

Original Paper

Research on Cross-cultural Narrative Strategies of Chinese Education Brand on Short Video Platform—Take TikTok as an example

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Received: May22, 2026

Accepted: June 09, 2026

Online Published: June 29, 2026

doi:10.22158/wjer.v13n3p129

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v13n3p129>

Abstract

In the context of digital transformation, TikTok has become the core media carrier for international Chinese education brands to carry out cross-cultural communication, and overseas Generation Z learners have gradually formed the habit of short video fragmented Chinese learning. Relying on the data of official platforms such as the Center for Sino-foreign Language Exchange and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Duolingo, the number of Chinese learners in the world has exceeded 200 million, the total broadcast volume of TikTok # LearnChinese related topics has exceeded 340 million, and the broadcast volume of # 4tones4dance Chinese Tone Challenge has reached 5.8 billion. Short video narrative has become the key path for Chinese education brand to achieve cultural entry. Based on the adjustment logic of international Chinese communication media and communication environment, this study puts forward optimization strategies from four dimensions of narrative subject, narrative content, narrative expression and narrative interaction, aiming at providing theoretical reference and practical scheme for Chinese education brand to break through cross-cultural communication barriers and build a long-term international communication mechanism.

Keywords

TikTok, international Chinese education brand, cross-cultural narrative, short video, Cultural transmission

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly States that we should refine and display the spiritual symbol and cultural essence of Chinese civilization, tell Chinese

stories well and spread Chinese voice well. As the core carrier of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, international Chinese education undertakes the dual functions of language teaching and cultural communication. At present, the short video media has reconstructed the external communication tools and communication environment, and the overseas short video platform represented by TikTok has become the core field of folk Chinese education communication. Official statistics from the Ministry of Education show that 86 countries around the world have incorporated Chinese into the national education system, and the total number of overseas Chinese learners and users has exceeded 200 million, of which young learners aged 18-35 account for more than 62%. This group uses short videos for more than 120 minutes a day, and fragmented online learning has become the mainstream learning mode.

The brand matrix of official, commercial and we-media Chinese education in TikTok platform has initially taken shape: the Sino-foreign Language Exchange and Cooperation Center has created Sing & Learn Chinese online creative activities, covering nearly 60 countries around the world, with a cumulative broadcast volume of more than 5 million; Bamboo Chinese, a commercial brand, has been deeply engaged in TikTok short teaching videos, and the total number of broadcasts on its accounts in half a year has exceeded 600,000; the highest number of broadcasts on a single teaching video on the accounts of overseas local Chinese bloggers has reached 7 million. The change of media environment promotes Chinese education from traditional classroom one-way indoctrination narrative to short video multi-modal, two-way interactive cross-cultural narrative mode, but the existing brands generally have cultural adaptation shortcomings, cultural discounts are significant, and it is difficult to achieve the transformation from going out to going in.

1.2 Research Significance

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

Existing international Chinese communication research focuses on offline teaching and content analysis of domestic tremolo platforms, while theoretical research on TikTok overseas field and brand cross-cultural narrative is relatively scarce. This paper integrates narratology, cross-cultural communication and second language acquisition theory, constructs a brand narrative analysis framework of short video Chinese education, enriches the theoretical system of cross-cultural narrative of international Chinese education under digital media, and provides empirical support for the media-environment bivariate influence on Chinese communication mechanism.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

Based on TikTok's real account samples and official industry data, this study combs the narrative experience and existing shortcomings of the head Chinese education brand, and puts forward the cross-cultural narrative optimization path that can be landed, so as to provide practical solutions for the official account of Hanban, the commercial Chinese education brand to adjust the communication content and adapt to the context of overseas audiences, so as to help the Chinese education brand. Serve the long-term development of non-governmental foreign exchanges between China and foreign

countries.

1.3 Domestic and Foreign Research Review

At the domestic research level, Cao Antong and others, taking YouTube Chinese learning short videos as the object, proposed that cross-cultural communication should tap the "resonance and excitement" of different cultures, but did not focus on the commercial education brand of TikTok platform. Sembati Ye Ran's quantitative analysis of the influencing factors of TikTok Chinese short video communication effect focuses on data measurement and lacks theoretical analysis of narrative logic; Tan Lei takes the charming Chinese of the General Station as an example to explore audio-visual communication strategies, but the main body of the study is the national media, which does not cover small and medium-sized Chinese education brands.

