International Communication Strategies of Chinese ICH from the Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Against the backdrop of in-depth globalization and the rise of cultural mutual learning, the international communication of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has become a key vehicle for enhancing China's cultural soft power and engaging in global cultural dialogue. However, in cross-cultural contexts, this communication faces structural dilemmas at multiple levels. From a cross-cultural perspective, this study proposes targeted solutions to address these dilemmas. The ultimate goal is to promote the transformation of China's ICH international communication from "symbolic display" to "meaning sharing" and from "cultural output" to "value resonance", thereby enhancing the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication and advancing the global recognition of China's ICH.

Keywords: ICH, international communication, interactive mechanism, effect evaluation

Introduction

In the contemporary context where globalization advances in depth and cultural mutual learning has become a human consensus, cultural soft power has emerged as a core component of a country's comprehensive national strength and a crucial measure of its international discourse power. As a living carrier of the cultural genes of the Chinese nation, the fundamental significance of the international communication of China's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) lies in transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. This allows lifestyles, craftsmanship, and traditions that embody oriental wisdom and aesthetics to be recognized and appreciated by a broader global audience. With the systematic advancement of ICH protection and inheritance efforts in China, the vitality of these intangible cultural heritages has been effectively sustained within the country. However, in the cross-cultural context of international communication, a key issue in enhancing the influence of Chinese culture and engaging in global cultural dialogue is how to go beyond the traditional paradigm of symbolic display and one-way output, break through cognitive barriers and meaning dissipation, and achieve in-depth communication effectiveness that shifts from "cultural output" to "value resonance". Therefore, based on a cross-cultural communication perspective, this study aims to systematically analyze the problems in current communication practices and explore effective strategic adjustments. The goal

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is to promote the in-depth transformation of China's ICH in the international arena from formal communication to meaning sharing, thereby truly enhancing its cultural influence and communication efficiency.

Cross-Cultural Dilemmas in the International Communication of China's ICH

In the field of cross-cultural communication, the international dissemination of China's intangible cultural heritage is not a simple migration of cultural symbols, but a process of collision and interaction between different civilizational systems, values, and cognitive models. Affected by multiple factors such as cultural differences, communication mechanisms, and audience perceptions, the current international communication of China's ICH faces numerous structural dilemmas. These dilemmas not only restrict the improvement of communication effects, but also hinder the cross-contextual transmission of the cultural connotations of ICH and the formation of value resonance.

Cultural Cognition Level: Contextual Deficiency and Meaning Dissipation

Cultural context serves as the core carrier for intangible cultural heritage to convey meaning, and the phenomenon of contextual disruption in cross-cultural communication directly leads to the dissipation of meaning regarding the cultural connotations of ICH. According to Edward T. Hall's (1976) high-context and low-context culture theory, China, as a typical high-context culture, embeds the cultural significance of its ICH within implicit contexts such as historical traditions, community customs, and emotional experiences, rather than presenting it directly through explicit language or symbols. For instance, the emotional and narrative meanings embodied in traditional performances can only be fully interpreted when combined with specific historical backgrounds and customs; these implicit connotations are hardly perceptible to cross-cultural audiences through superficial displays.

However, in current practices of international communication of ICH, most communication activities remain at the level of symbolic display and fail to construct an interpretive context suitable for audiences from low-context cultures. On one hand, communication content tends to focus on the external forms of ICH, while neglecting systematic explanations of its historical origins, cultural implications, and contemporary value. This reduces ICH to a context-free cultural spectacle, where cross-cultural audiences can only perceive its aesthetic value but cannot grasp its deeper cultural meanings. On the other hand, although some communication content attempts to explain cultural connotations, it is constrained by communicators' insufficient cross-cultural awareness, failing to translate the cultural logic of ICH into a universal cultural language understandable to international audiences. Instead, inappropriate cultural encoding gives rise to cognitive biases. For example, certain rituals in traditional folk customs are oversimplified as mystical symbols, or the inheritance model of traditional craftsmanship is misinterpreted as backward manual production. Such decontextualized interpretations not only distort the cultural essence of ICH but also exacerbate the cognitive gap between cross-cultural audiences and ICH.

