

# Research on the International Communication Path of Intangible Cultural Heritage Short Videos of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal

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As a World Cultural Heritage site, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal has rich intangible cultural heritage (ICH) along its route. In the era of globalization and media convergence, using short videos to promote the canal's ICH globally is important for internationalizing Chinese culture. This study uses cross-cultural communication theory, case analysis, and data research to examine the current status of short video dissemination of the canal's ICH. It identifies core challenges in narrative techniques and cultural translation, and proposes a systematic optimization framework with five dimensions including content and platform. The findings offer both theoretical insights and practical guidance for the international promotion of ICH.

*Keywords:* Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, intangible cultural heritage, short video, international communication

The Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal is a monumental water conservancy project and cultural heritage corridor. Its intangible legacy embodies Chinese civilization and national identity. In the digital age, short videos have transformed cultural dissemination, offering opportunities for heritage revitalization and global outreach. The key challenge is overcoming cultural barriers to promote the canal's heritage internationally through short video platforms. This paper explores effective international communication strategies to address this issue innovatively.

## Current Status of Grand Canal ICH Short Video Communication

Short video platforms, including domestic ones like TikTok, Kuaishou, Bilibili, and international versions, have become central to revitalizing and disseminating the canal's intangible cultural heritage. Governments, cultural institutions, inheritors, and grassroots creators jointly participate, forming a dissemination pattern of "official matrix + museum/attraction content + key opinion leader /grassroots creativity". Some regions generate short-term communication hotspots through theme planning, cultural tourism events, and cultural product promotions. Overall, these short videos exhibit the following characteristics.

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**Communication Entities: Initial Establishment of a Diversified Matrix**

The dissemination of short videos on the intangible cultural heritage of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal is diversified, forming a three-tier structure of government-led, institutional participation, and individual creation. Government and cultural tourism departments are the primary drivers, achieving strong dissemination through themed events and concentrated releases. For example, in 2023, Hebei's cultural tourism department launched a project producing 61 short videos on over 20 platforms, with 45 million views, establishing an official matrix model. Cultural institutions, museums, and universities serve as professional forces, such as the Yangzhou China Grand Canal Museum's online exhibitions and series showcasing silk weaving and woodblock printing through immersive visuals. Ordinary creators and KOLs significantly boost public attention, with platforms like Bilibili and TikTok featuring cultural UP creators and craftsmanship enthusiasts, promoting intangible heritage through urban exploration, experiential learning, and hands-on teaching.

**Content Form: The Combination of Documentary and Entertainment**

Short videos on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal show convergent development, blending documentary, entertainment, and interaction. Early videos focused on objective introductions to craftsmanship, while current works use emotional storytelling to engage viewers. For example, Wuxi's "Huishan Clay Figure" series ties characters to urban life, drawing youth to interactive events. Hangzhou's "Silk Production" uses pop music and fast editing to refresh traditional crafts. Through livestreams, comments, and educational content, creators boost engagement, turning ICH from static displays into dynamic experiences that broaden its influence.

**Communication Channels: Dual-Track Parallelism at Home and Abroad**

The dissemination of canal intangible cultural heritage short videos follows a matrix model, characterized by a dual-line structure of "domestic main platform + international outreach". Domestically, platforms like TikTok, Kuaishou, and Bilibili—with their advanced algorithms, large user bases, and high interactivity—host most content. Local cultural and tourism institutions and museums have established a broad, actively updated content ecosystem through official account matrices.

Internationally, TikTok and YouTube are the primary platforms. Some institutions, such as the Yangzhou Grand Canal Museum, maintain English-language accounts and publish multilingual content like the "Canal Stories" series. However, international reach remains limited compared to domestic impact. While certain events, like the "Tonghang" incident in Cangzhou, gained temporary visibility through news and reposted videos, sustained international operations are lacking. Overall, international channels are still underdeveloped, often relying on direct translations without localization or long-term strategy, resulting in low overseas audience engagement.

**Audience: Younger and More Segmented**

Short video platforms like TikTok are popular among users aged 18-35. Intangible cultural heritage videos of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal spread through interest-based circles. The "Craftsmanship Circle" highlights skill aesthetics, the "Ancient Style Culture Circle" focuses on traditional clothing and lifestyle, and the "Cultural Tourism Experience Circle" shares travel vlogs about canal cities.

Although tags like #Chinese Handicraft and #Canal Culture reached over 200 million views in 2024, canal-related content made up only 3% of total views, showing limited overseas understanding of the culture. To stand out, these short videos need strong storytelling and visuals that appeal to youth and algorithm preferences.