At the level of foreign research, overseas scholars mostly focus on the recommendation of short video algorithms for language learning and user learning motivation, while there are few studies on the adaptation of Chinese cultural narrative and long-term brand communication, and there is a lack of case studies combined with Chinese local Chinese education brands.

1.4 Research Methods and Theoretical Basis

1.4.1 Research Methods

Literature research method: Combing the journal literature related to CNKI international Chinese education, cross-cultural narrative and short video communication, integrating the authoritative data of the Ministry of Education and HolonIQ industry report, and building a theoretical analysis framework.

Content analysis method: Select three typical accounts of TikTok: official account Chinese Star, commercial brand Bamboo Chinese, and overseas local blogger Henry Chinese Classroom, and extract 50 short videos from each account. It is analyzed from four dimensions: narrative subject, narrative content, narrative form and interactive feedback.

1.4.2 Core Theoretical Support

Cross-cultural narrative theory: the core emphasizes that narrative should take into account the output of local culture and the acceptance habits of foreign cultural audiences, eliminate cognitive barriers through cultural translation, and achieve the symbiosis of two cultural meanings in narrative texts.

Hall's high and low context theory: Western TikTok audiences mostly belong to low context culture, prefer straightforward, life-oriented and concrete narrative, and reject implicit and abstract traditional cultural preaching, which provides a theoretical basis for the adjustment of narrative content.

Intercultural theory: the short video platform constructs the third space of equal dialogue between Chinese and foreign cultures, and the narrative can not adopt the perspective of one-way cultural output, but needs to build a two-way communication narrative field.

2. Second, the Current Situation of Cross-cultural Narrative Development of Chinese Education Brand on TikTok Platform

2.1 Dissemination Scale: Chinese Education Short Video Traffic Continues to Expand, and the Audience is Younger

HolonIQ Global Education Market Report predicts that the global Chinese language learning market will reach 13.1 billion US dollars in 2027, and the contribution of short video channels will exceed 45%. TikTok platform # LearnChinese core topic has been broadcast 340 million times, far more than French, German and other small language learning topics. The # 4tones4dance Chinese Tone Challenge launched by Hanban has been played 5.8 billion times, covering youth groups in more than 180 countries around the world.

From the perspective of audience structure, the audience of Chinese education content on the platform is mainly Generation Z aged 18-35, accounting for 67.3%, with Southeast Asian, European and American users accounting for the highest proportion: Southeast Asian learners focus on daily communication Chinese, while European and American learners prefer cultural experience Chinese content. According to Duolingo 2025 data, the number of Chinese learning users in the United States increased by 216% year on year, and the growth of traffic mainly came from TikTok short video drainage. Media tool iteration lowers the threshold of Chinese learning, and short video fragmentation narrative meets the lightweight learning needs of overseas youth, becoming the core driving force of brand traffic growth.

2.2 Narrative Subject: The Matrix of Three Types of Brand Accounts Is Formed, and the Narrative Perspective Is Differentiated

At present, TikTok Chinese education brand is divided into three types of narrative subjects, with significant differences in narrative standpoint and creative logic:

Official public welfare brand (Chinese Star, Hanban TikTok official account): The narrative subject is mainly domestic teachers and official activity planning team. The narrative perspective is based on Chinese culture. The content focuses on traditional festivals, the origin of Chinese characters and national cultural achievements. The narrative goal is grand, focusing on macro-cultural communication. For example, in 2023, the Rabbit Year Filter Event was planned by the Chinese team to output the narrative content of the twelve zodiac signs and the Spring Festival customs, with a single event broadcast volume of 30 million times.

Commercialized Chinese education brand (Zhuji Chinese, Wukong Chinese overseas account): The narrative subject takes into account both Chinese teachers and a small number of overseas local teaching assistants, the narrative balances language teaching and cultural content, with paid course drainage as the core goal, the narrative scene focuses on daily shopping, travel, practical Chinese in the workplace, and cultural content as auxiliary teaching materials. Bamboo Chinese produced 56 short teaching videos in six months, taking into account Pinyin teaching and Panda Guofeng symbolic narrative, but the depth of cultural content is insufficient.

Overseas local Chinese blogger brand (multi-national local Chinese Internet celebrity account): The narrative subject is overseas local learners and local Chinese teachers. The narrative perspective is in line with the local audience's cognition. It is good at explaining Chinese in combination with the comparison of national culture, which is more likely to arouse the audience's resonance. Hungarian blogger Levent Kapi's single the Spring Festival narrative video has a broadcast volume of 7 million, using its own language to interpret Chinese Chinese zodiac and culture, and the interaction in the commentary area is far more than that in the Chinese production video.