Communication Mechanism Level: Discourse Imbalance and Channel Monotony

The effectiveness of cross-cultural communication relies on a interactive communication mechanism. However, the current international communication of China's intangible cultural heritage still faces the dual

dilemmas of discourse imbalance and channel singularity, resulting in a one-dimensional output characteristic in the communication process, which makes it difficult to form effective cultural dialogue.

In terms of communication discourse, there exists a tendency toward "ethnocentrism" in the current international communication of ICH, failing to construct a dialogical discourse system suitable for cross-cultural communication. On one hand, the communication discourse mostly starts from a Chinese cultural perspective, neglecting adaptation to the cognitive habits and acceptance psychology of cross-cultural audiences. For example, a large number of professional terms or culture-specific concepts are used in ICH introductions without popularized translation, making it difficult for cross-cultural audiences to understand. On the other hand, the communication discourse focuses more on the historical value and traditional forms of ICH, failing to connect ICH with contemporary issues of global concern such as cultural diversity protection and sustainable development, thus struggling to arouse emotional resonance and active participation among cross-cultural audiences. This discourse imbalance has led the international communication of ICH into the predicament of monologue, unable to form effective cross-cultural dialogue.

In terms of communication channels, the current channels for international communication of ICH still exhibit characteristics of singularity and fragmentation, failing to build a multi-dimensional communication channel matrix. Among traditional communication channels, offline activities such as official-led cultural exhibitions and art performances, although authoritative, are limited by region, time, and cost, resulting in a narrow coverage and difficulty in forming sustained communication influence. Among emerging digital communication channels, although the scope of communication has been expanded through social media and short-video platforms, content production remains superficial and entertainment-oriented, lacking in-depth exploration of the connotations of craftsmanship and cultural value. Moreover, the communication content lacks systematic planning, making it difficult to form a synergistic effect between different platforms and different contents. This leads to scattered communication effects and fails to achieve in-depth penetration of ICH culture.

Audience Adaptation Level: Demand Mismatch and Participation Deficit

The core of cross-cultural communication lies in being audience-centered. However, the current international communication of China's intangible cultural heritage suffers from a significant mismatch with audience needs and a lack of effective mechanisms for audience participation. This disconnects communication activities from audience demands, making it difficult to stimulate audiences' active cognition and in-depth engagement.

In terms of adapting to audience needs, the current international communication of ICH tends toward homogenized dissemination, failing to achieve targeted communication based on differences in cultural backgrounds, cognitive levels, and needs among audiences from different regions and groups. On one hand, there is insufficient segmentation of audiences, as international audiences are treated as a homogeneous group, ignoring the diverse needs of audiences from different countries, age groups, and cultural circles. On the other hand, the exploration of audience needs remains limited to superficial demands such as aesthetic appreciation and curiosity, while neglecting deeper needs like cultural learning, emotional resonance, and participatory

creation. This results in communication content that fails to satisfy audiences' desire for in-depth understanding of ICH culture, thereby reducing audience engagement and loyalty.

In terms of audience participation mechanisms, the current international communication of ICH still prioritizes passive reception, lacking interactive mechanisms to stimulate active audience involvement. This makes it difficult for audiences to transition from bystanders to participants and communicators. On one hand, offline communication activities are mostly exhibitions and performances, where audiences can only passively receive information through watching and listening, with a lack of interactive sessions such as hands-on experiences and cultural co-creation—making it hard to form deep emotional experiences and lasting memories. On the other hand, although online communication platforms offer interactive functions, such interactions are mostly shallow, limited to actions like liking and commenting, without creating scenarios for in-depth participation. For example, there is a lack of features such as online teaching of ICH craftsmanship, cultural creative co-creation, and community exchanges, which prevents audiences from deeply engaging in the inheritance and dissemination of ICH. This deficit in participation not only reduces audiences' sense of identity and belonging to ICH but also misses opportunities to leverage audience power for the secondary dissemination of ICH.

