

Original Paper

Research on International Cultural Diffusion Strategies for Excellent Chinese Traditional Culture via Short Videos

Shanshan Zhao^{1*}, Ziqian Tang¹ & Zitong Feng¹

¹ Faculty of English Literature and Culture, Guangdong University of Foreign Study, Guangzhou, China

* Shanshan Zhao, Faculty of English Literature and Culture, Guangdong University of Foreign Study, Guangzhou, China

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Abstract

Short videos have amassed a substantial overseas user base as a vital channel for Chinese international communication. A critical challenge is how to harness short video platforms as “amplifiers” to tell China’s stories and spread its voice effectively. This endeavour is essential for the transformation and modernization of Chinese international communication strategies, thus establishing a unique Chinese framework for global cultural dissemination. This paper conducts a comprehensive analysis of the current status and challenges faced by short video content creation and cross-cultural communication in China. It proposes tailored communication strategies to enhance understanding of Chinese culture among audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering cultural recognition. This study seeks to bridge the gap in understanding between China’s millennia-old traditions and international audiences. By drawing on cultural memory and emotional resonance, it aims to promote the preservation, development, and revitalization of China’s outstanding traditional culture.

Keywords

Chinese excellent traditional culture, international cultural communication, short video, communication strategies

1. Introduction

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China’s Decision on Deepening Reform and Promoting China’s Modernization Drive emphasizes the need to accelerate the construction of a discourse and narrative system with Chinese characteristics and comprehensively enhance international communication capabilities. At present, the international environment is undergoing profound changes

in a century, and the media ecosystem is becoming increasingly intelligent and socialized. Against this backdrop, excellent traditional Chinese culture has become a solid foundation for telling Chinese stories well and enhancing the effectiveness of international communication. Effectively harnessing evolving media technologies to enhance the global reach of China's traditional culture is a critical priority today (He & Jiang, 2024).

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee has issued repeated instructions on protecting, inheriting, and disseminating excellent traditional Chinese culture. In June 2023, during the symposium on cultural inheritance and development, Chinese government stated: "Continuing to promote cultural prosperity, build a strong cultural country, and construct a modern civilization of the Chinese nation at a new scratch line is our new cultural mission in the new era". This pivotal assertion has made Chinese culture a focal point at home and abroad, further highlighting the urgency of promoting Chinese culture "going global".

With the advancement of globalization, new media has gradually become a key medium for shaping national images. Among these, short video platforms have risen rapidly, fueled by advantages like short duration, strong interactivity, rapid dissemination, and broad reach. They have gained significant global influence. Currently, excellent traditional Chinese culture faces challenges in international communication including severe cultural discounts, frequent misunderstandings, lack of specialized communication channels, inaccurate content translation and insufficient innovation with monotonous forms. Thus, innovations in short video content, production, and platform strategies can help elevate the value of excellent traditional Chinese culture, promote China-foreign exchanges, and expand China's international influence.

2. Value Implications of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture in International Communication

2.1 Breaking "Western Cultural Centralism" and Enhancing China's International Discourse Power

Today, the competition among great powers extends far beyond traditional political, economic, and military domains into increasingly complex arenas, where cultural soft power has become a pivotal front. For a long time, European and American cultures have dominated global communication orders, evolving into the ideology of "Western cultural centralism". Under this dominant narrative, Western societies often downplay or ignore "Chinese values", distort "China's image" and stigmatize China and its people. Some countries even label China as an "anti-modern civilization force" (Zhang & Pan, 2021). Such biased perceptions create obstacles to Chinese culture's global spread. To break this long-standing "cognitive bias", China must take proactive steps to deconstruct outdated cultural communication orders and explore new models for disseminating Chinese cultural essence—thus building a more diverse and inclusive global cultural landscape. Amid intensifying global political rivalries, actively communicating Chinese culture and gaining more initiative in the international

discourse system has become a necessary and urgent choice for building a cultural powerhouse. With the development of digital technology and media, social platforms tell China's stories and convey Chinese concepts in vivid and interactive ways. It not only enhances China's cultural influence but also strengthens the persuasiveness and appeal of Chinese discourse.