2.3 Narrative Content: Language Teaching Is the Main Content, and Cultural Narrative Symbols Are Homogeneous

Sample account content coding results show that 68% of short videos are mainly pure language teaching contents such as Pinyin, Chinese characters and HSK grammar, while cultural narrative content accounts for only 32%. Cultural narrative focuses on panda, kungfu, the Spring Festival and Hanfu, while contemporary Chinese urban development, youth culture and folk life narrative are scarce, and the content is seriously homogeneous.

The cultural narrative of official brand accounts is biased towards grand historical and traditional culture, lacking life-oriented contemporary narrative; in order to cater to the flow, commercial brands repeatedly use a single national style symbol, forming a stereotyped cultural impression; Although local blogger accounts can balance Chinese and foreign cultures, they are limited by the ability of content production, scattered cultural narrative system, and have not formed a systematic brand narrative IP.

2.4 Narrative Form: Multi-modal Short Video Narrative Is Popular, but Interactive Narrative Development Is Insufficient

TikTok short video relies on vertical screen, short duration (15-60s), background music, special effect filters and short drama to form a multimodal narrative system. Hanban Challenge uses the narrative form of dance, music and language knowledge points to achieve phenomenal communication. But on the whole, most Chinese education brands still adopt the single narrative mode of "teacher's one-way explanation" and lack of two-way dialogue narrative. First, they lack the narrative design of audience participation and seldom initiate the challenge of audience co-creation and bilingual dialogue. Second, the operation of narrative interaction in the comment area is weak, only 19% of the accounts regularly reply to the audience's cultural questions, and the comment area is not made into a narrative space for cross-cultural communication; third, the narrative focus is insufficient, and the narrative scripts are not designed for different audiences in Europe, America, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

3. Existing Core Issues of Cross-cultural Narrative of TikTok Chinese Education Brand

3.1 One-way Standard of Narrative Perspective, Stereotyped Thinking of Cultural Output and Lack of Interculturality

Most of the Chinese educational brands operated by the Chinese side adopt the one-way narrative perspective of self-centeredness, ignore the acceptance habits of low-context cultural audiences, replace

equal cross-cultural dialogue with cultural indoctrination, and violate the core requirements of intercultural theory. Account narrative only interprets the content from the perspective of Chinese culture, lacking the perspective of cross-cultural comparison, and overseas audiences are prone to cultural alienation.

According to the relevant research data of VIP Journal, 43% of the negative comments on the Chinese educational videos of tremolo are too didactic and difficult to empathize. For example, some official accounts simply display traditional ancient buildings and classical poetry, without combining the daily life scenes of overseas audiences, the video completion rate is less than 15%, far below the average completion rate of 42% of local bloggers, and the cross-cultural narrative gap is significant. The media environment has been transformed into an equal online communication field, but the brand narrative thinking still stays in the traditional offline classroom one-way communication mode, which does not adapt to the characteristics of short video two-way communication media.

3.2 Shallow Homogenization of Cultural Symbols and Insufficient Depth of Cultural Translation Result in High Cultural Discount

At present, brand culture narrative relies too much on traditional symbols of facial makeup, and the narrative content lacks deep cultural connotation translation, which can not complete cross-cultural meaning decoding, resulting in serious cultural discount. Sample statistics show that 76% of cultural short videos reuse the three symbols of panda, Hanfu and Kungfu, which are insufficient to excavate the contents of contemporary Chinese youth culture, urban and rural life and folk cultural exchanges, and overseas audiences are prone to form a one-sided and solidified understanding of Chinese culture.

From the perspective of cultural translation theory, brand narrative only completes the surface display of cultural symbols, without localized semantic transformation: when explaining Chinese festivals, it only shows the festival process, without comparing with similar overseas festivals and interpreting the humanistic value behind them, which makes it difficult for overseas audiences to understand the cultural core. For example, some the Spring Festival narrative videos only show posting Spring Festival couplets and eating New Year's Eve dinner, without comparing with overseas Christmas and New Year customs, the audience comment area frequently appears questions that can not understand the meaning of the festival, and the communication efficiency is greatly reduced.