Effect Evaluation Level: Lack of a System and Ambiguity of Standards

A scientific evaluation of communication effects is crucial for optimizing communication strategies and improving communication quality. However, the current international communication of China's intangible cultural heritage lacks a systematic cross-cultural communication effect evaluation system, with ambiguous evaluation standards and a single evaluation dimension. This makes it impossible to accurately identify problems in communication or provide effective feedback for optimizing communication strategies.

In terms of the evaluation system, current assessments of ICH's international communication effects are dominated by quantitative indicators, lacking support from qualitative indicators and failing to form a full-chain evaluation framework covering communication processes, communication effects, and cultural impacts. On one hand, evaluation indicators focus on superficial effects of communication, such as quantitative data like exhibition attendance, short-video views, and social media discussion volume. While these data can reflect the scope of communication, they cannot measure audiences' understanding of ICH's cultural connotations, emotional recognition, or behavioral transformation. On the other hand, evaluation content neglects tracking of long-term effects, focusing more on the short-term results of individual communication activities rather than the long-term impact of ICH on cross-cultural audiences' perceptions-such as whether ICH has become a key symbol in audiences' understanding of Chinese culture or whether it has promoted shifts in their overall perception of Chinese culture. This short-term, superficial evaluation fails to fully reflect the actual effects of ICH's international communication.

In terms of evaluation standards, there is a lack of standardized evaluation criteria adapted to cross-cultural scenarios, resulting in strong subjectivity and arbitrariness in the evaluation process. On one hand, due to differences in cognitive models and values among audiences from different cultural backgrounds, there is no unified reference standard for judging ICH communication effects. For example, content deemed effective communication in one cultural context may underperform in another due to cultural differences, yet current

evaluations fail to fully consider such disparities, relying instead on a single standard to measure effects across different regions. On the other hand, evaluators are mostly communicators themselves, lacking participation from third-party evaluation institutions and cross-cultural audiences. This makes evaluation results vulnerable to self-identity bias, failing to objectively reflect problems in communication. Such a lack of evaluation system plunges ICH's international communication into a state of blindness, preventing timely strategy optimization based on communication effects and leading to waste of communication resources and low communication efficiency.

Constructing Cross-Cultural Strategies for the International Communication of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage

Reconstructing Interpretive Contexts

To address the core issue of meaning dissipation caused by contextual deficiency in ICH communication, we must focus on cultural translation to reconstruct an interpretive context adapted to cross-cultural audiences. This involves transforming the implicit cultural connotations of ICH into perceptible and understandable communication content, achieving a shift from symbol display to meaning transmission.

Drawing on Edward T. Hall's high-context and low-context culture theory, we can construct a dual-context narrative framework of "preserving local context + adapting to international context". On one hand, we should retain the core cultural genes of ICH, such as the essential processes of traditional craftsmanship and the core symbols of folk rituals, to avoid alienating their cultural essence. On the other hand, ICH narratives should be connected to shared contexts familiar to international audiences. For example, when communicating traditional textile, we can both showcase the traditional techniques of tie-dyeing and kesi (silk tapestry) and link them to globally concerned contemporary issues like sustainable fashion and innovations in eco-friendly materials. This narrative logic of "traditional craftsmanship + contemporary value" lowers the threshold for cultural cognition. Meanwhile, we should reduce reliance on grand historical narratives and increase the proportion of individual stories—such as exploring the growth experiences and technical innovation stories of ICH inheritors. By connecting with cross-cultural audiences through human emotions, we can dissolve cultural barriers through universally shared emotional experiences.