### **Communication Effect: Remarkable Domestic Success But Limited International Expansion**

The short video dissemination of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal intangible cultural heritage has achieved domestic success but faces international limitations. Communication depends on event nodes, lacking sustained impact due to insufficient follow-up content. Most videos are in Chinese with direct English translations, failing to convey cultural context. The content ecosystem lacks long-term mechanisms, relying on playback and likes instead of comprehensive metrics like cross-lingual dissemination rates and cultural comprehension. Overall, international dissemination remains weak, limited in sustainability and cultural interpretation.

### **Existing Problems and Root Causes in International Communication**

Although the short video communication of Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal intangible cultural heritage presents a trend of diversified integration, its international communication power and cultural influence are still weak. At present, it is mainly limited to domestic scope, and its sustainability, influence, and cultural interpretation power at the international level are relatively insufficient.

#### **Language Narrative Barriers: Literal Translation and Introverted Perspectives**

Currently, short videos on the intangible cultural heritage of the Grand Canal suffer from linguistic monotony and inward-focused narratives in international dissemination. Most use Chinese as the primary language, with English subtitles that are often literal or machine-translated, neglecting the cultural background of global audiences. For example, terms like “sacred bag making” are translated without cultural explanation, hindering comprehension. On TikTok in 2024, multilingual subtitles accounted for only about 18% of “China handicraft” videos, with canal-related content below 3%. Although cities like Yangzhou and Wuxi have international accounts, most posts still use Chinese with English subtitles and see engagement rates under 10% of domestic levels. Poor language adaptation and narrative alignment hinder effective cross-cultural communication.

Narratively, many videos focus on “local showcases” or official demonstrations of craft techniques rather than storytelling. This fails to emotionally connect with international viewers, who prefer content with character development, plot, and emotional engagement. Canal heritage videos often remain introductory, lacking cross-cultural appeal.

Additionally, there is a lack of cultural translation competence. Literal translation leaves symbols like “auspicious dragon and phoenix” unexplained. Content is fragmented, omitting historical and spiritual context, and universal themes like “family inheritance” are underdeveloped. For instance, the Wuxi Huishan Clay Figure video has over 20 million domestic views but under 10,000 on TikTok. Domestic versions emphasize local pride, but international audiences lack the context to connect. In contrast, South Korean heritage videos like “Hanji Craft” and “Kimchi Making” succeed by highlighting family traditions and national memory. Therefore, the dissemination of Grand Canal heritage should shift from showcasing to storytelling, using narrative translation and emotional expression to achieve effective cultural transcreation.

#### **Platform Algorithm Mismatch: Operational Thinking and Ecosystem Differences**

The spread of short videos relies on platform algorithms and content ecosystems. Significant differences exist between domestic and international platforms in terms of algorithms and user profiles. However, most canal intangible cultural heritage videos are produced from a domestic perspective and released on overseas platforms, limiting their global reach.

Algorithm mismatch is an issue. TikTok's algorithm prioritizes user feedback and local hashtags. Without English titles, regional tags, or engagement data, videos struggle to gain traction. Hashtags like "Grand Canal Culture" are underused, reducing visibility.

There is a lack of international operational expertise. Many institutions treat their TikTok accounts as secondary channels without real-time interaction. For example, the Yangzhou Grand Canal Museum's TikTok has only 5,000 followers, compared to over 1 million on Douyin. In contrast, Thailand's Bangkok Heritage Crafts maintains daily updates and interactions, achieving a 15% engagement rate.

Account ecosystems are fragmented. Cities along the Canal operate independently without a unified overseas strategy. Even initiatives like Beautiful China—Light of the Canal lack a consistently updated central account, leading to repetitive content, audience overlap, and weak branding.

### **Insufficient Resource Coordination Efficiency: Regional Imbalance and Fragmented Communication**

Cities along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal show major disparities in economic development, cultural industries, and digital communication, affecting the quality and global reach of their short videos. Upstream cities like Beijing and Tianjin benefit from strong resources and networks, while midstream and downstream cities such as Suqian and Cangzhou struggle with limited funds and expertise, leading to a shortage of professional teams. Small and medium-sized cultural heritage holders often lack new media skills, hindering high-quality video production. Yangzhou has built a mature system using museum and university resources, whereas Dezhou and Suqian depend on short-term projects with uneven content. The absence of resource-sharing mechanisms results in fragmented videos that fail to convey the canal's full value and history, limiting international appreciation.

