidu News, NetEase News, Sohu, Sina, and ZAKER News, achieving excellent dissemination results.

With only one Two Sessions press pass, the Xinhua Vision team basically worked from the rear, but our sense of participation refused to lag behind. By focusing

on the keyword “voice” and pursuing micro-innovations, we finally achieved “I participate, I shine.”

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.