To tackle the problem of suspended cultural symbols, we need to establish a hierarchical translation system covering surface symbols, intermediate techniques, and deep-seated values. At the surface symbol level, culturally specific symbols like "loong and phoenixes" or "the Eight Trigrams" should be interpreted through "visualization + contextualization". For instance, when communicating ICH costumes, dynamic diagrams can be used to annotate the historical origins of patterns and supplement cultural comparisons with Western griffin symbols to help audiences build cognitive connections. At the intermediate technique level, an approach of "immersive demonstration + popularized interpretation" should be adopted—for example, using 3D animations to disassemble the joining logic of traditional mortise-and-tenon craftsmanship, replacing professional terminology with phrases like "structural wisdom without nails" to reduce the difficulty of understanding techniques. At the deep-seated value level, we should extract the alignment between ICH and universal human values: interpreting solar term culture in traditional agricultural ICH as ecological wisdom of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, and linking craftsman spirit in traditional craftsmanship to the

professional ethics of striving for excellence. Through such international expression of cultural values, we can arouse value recognition among cross-cultural audiences.

Optimizing the Interactive Mechanism

To address the issues of one-way output caused by discourse imbalance and scattered communication due to singular channels, a dual approach of discourse reconstruction and channel integration is required. This involves building a two-way communication mechanism featuring multi-subject collaboration and online-offline linkage, thereby transforming the international communication of intangible cultural heritage from talking to oneself to cultural dialogue.

Break away from the government-dominated model and establish a multi-stakeholder discourse collaboration mechanism of "government guidance + inheritors as main actors + cultural translators as enablers". At the government level, take on the role of "framework builder": formulate plans for ICH international communication, establish international exchange platforms to provide policy and resource support for communication, and shift from propaganda-style discourse to service-oriented discourse. At the inheritor level, strengthen "first-person narration": encourage inheritors to share daily skill practice and inheritance stories via overseas social media, replacing official standardized interpretations with authentic, vivid individual voices to enhance the appeal of the discourse. At the cultural translator level, engage a translation team consisting of "cross-cultural communication scholars + international opinion leaders + local cultural bloggers" to conduct re-encoding of ICH discourse. For example, invite overseas fashion bloggers to participate in ICH costume design and use their perspectives to interpret the aesthetic value of ICH patterns; or have cross-cultural scholars compile "ICH cultural interpretation manuals" to convert professional terminology into popular expressions, achieving effective connection between official discourse, folk discourse, and international discourse.

In response to the need to shift from fragmented communication to systematic communication, integrate traditional channels and emerging digital channels to build a three-dimensional channel matrix. For offline channels, move beyond the one-off exhibition model to create immersive experience spaces: set up ICH interactive workshops in overseas cultural centers, allowing audiences to participate in hands-on creation of ICH crafts such as paper-cutting and pottery, and deepen their understanding through "tactile experience + skill practice". Meanwhile, promote the integration of ICH with local cultural scenes overseas to enhance communication penetration by leveraging local contexts. For online channels, realize "platform feature adaptation + hierarchical content communication": for short-video platforms like TikTok, produce 15-second highlight clips of ICH skills to attract young audiences with "visual spectacle + lightweight narration"; for long-video platforms like YouTube, launch in-depth ICH documentaries to systematically interpret the historical origins and contemporary innovations of ICH; for visual platforms like Instagram, initiate ICH cultural and creative check-in challenges to encourage audiences to share ICH-related life scenarios and achieve secondary communication of ICH through user-generated content. In addition, build an international ICH digital platform to integrate multilingual ICH resources, providing a one-stop access point for global audiences to obtain information and interact, and solving the problem of fragmented channels.

Empowering Participatory Communication

To address the issues of homogenized audience needs and weak participation mechanisms, it is necessary to build a communication system characterized by precision in demand matching and in-depth audience engagement, with targeted communication as the foundation and participatory design as the core. This system will facilitate the transformation of audiences from passive recipients to active communicators.