2.2 Sustaining Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture and Boosting Cultural Confidence

The enduring vitality of Chinese culture throughout millennia stems fundamentally from its remarkable integrative dynamism and inclusive nature. As Fei (1992) articulated, its formation and development are characterized by the continuous absorption and harmonious synthesis of diverse elements—from disparate geographic regions, various ethnic groups (Han alongside numerous others), and successive historical epochs (p. 62). This intricate fusion forged a unique cultural pattern best described as “pluralistic unity” (多元一体, *duoyuan yiti*), where distinct components coexist synergistically within a cohesive whole. This profound capacity for integration is not mere assimilation but a transformative process that imbues Chinese culture with extraordinary resilience and adaptive innovation (Zhang, 2015). When confronting era-specific challenges—be it philosophical contention during the Hundred Schools of Thought, socio-political upheaval, or encounters with foreign civilizations—this inherent flexibility allowed the culture to evolve, reinterpret traditions, and maintain its essence while incorporating new influences. This dynamic adaptability ensures its ongoing relevance and creativity.

Consider Confucianism, a central ideology in Chinese history, as an example. Its core values such as benevolence, ritual and righteousness not only guide individual behaviors and values but also shape the Chinese nation's distinctive moral and ethical outlooks, deeply rooted in its spiritual heritage. Sustaining such a profound heritage necessitates active engagement with contemporary mediums. In an age dominated by ubiquitous short video platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou, lies a potent opportunity for innovative cultural transmission. Creatively produced short videos can transform abstract Confucian virtues into vivid, relatable narratives—perhaps depicting modern scenarios exemplifying *ren* (compassion) or *xin* (trustworthiness). This makes profound wisdom accessible and engaging for vast audiences, particularly the younger generation. Successfully achieving this fosters a broader social environment that reveres traditional values, thereby significantly boosting collective cultural confidence. This renewed confidence is indispensable, providing crucial spiritual sustenance and ethical grounding for the nation's ongoing rejuvenation journey, ensuring its cultural identity remains vibrant amidst global change.

3. Advantages of Short Videos as a Cultural Communication Medium

3.1 Real-Time Dissemination and Efficient Diffusion: The Timeliness Advantage of Short Videos

The global proliferation of new media has fundamentally reshaped information consumption, and within this landscape, the unique fondness of short videos presents unprecedented opportunities for the

real-time dissemination and efficient diffusion of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Characterized by extreme brevity (typically seconds to minutes), diverse thematic potential, and comparatively low production barriers, the short video format aligns perfectly with contemporary audiences' fragmented attention spans and preference for instant gratification (Zeng & Wei, 2024). This structural advantage enables the swift packaging and release of cultural content, allowing practitioners to respond almost instantaneously to events, seasonal festivals, or trending topics with culturally relevant snippets. The power of this timeliness is magnified exponentially by sophisticated algorithmic distribution channels embedded within dominant platforms like TikTok and Kuaishou. These algorithms prioritize content discovery based on user preferences and engagement patterns, facilitating the rapid, widespread diffusion of compelling cultural shorts across vast networks within minutes or hours of posting, far outpacing traditional media cycles or even long-form digital content.

The sheer scale of the short video ecosystem in China and globally underpins its efficacy as a cultural transmission vehicle. According to the authoritative 55th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China (China Internet Network Information Center [CNNIC], 2025), by the end of 2024, China had reached 1.108 billion internet users, representing a penetration rate of 78.6%. Crucially, 1.04 billion of these individuals were short video users, constituting a staggering 93.9% of the total online population. The broader online audiovisual market, encompassing long videos, short videos, live streaming, and audio, solidified its massive economic significance by surpassing one trillion yuan in market size (CNNIC, 2025), demonstrating the centrality of platforms supporting short-form content. Globally, the reach is equally profound. Data from Statista (as cited in We Are Social, 2024) shows that TikTok, the international counterpart to Douyin, had amassed over 4.92 billion downloads worldwide by April 2024 and boasted 1.582 billion monthly active users, securing its position as the fifth most popular social platform globally. This unparalleled combined user base and pervasive platform infrastructure provide an unprecedented conduit. When culturally rich and engaging short videos are disseminated through these channels, leveraging their intrinsic timeliness and algorithmic propulsion, they possess an immense capacity to amplify the reach and visibility of traditional Chinese culture, not just domestically but across international borders. This efficient, wide-reaching diffusion fosters greater accessibility and familiarity with Chinese cultural heritage on a global scale.