3.3 Narrative Lacks National Localization Adaptation, and the Focus Narrative System Has not yet been Established

The audiences in different regions of the world belong to different cultural contexts, but the vast majority of Chinese education brands adopt a unified narrative script, without adjusting the narrative content and expression form for the audiences in Southeast Asia, Europe, America and the Middle East. European and American low-context audiences: they prefer straightforward, life-oriented, short-plot narrative, and dislike lengthy abstract cultural explanations, but official accounts mostly use long text explanations and historical popular science, with low adaptability;

Chinese audience in Southeast Asia: they have basic knowledge of Chinese culture and need advanced

cultural narrative content, but a large number of accounts on the platform only output entry-level shallow national style content, which can not meet the demand;

Middle East high context audience: focus on implicit, family-oriented narrative, some brand short videos use fashion, entertainment narrative form, there is a risk of cultural sensitivity.

Industry data show that the growth rate of national differentiated narrative account fans is 2.7 times that of general content accounts. At present, less than 12% of the head brands have built a focus narrative system, and localized narrative has become a common shortcoming in the industry. There are national cultural differences in the foreign exchange environment, but the Chinese education brand does not adjust the narrative scheme according to the media audience environment, which restricts the depth of communication.

3.4 Absence of Interactive Narrative Mechanism and Failure to Build a Two-way Cross-cultural Communication Narrative Field

The core of cross-cultural narrative is two-way meaning co-construction, but most Chinese education brands in TikTok only use short videos as one-way content distribution channels, ignoring the strong interactive media attributes of short video platforms, and lack of interactive narrative development, which have two major shortcomings:

First, the pre-narrative lacks the design of audience co-creation. Only a few Hanban official challenges open channels for audience content co-creation, commercial and self-Media brands rarely initiate bilingual dialogue and cultural contrast creation challenges, and audiences are only content viewers, unable to participate in narrative production.

Second, the narrative operation of the post-comment area is blank. More than 80% of Chinese education accounts have not systematically operated comment areas, and the questions raised by the audience about Chinese learning and cultural cognition have not been answered for a long time, thus missing the narrative space for cross-cultural instant communication. The third cross-cultural space can not be formed, and the narrative stays in one-way content output, which makes it difficult to achieve in-depth foreign exchanges between Chinese and foreign people.

4. Cross-cultural Narrative Optimization Strategy of TikTok Chinese Education Brand

4.1 Changing the Narrative Perspective: Constructing a Two-way and Equal Dialogical Cross-cultural Narrative

It breaks away from the single culture-based narrative thinking, builds an equal and two-way dialogue narrative perspective based on the theory of interculturality, and adapts to the TikTok short video folk communication media environment.

Carry out dual-subject joint narrative: the brand sets up a joint creative team of Chinese teachers and overseas local teaching assistants, and each short video incorporates both Chinese and foreign perspectives at the same time, using a cultural contrast narrative framework. When explaining Chinese vocabulary, we should synchronously compare the language and cultural phenomena of the audience

and dispel the sense of cultural alienation. Commercial brands can cooperate with local Chinese bloggers in various countries for a long time, such as bamboo Chinese introducing local teachers from Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States to narrate on camera, so as to enhance the empathy of content.

Weaken the grand didactic narrative and turn to the micro-life narrative: reduce the macro-historical and national level narrative, and focus on the daily scene narrative of ordinary people. The familiar scenes of overseas audiences, such as youth diet, campus life, pets and workplace social interaction, carry Chinese knowledge points and cultural content, which are in line with the straightforward narrative preferences of low-context audiences. Referring to the video logic of Hungarian local bloggers, it carries the Spring Festival and Chinese zodiac culture with family daily stories, which greatly improves the completion rate and interaction.

The goal of balancing public welfare and commercial narrative: the official public welfare brand takes into account both grand cultural communication and life-oriented micro-narrative; The brand of commercial education balances the narrative of curriculum drainage and the narrative of cultural communication, and avoids the value of cultural communication being dispelled by pure marketing content.

4.2 Deepening Cultural Translation: Creating a Multi-cultural Symbolic Narrative System and Reducing Cultural Discount

Relying on Lefevre's cultural translation theory, this paper disassembles Chinese cultural symbols in layers, completes the semantic transformation of localization, gets rid of the dilemma of homogenization of shallow symbols, and optimizes the effect of cross-cultural decoding.

Three layers of cultural symbols are layered narrative: the surface general symbols (pandas, food, traditional festivals) are used as the introductory narrative material. Middle-level life symbols (milk tea, national style wear, short video culture, youth social interaction) as the main narrative content, fill the narrative gap of contemporary China; deep value symbols (harmony, tolerance, mutual assistance) are imperceptibly transmitted through micro-stories, avoiding direct preaching.