### **Evaluation System Bias: Emphasizing Traffic Over Cultural Influence**

Currently, short video dissemination is primarily evaluated using metrics such as views, likes, and shares. While this quantitative approach supports short-term reach expansion, it often leads to homogenized and superficial content. For instance, some intangible cultural heritage videos emphasize visual spectacle and festival scenes—like "Canal Food Festivals" or "Water Performances"—while overlooking cultural depth and preservation. Such entertainment-focused edits attract clicks but reduce educational value. Moreover, there is a lack of professional evaluation mechanisms for international dissemination, including overseas completion rates, cross-language engagement, and cultural understanding. Insufficient audience and opinion research makes it difficult to assess communication effectiveness, leading to inefficient resource allocation in overseas efforts.

### **Optimization Path: Constructing a "Five-Dimensional" New Communication Structure**

To achieve the transformation of Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal's intangible cultural heritage short videos from "domestic heat" to "international access", a systematic optimization path must be developed across content, platform, mechanism, talent, and evaluation.

#### **Content Dimensions: Deepening Narratives and Enhancing Translation**

**Building a multilingual content production mechanism.** International communication must overcome language barriers. Intangible cultural heritage short videos should be developed in multilingual versions (at least Chinese and English), and localized into Spanish, Arabic, and other regional languages. Forming "multilingual subtitle task forces" within local heritage projects—where cultural advisors collaborate with foreign language creators—can prevent mechanical translation. For example, Yangzhou Grand Canal Museum's 2024 "Canal

Culture Online” project involved international students in translation, increasing YouTube video completion rates by 35%.

**Promoting cultural “Recreation”.** The dissemination of intangible cultural heritage should go beyond symbolic displays, achieving cultural re-creation through narrative. By blending traditional crafts with universal themes like “the art of time”, “family memories”, and “human-nature harmony”, we can bridge cultural gaps via emotional resonance. For example, South Korea’s Hanji Craft videos use stories of grandparents and grandchildren to showcase generational inheritance, resonating globally. The Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal could adopt this “character-driven” approach, focusing on artisans’ life narratives.

**Storytelling and visual narration.** Short videos should emphasize narrative progression and visual impact, integrating intangible cultural heritage into storytelling frameworks (like conflict-twist-resolution using micro-documentary techniques). For example, the Wuxi clay sculpture tradition could begin with preserving endangered craftsmanship and conclude with global recognition, creating emotional resonance. Production should incorporate aerial shots, time-lapse photography, and close-ups to highlight the craft’s aesthetic and spatial dimensions.

### **Platform Dimension: Building a Matrix for Precise Adaptation**

**Establishing the “International Dissemination Network for Canal Intangible Cultural Heritage”.** Currently, regions along the canal operate independently without unified branding. It is recommended that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism coordinate planning, with local governments collaborating to establish an official “Grand Canal Heritage” international communication matrix. This includes a TikTok main account for English content, extended platforms on YouTube and Instagram, and partnerships with overseas Chinese communities and cultural centers. Provincial sub-accounts like “Grand Canal—Jiangsu” and “Grand Canal—Zhejiang” will maintain a unified visual and content style.

**Optimizing algorithm labels and data structures.** On platforms like TikTok, the recommendation algorithm is highly dependent on hashtags. To enhance international visibility, it is crucial to actively incorporate high-frequency international hashtags, such as #Heritage, #Craftsmanship, #CanalCulture, #ChineseTradition, etc. Meanwhile, video titles should adopt a concise bilingual structure, for example: “Silk Weaving on the Grand Canal | 运河上的丝织艺术”. According to data comparisons, videos using precise hashtags can achieve an average exposure increase of over 50% and a completion rate rise of approximately 20%.

**Introducing social interaction mechanisms.** International users value interaction. TikTok boosts community vitality through live streams, Q&A, and challenges. For example, the Hangzhou Silk Museum collaborated with British designers on the #SilkChallenge, encouraging overseas users to share silk-inspired content. It attracted over 8 million views quickly, demonstrating cross-cultural co-creation potential.

### **Mechanism Dimension: Promoting Coordination and Long-term Operation**

**Establishing a collaborative framework of government, institutions, and creators.** An “International Communication Alliance for Canal Intangible Cultural Heritage” should be established at the national level, jointly formed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, cultural and tourism departments of provinces and municipalities along the canal, museums, and universities, to create a mechanism for resource co-construction and content sharing. For instance, in terms of functional design, the following factors should be emphasized: a unified international communication theme and visual identity; provision of a centralized resource library (images,

videos, music, copywriting templates); and regular cross-regional content. This would help form annual thematic communication activities (such as the "Canal Culture International Season"), creating sustained topic.

**Promoting content industrialization and branding.** Short video dissemination and cultural industries combine to advance the “intangible cultural heritage + cultural innovation + e-commerce” model, enabling monetization and promotion through product-embedded videos. For instance, Hangzhou’s “West Lake Silk Umbrella” achieved an 8% conversion rate on TikTok, and expanding to TikTok Shop creates an international loop for communication and revenue.