3.2 Cross-Regional Communication and Multicultural Integration: The Global Advantage of Short Videos

The inherently cross-border nature of the internet, coupled with the unique communicative strengths of the short video format, creates unparalleled opportunities for overcoming geographical and cultural divides to facilitate the global dissemination and integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Unlike static text or complex historical documentaries, short videos leverage powerful symbolic carriers inherent to Chinese civilization, which possess a unique capacity to inspire immediate sensory

engagement and spiritual reflection. Crucially, short videos achieve multicultural resonance primarily through effective visual storytelling and relatable character portrayals. Visuals often function as a “universal language” that can bypass linguistic barriers more readily than textual communication. By constructing narratives around everyday practices, familial bonds, celebrations, or artistic pursuits deeply rooted in Chinese tradition, creators can tap into fundamental human emotions—wonder, nostalgia, serenity, or admiration for skill. This non-verbal, emotion-driven communication effectively sparks the interest of global audiences unfamiliar with specific cultural contexts, fostering an initial connection that transcends overt cultural differences and lays the groundwork for deeper appreciation and understanding. The phenomenal international success of creators like Li Ziqi stands as a compelling empirical demonstration of this global advantage. Li’s meticulously crafted videos, characterized by their poetic originality, cinematic aesthetic quality, and deep immersion in rural Chinese lifestyles such as traditional farming, cooking, and handicrafts, deliver immense emotional and aspirational value. By showcasing the tranquillity, self-sufficiency, and profound beauty inherent in traditional practices, she constructs an appealing vision that resonates powerfully with global audiences experiencing digital saturation and modern anxieties. Li Ziqi’s content prompted significant overseas audiences to reassess their perceptions of China, transforming simplistic stereotypes into a more objective appreciation of its cultural depth and ecological wisdom. Her approach provides a replicable blueprint: focusing on universal human values (connection to nature, craftsmanship, family, peace), utilizing highly evocative visual aesthetics, and minimizing reliance on overt verbal explanation or cultural didacticism. This model underscores how strategically crafted short videos can function as highly effective “soft power” tools. They enable the organic integration of specific Chinese cultural elements into the global digital landscape, fostering multicultural dialogue and understanding while simultaneously enhancing the global visibility of China’s intangible cultural heritage and boosting domestic cultural confidence through international validation.

3.3 Multi-sensory Synergy: The Immersive Cultural Expression Advantage of Short Videos

The profound multi-sensory nature of short videos unlocks unparalleled potential for immersive cultural expression, uniquely positioning the format as a vital conduit for showcasing the richness and depth of traditional Chinese culture. Unlike text or audio alone, short videos integrate visual spectacle, auditory richness (music, dialogue, ambient sound), rhythmic editing, and kinetic movement into a cohesive sensory experience, closely mirroring embodied human perception (Manovich, 2001). This convergence creates an immersive immediacy crucial for presenting China’s intricate cultural heritage—comprising diverse elements like calligraphy, traditional painting (国画, guohua), Peking opera (京剧, Jingju), martial arts (武术, wushu), tea ceremony (茶道, chadao), porcelain (瓷器, ciqu), and silk (丝绸, sichou). By strategically selecting and artfully integrating these symbolic cultural carriers, content creators can construct a dense, interconnected symbolic network. This network doesn’t merely present isolated artefacts; it weaves them into meaningful narratives, embedding them within stories of historical

figures, folklore, seasonal rituals, or philosophical concepts. For instance, a video might depict a calligrapher (chufa jia) composing poetry (shi) while traditional instruments (guzheng) play and ink paintings hang nearby, thereby layering multiple symbolic practices into a single, resonant tableau.