Implement localized semantic translation: When explaining traditional culture, bind similar cultural carriers familiar to overseas audiences for comparative translation. Explain the Dragon Boat Festival and compare the European and American Carnival parades synchronously. Explain the reunion of Mid-Autumn Festival, compare with the family gathering of Thanksgiving Day in the West, lower the threshold of audience understanding, and realize the common cultural significance.

Create exclusive brand narrative IP symbols: Chinese education brands create differentiated visual narrative logos, such as Bamboo Chinese's continuous deep cultivation of bamboo and Panda's lightweight symbol system. The official account of Chinese Star takes Chinese character dance as the core narrative IP to avoid the high overlap of symbols in the whole industry and strengthen brand recognition.

4.3 Build a National Localized Focus Narrative System to Adapt to a Differentiated Foreign Exchange

Environment

The narrative script should be adjusted according to the cultural context of different regional audiences and the needs of Chinese learning, and the narrative content and expression form should be adjusted according to the media audience environment, so as to achieve precise cross-cultural communication.

European and American regions (low context): 15-30s short drama narrative, no lengthy text explanation, plot, action, music to carry Chinese knowledge points, content focusing on workplace, travel practical Chinese, with the trend of youth culture narrative;

Southeast Asia region (deep Chinese base): add intermediate and advanced cultural narrative content, interpret cultural differences between ancient and modern times, and launch short narrative videos of Chinese root-seeking and Sino-foreign business exchanges;

Middle East and Latin America (high context and cultural sensitivity): Focus on family, diet, peaceful coexistence and mild narrative themes, avoid trendy entertainment and conflict narrative content, and take into account local cultural customs.

Relying on TikTok backstage audience regional data, the brand backstage publishes differentiated narrative content in different regions, synchronously operates multilingual subtitle versions (English, Thai, Spanish, etc.), and adapts to the multilingual communication environment.

4.4 Improve the Two-way Interactive Narrative Mechanism and Create the Third Space for Online Cross-cultural Communication

Make full use of the characteristics of short video strong interactive media tools, build a complete interactive narrative chain of video pre-co-creation and post-dialogue in the comment area, and realize two-way cultural exchanges.

Regularly launch audience co-creation narrative activities: learn from the experience of Hanban #4tones4dance Challenge, launch low-threshold bilingual creation challenges every month, such as my Chinese word story, Chinese and foreign festival comparison Vlog, encourage overseas audiences to participate in narrative production, excellent co-creation content into the brand official account push, so that overseas learners become one of the narrative subjects.

Systematic operation of dialogue and narrative in the comment area: set up full-time cross-cultural operators to reply to the audience's questions related to Chinese and culture within 24 hours, actively guide the audience to share their own cultural customs, make the comment area real-time cross-cultural communication field, and extend the short video narrative boundary.

Develop live broadcast linkage narrative mode: regularly carry out bilingual live dialogue between Chinese and foreign teachers and students, supplement the short board of short video static narrative with real-time interactive narrative, build normal non-governmental external communication channels online, and strengthen the long-term communication influence of the brand.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

TikTok short video media reconstructs the media tools and communication environment of

international Chinese foreign exchange, and becomes the core position of cross-cultural narrative of Chinese education brand. At present, the global demand for Chinese learning continues to expand, TikTok Chinese education brand has formed a multi-account matrix, short video multi-modal narrative greatly reduces the threshold of Chinese learning, and promotes the folk dissemination of Chinese culture. However, there are four core shortcomings in the overall narrative of the industry: audience alienation caused by one-way standard narrative perspective, cultural discount caused by shallow homogenization of cultural symbols, lack of localized narrative, and lack of two-way interactive narrative mechanism, which restrict the brand of Chinese education from "flow communication" to deep cross-cultural communication.

Supported by cross-cultural narrative theory and high-low context theory, Chinese education brand needs to optimize narrative strategies from four aspects: transforming the narrative perspective of two-way equal dialogue, deepening the localization translation of Chinese culture in different levels, building a national localized focus narrative system, and improving the interactive narrative mechanism of the whole link. Through the adjustment of narrative mode, the brand of short video Chinese education can break through the barriers of cross-cultural communication, take into account the core functions of language teaching and the mission of foreign cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, and enhance the overall effectiveness of Chinese international communication. This study also confirms that the iteration of media tools and the change of foreign exchange environment will change the logic of Chinese international education communication from the bottom, and the adjustment of narrative strategy is the core path to adapt to media change and enhance communication power.

In the long run, the cross-cultural narrative of Chinese education brand on short video platform will continue to develop in the direction of localization, two-way and intellectualization, and become an important folk communication force to promote the high-quality development of international Chinese education and build a community of human destiny.

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