**Establishing a long-term content update mechanism.** To avoid "project driven" and "event driven" dissemination, an annual content plan should be developed. Monthly fixed theme releases, such as "Beauty of Craftsmanship", "Charm of Festivals", and "Canal Stories". Establish a "content calendar" system, with materials submitted uniformly by various regions and regularly pushed by the central platform.

### **Talent Dimension: Cultivating Multi-functional Creative Subjects**

**Cultivating “Intangible Cultural Heritage + New Media” compound talents.** Currently, cities along the route face a structural imbalance. Some understand intangible heritage but lack new media skills, while others know communication but lack cultural expertise. Universities should offer courses like “Digital Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage” to cultivate integrated talents. Establishing a “Training Base for International Dissemination of Canal Intangible Heritage” at institutions like China Media University is recommended.

**Introducing international creators to co-create.** To enhance video localization and global empathy, Wuxi Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism partnered with UK-based blogger Canal Crafts in 2024, producing short films that showcased canal crafts through international perspectives. Each video garnered over 2 million views. The bureau proposed establishing a “Canal Culture Overseas Creator Program” to invite global influencers for collaborative content creation and cross-cultural co-creation.

**Activating the potential of inheritors’ self-media.** Encourage inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to become content creators themselves. Through short video training, equipment support, and account operation guidance, inheritors can "tell their own stories," enhancing authenticity and appeal. Zhang Guosheng, an inheritor of Yangzhou block printing, opened a personal Douyin account named "the Engraver of the Canal," where he showcases this intangible cultural heritage through his daily handcrafting activities. He has garnered over 300,000 followers, and his content has been shared more than 50,000 times on overseas platforms

### **Evaluation Dimension: Establishing a Comprehensive Benefit Evaluation System**

**Turning to “Culture-Oriented Influence”.** We will establish a multi-dimensional evaluation system that incorporates cultural comprehension cross-language dissemination rate, user engagement, and emotional resonance, moving beyond reliance on mere view counts. The framework includes: content metrics (multilingual coverage, thematic innovation index); dissemination metrics (international completion rate, cross-language comment ratio); impact metrics (global user cultural comprehension survey); and industry metrics (cultural innovation conversion rate and brand exposure).

**Building a data monitoring and public opinion analysis system.** By leveraging big data tools, we can track the dissemination paths, comment sentiments, and audience profiles of short videos on international platforms. A 2024 semantic analysis by Beijing Normal University on “Canal Culture Short Videos” showed that overseas comments frequently included keywords like “beautiful”, “handmade”, and “amazing”, while terms

such as “meaning” and “history” accounted for less than 5%. This indicates a stronger audience focus on visual aspects. Therefore, content narratives should balance visual presentation with cultural interpretation.

In conclusion, this study proposes a “trinity strategic model” for the international dissemination of short videos featuring the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal’s intangible cultural heritage.

The global spread of Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal intangible cultural heritage short videos will shift from “single-point breakthrough” to “systematic collaborative resonance”, creating synergy in content, technology, organization, and culture. Optimization should be guided by “cultural confidence and global empathy”, establishing a new paradigm of multilingual expression, matrix dissemination, and collaborative governance. Future efforts will not only “tell China’s stories” but also “co-create global cultural narratives”—through cross-cultural storytelling, cross-platform collaboration, and cross-entity cooperation, transforming the canal’s heritage from a local legacy into a symbol of global cultural exchange.

Table 1  
*Trinity Model Table for International Communication of Short Videos on Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal*

Dimension	Core tasks	Main strategy	Expected goal
Narrative level	Multilingual reconstruction and emotional expression	Build a multilingual content production line and strengthen the narrative	Enhance international audience understanding and resonance
Platform level	Global matrix and algorithm adaptation	Establish the “Grand Canal Heritage” matrix and optimize the tag system	Expand international exposure and targeted communication
Ecological level	Coordination mechanism and talent support	Establish communication alliances, train versatile talents, and bring in international creators	Building a sustainable international communication ecosystem

Epilogue

The international dissemination of short videos showcasing the intangible cultural heritage of the Beijing- Hangzhou Grand Canal constitutes a systematic project integrating culture, media, technology, and management. This initiative not only promotes Chinese culture globally but also fosters dialogue between civilizations. Future development should be rooted in cultural confidence and global empathy, driving the canal’s heritage from a geographical concept to a cultural category through innovations in narrative reconstruction, platform cultivation, institutional coordination, talent development, and scientific evaluation. Only through such efforts can this ancient waterway regain vitality in the digital age, flowing into the world and illuminating the future.

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