This systematic symbolic integration, facilitated by the short video's audiovisual capabilities, serves a critical function in cross-cultural comprehension. Symbolic narrative, as a communication tool, effectively transcends linguistic specifics and regional cognitive frameworks. The simultaneous presentation of visual symbols (the flowing lines of calligraphy), auditory cues (the distinct melodies of Peking opera percussion), tactile suggestions (the texture of silk depicted in close-up), and narrative context (a story about a Ming dynasty artisan) engages audiences on multiple cognitive levels. This sensory synergy activates what Paivio's (1986) dual-coding theory describes as complementary verbal and non-verbal mental representations, reinforcing memory and understanding. Foreign audiences might not grasp the specific historical context of a qinghua porcelain vase immediately, but experiencing it visually alongside the sounds of its creation, contextualized within a narrative about craftsmanship and aesthetic philosophy, fosters a gradual, holistic assimilation of its cultural significance. This multi-dimensional exposure helps demystify complex traditions, moving beyond superficial exoticism towards genuine appreciation, thereby shaping perceptions of China as a culture characterized by approachability (embodied in relatable stories/daily practices), profound respectability (through showcasing mastery and philosophical depth), and credibility (rooted in authentic representation and enduring vitality). The immersive power of the medium turns abstract "culture" into tangible, resonant experiences.

4. Current Status of Traditional Culture Short Videos: Creation and International Communication

4.1 Severe Cultural Discount Phenomenon: Recurrent Cultural Misinterpretations

Due to cultural differences, excellent traditional Chinese culture often faces cultural discount phenomenon in cross-cultural communication (information loss or misunderstanding). First, many concepts and expressions in traditional Chinese culture (e.g., idioms, ancient poetry) lose their original artistic conception and atmosphere when translated. Second, many cultural symbols and images in Chinese tradition have specific connotations. However, due to cultural differences, value conflicts, and lack of background knowledge, foreign audiences struggle to understand traditional festivals, customs, and moral concepts. For example, Disney's *Mulan* rewrote the original "filial piety and loyalty" core as a "pursuit of personal value" (a Western narrative), undermining Confucian ethics' cultural foundation (Pan & Dong, 2023). This dual deviation (from symbolic expression to value core) creates cognitive gaps in cross-cultural communication.

4.2 Lack of Specialized Media and Inaccurate Content Translation

At present, short videos have a large overseas user base but lack in-depth cooperation with international media and cultural institutions, limiting global influence. Additionally, inaccurate or lively language translation in foreign-language short videos directly affects communication effectiveness. For example, in the documentary *The Poetic World of Li Bai*, the line “仰天大笑出门去” (yangtian daxiao chumen qu) was literally translated as “I laugh loudly and go out”—stripping away the poet’s spiritual awakening from bureaucratic constraints. Such reductive cultural decoding lies at the root of why “China’s narratives” stagnate at the level of superficial spectacle.

4.3 Insufficient Innovation and Monotonous Forms

In the current context, foreign-language short videos on Chinese traditional culture often fall into the dual trap of symbolic and rigid forms (Gong, 2023). Their focus on classic elements—martial arts, calligraphy, Peking opera, and ancient texts—often results in homogenized content and uninspired presentations. This superficial approach neglects deeper cultural meanings and historical narratives, leading to aesthetic fatigue and diminished engagement. Some short videos still use traditional documentary or interview formats, lacking innovation and fun, making them unattractive to young people. For example, the BBC documentary *The Story of China* uses a linear narrative to interpret Confucianism, focusing on static artifacts and scholarly commentary. Some overseas audiences noted that while content is rigorous, the slow narrative pace struggles to adapt to short video viewing habits.

5. Strategies for International Communication of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture via Short Videos

5.1 Strengthen Content Innovation and Deeply Explore the Cultural Core

To effectively leverage short videos for transmitting traditional Chinese culture globally, prioritizing substantive content innovation is paramount. This necessitates actively countering tendencies towards symbolic simplification and thematic monotony—such as reducing rich traditions to mere aesthetic snippets devoid of context. Overcoming this requires methodological rigor beginning with comprehensive audience research. Drawing on cultural anthropology frameworks (Hofstede et al., 2010), practitioners must deeply analyze the socio-cultural backgrounds, media consumption habits, and cognitive preferences of specific target demographics. For instance, content aimed at Southeast Asian youth might foreground shared Confucian values through modernized musical narratives, while videos targeting European audiences could emphasize universal philosophical concepts like harmony (和, *he*) using relatable visual metaphors. This granular understanding enables the creation of premium, resonant content that authentically bridges cultural distance.