Based on diversified audience needs, a targeted communication model of audience profiling-content customization-channel matching should be established. From a regional perspective, for audiences in developed European and American countries, the focus should be on communicating the integration of ICH with contemporary artistic innovation and high-end cultural and creative design to align with their demand for cultural creativity. For audiences in developing countries along the Belt and Road, emphasis should be placed on the connection between ICH and skill-based poverty alleviation and improvement of people's livelihood to cater to their focus on practical value. From a group perspective, for teenage audiences, develop ICH digital games and ICH animated shorts to stimulate interest through entertaining experiences; for professional audiences, host international academic forums on ICH and ICH design workshops to provide in-depth content featuring skill exchanges and academic discussions. Meanwhile, establish an audience demand feedback mechanism to collect real-time audience needs through overseas social media questionnaires and interviews at offline experience activities, dynamically adjusting communication content to avoid demand mismatch caused by homogenized communication.

With audience empowerment at its core, design a full-chain participation mechanism covering cognition, experience, creation, communication. In the cognition phase, launch online ICH courses, inviting inheritors to conduct zero-based skill training via live-streaming platforms, such as online paper-cutting courses and introductory pottery lessons, allowing audiences to deepen their understanding through learning participation. In the experience phase, create ICH cultural co-creation projects. In the communication phase, establish an ICH Communication Ambassador Program to recruit overseas audiences interested in ICH, provide them with ICH communication training and material support, and encourage them to share their ICH experiences through personal social accounts, expanding influence through acquaintance communication. Through full-chain participation from cognition to communication, audiences' sense of identity and belonging to ICH will be enhanced, forming a positive cycle of "communicators-audiences-re-communicators".

Improving the Cross-Cultural Evaluation System

To address the issues of a singular evaluation system and vague standards, it is necessary to construct a cross-cultural communication effect evaluation system that integrates quantitative and qualitative measures, covers short-term and long-term impacts, and involves multiple subjects. This system will provide a scientific basis for optimizing communication strategies and realizing closed-loop management of ICH communication.

Breaking through the limitations of single quantitative indicators, we should establish a four-dimensional evaluation index system: communication coverage, cognitive depth, emotional identification, and behavioral transformation. In the dimension of communication coverage, while retaining quantitative indicators such as exhibition attendance and short-video views, we should add indicators like channel penetration rate and regional coverage to comprehensively measure the scope of communication. In the dimension of cognitive

depth, qualitative data should be collected through online questionnaires and in-depth interviews to assess the depth of audiences' understanding of ICH cultural connotations. In the dimension of emotional identification, sentiment analysis should be introduced to judge audiences' emotional attitudes toward ICH through text analysis of social media comments and interview content. In the dimension of behavioral transformation, audiences' subsequent behaviors should be tracked. The combination of quantitative data and qualitative analysis will avoid superficial evaluations.

To tackle the problem of vague evaluation standards, on one hand, we should establish a cultural adaptability adjustment mechanism and formulate differentiated evaluation standards based on different cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, we should introduce a multi-subject evaluation mechanism to break the limitation of self-evaluation by communicators, and form an evaluation team consisting of third-party evaluation institutions, cross-cultural scholars, and representatives of overseas audiences. Third-party institutions will be responsible for data collection and quantitative analysis to ensure the objectivity of the evaluation; cross-cultural scholars will interpret the evaluation results from a theoretical perspective and analyze the impact of cultural differences on communication effects; representatives of overseas audiences will directly feedback their cognitive experiences and provide first-hand demand suggestions. Meanwhile, a long-term tracking mechanism should be established to monitor the long-term changes in audiences' perception of ICH, avoiding strategy deviations caused by short-term evaluations.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of globalization and cultural mutual learning, the international communication of China's intangible cultural heritage serves as a crucial means to enhance the influence of Chinese culture and engage in global cultural dialogue. Notably, this international communication of China's ICH is not only a way to participate in global cultural dialogue, but also a key approach to promoting the protection of cultural diversity. It is essential to abandon the ethnocentric communication mindset and, while preserving cultural genes, identify the points of value alignment between ICH and global audiences.

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