Fundamental to this innovation is a profound engagement with the cultural material itself. Rather than superficial displays (e.g., showcasing porcelain without explaining its technological and aesthetic

evolution), creators must invest in interpretative depth that unpacks historical layers, contextual meanings, and enduring spiritual values underpinning practices (UNESCO, 2003 Convention Art. 2). A short video on Kunqu opera (昆曲, Kunqu), for instance, should transcend costume and melody to explore its literary sophistication as were xiqu (文人戏曲, literati theatre) and its embodiment of Ming-Qing literati ideals. Artistic expression then becomes the vehicle for conveying this substance, demanding linguistic precision and contextual adaptation. This involves moving beyond rigid literal translations to employ idiomatic, audience-appropriate language—explaining 知足常乐 (zhi zu chang le) not merely as “contentment brings happiness” but contextualizing it within Daoist wu-wei (无为) philosophy or agrarian life-worlds. Furthermore, innovative multimedia integration is crucial. Merging traditional art forms such as shadow puppetry, and playing with modern techniques—like 3D animation recreating mythological scenes, augmented reality overlays explaining Han Dynasty bronze motifs, or spatial audio simulating temple rituals—transforms abstract heritage into sensorial vivid, emotionally compelling experiences. This synergy doesn’t just illustrate tradition; it demystifies and re-contextualizes it, enhancing comprehension and engagement. Ultimately, content rooted in deep cultural excavation and expressed through innovative, audience-aware multimedia yields not just views, but meaningful cross-cultural resonance and sustained impact.

5.2 Leverage Social Media Platforms and Seize Communication Initiative

To maximize the global reach of excellent traditional Chinese culture through short videos, proactively harnessing the infrastructure and dynamics of dominant social media platforms is essential for maintaining persistent visibility and shaping coherent narratives. As highlighted by van Dijck et al. (2018), platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook operate as “algorithmically governed attention economies” (p. 31), where visibility depends on strategic content adaptation to platform-specific logics. Chinese cultural promoters must move beyond sporadic posting to implement systematic channel operations, including algorithm-optimized publishing schedules tailored to overseas audiences’ peak engagement times and consistent thematic branding across campaigns (Zhao & Belk, 2021). This requires strengthening video script architecture—ensuring narrative clarity within tight time-frames through compelling hooks, logical progression (e.g., problem-solution frameworks), and culturally resonant conclusions. Only through such structured, high-frequency content dissemination can practitioners establish continuous cultural touch-points, gradually fostering familiarity and countering fragmentation inherent to digital spaces. This sustained presence transforms isolated cultural artifacts into a cohesive, recognizable digital tapestry that effectively circulates China’s spiritual and aesthetic essence globally.

Crucially, leveraging foreign creators as credible “cultural intermediaries” amplifies impact and disrupts entrenched stereotypes. Influencers with established global follower-ship offer authenticity and relatability often lacking in official channels. Their organic China-themed content—ranging from

culinary explorations and architectural marvels to participation in local festivals—generates immense virality and trust precisely because it bypasses perceived state narratives, presenting lived experiences over didactic messaging. For instance, during the 2024 surge in international tourism catalyzed by China's 144-hour visa-free transit policy, foreign visitors flooded platforms like TikTok and YouTube with spontaneously created shorts. These videos showcased vibrant street markets in Chengdu, breathtaking landscapes in Zhangjiajie, and intimate encounters with traditional craftspeople, accumulating billions of views. This organic, user-generated wave constituted a powerful counter-narrative to concurrent “de-globalization” rhetoric and Western media distortions, revealing a dynamically modern yet culturally rooted China. It demonstrates how strategically encouraging and amplifying such content (e.g., via hashtag campaigns like #ChinaUnfiltered or creator partnership programs) empowers international audiences to actively reconstruct their perceptions of China through firsthand digital “experiences”, thereby reclaiming communication agency and substantially advancing cultural influence beyond traditional diplomatic channels.

5.3 Focus on Audience Analysis and Precisely Target Groups

Effective global dissemination of traditional Chinese culture via short videos necessitates a data-driven, micro-segmented approach to audience analysis, transcending broad demographic categorizations to identify granular cultural affinities and consumption triggers. For successful cross-cultural communication, utilizing symbols, stories, or values that resonate with local preferences is crucial. Rigorous market research must therefore capture regional heterogeneity: while European audiences may respond to philosophical explorations of Daoist harmony (道, Dao) presented through landscape cinematography, Southeast Asian viewers might engage more deeply with familial ethics (孝, xiao) depicted in contemporary family stories (Chen, 2024). This demands developing multidimensional audience profiles that integrate quantitative metrics (content consumption duration, sharing frequency) with qualitative insights (cultural curiosity drivers, perceived relevance of traditions) across segmented cohorts like “US Gen Z gamers interested in mythology” or “Latin American eco-conscious travelers”. Precision targeting relies on translating these insights into hyper-localized content strategies. For instance, creators targeting Japanese audiences might leverage shared Buddhist heritage through videos on Dunhuang murals (Dunhuang bihua) contextualized within Sino-Japanese artistic exchange. This localization minimizes cultural discount effects while maximizing psychological proximity.

Technologically, leveraging AI-driven platform algorithms is indispensable. Systems like TikTok's recommendation engine analyze user interest graphs (e.g., interactions with related hashtags like #ChineseCalligraphy or #ZenGardens) and behavioral data (completion rates, re-watches) to identify receptive micro-segments. Finally, live-streaming serves as a dynamic engagement multiplier. Hosting sessions with scholars explaining The Analects (论语, Lunyu) or artisans demonstrating cloisonné (jingtailan) enables real-time Q&A and co-created meaning-making. These participatory exchanges

foster a sense of ownership and community—viewers transition from passive consumers to active cultural participants, strengthening long-term affinity and brand loyalty to Chinese cultural narratives in a crowded digital landscape.

5.4 Strengthen Professional Talent Training and Enhance Communication Efficiency

The global effectiveness of disseminating traditional Chinese culture through short videos hinges critically on developing specialized, interdisciplinary talent equipped with both technical proficiency and deep cultural-literacy. Educational institutions and cultural agencies must collaborate to design rigorous curricula that bridge creative production and strategic communication, thus training more professionals with hands-on experience, supporting industry sustainability. Core modules should encompass: cultural content curation, technical production: advanced instruction in cinematography, algorithmic platform literacy, data analytics etc., which should be based on a strong support from big internet platforms like Tiktok, Kuaishou to meet with evolving market needs.

Globalization also demands an enhancement on intercultural communication talent quality—strengthening language skills, cross-cultural communication, and media literacy. Mainstream media are responsible for training professionals for effective international communication, ensuring China’s voice is heard on the global stage. For example, CGTN’s “Digital Heritage Ambassadors” cultivate bilingual producer-hosts who narrate Xi’an terracotta warriors restoration livestreams while fielding real-time multilingual Q&A. Such initiatives directly enhance content credibility, dismantling misinterpretations through transparency and expertise. Meanwhile, Mainstream media should cultivate high-quality intercultural teams, using high-quality content to eliminate foreign misunderstandings of Chinese culture, promoting exchanges, and enhancing international influence.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of intercultural communication theory, cultural information transmission is complex, involving integration, contradictions, conflicts, and solutions among social members from different backgrounds. In short video creation and communication, creators must deeply understand target audiences’ cultural backgrounds to accurately encode culture, ensuring content crosses cultural barriers. In addition, creators should use cultural memory and emotional resonance to bridge the psychological gap between time-honored Chinese culture and foreign audiences—achieving a “soft landing” for excellent traditional Chinese culture in global communication.

In summary, new media tools (represented by short videos) open unprecedented opportunities for international communication of excellent traditional Chinese culture. This is not only a response to the modern cultural mission of the new era but also a necessary path to national cultural rejuvenation. Through new media, excellent traditional Chinese culture rejuvenates globally, showcasing its unique charm and profound heritage.

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