

Research on Strategies for Enhancing the Ability of Chinese German Learners to Tell Chinese Stories Through Short Videos*

YU Ji-kun, BIAN Hong

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

In the age of new media, short videos play an increasingly important role in international cultural exchange. However, German learners often encounter challenges when producing and sharing short videos due to factors such as technology and language proficiency. Such challenges can affect the professionalism and attractiveness of the videos. This study focuses on German learners at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology. The aim of this study is to investigate students' experiences in producing short videos, identify issues through surveys and interviews, and concentrate on editing skills, language proficiency, and intercultural communication abilities. It proposes strategies for developing these skills and aims to provide insights for German and other foreign language learners in telling Chinese stories using short videos.

Keywords: short video, better presentation of Chinese stories, intercultural communication

1. Introduction

Since the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference in August 2013, Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance and contemporary significance of accurately presenting China's narrative, promoting China's voice and enhancing China's image in external communication. In Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, he stated: "We will collect and refine the defining symbols and best elements of Chinese culture and showcase them to the world. We will accelerate the development of China's discourse and narrative systems, better tell China's stories, make China's voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable" (Xi Jinping, 2022, p. 39). In the new media era, short videos are playing an increasingly important role in the exchange and mutual learning of cultures because they are informative and visually appealing. Chinese German learners also contribute to the exchange of Chinese and foreign cultures through the use of short videos. However, the use of short videos to tell Chinese stories poses challenges for some learners, including a lack of knowledge of editing techniques, inadequate language skills, and insufficient intercultural communication skills, resulting in limited video traffic and minimal dissemination effects. In order

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YU Ji-kun, a third-year student, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

BIAN Hong, lecturer, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

to offer solutions to these challenges, this paper uses a qualitative analysis method and provides tailor-made proposals for each problem.

2. Background

In the new media era, short video social media platforms, represented by Tiktok, YouTube, Facebook and others, have developed rapidly. They play an increasingly important role in cultural exchange and mutual learning. According to China Internet Network Information Center's (CNNIC) 52nd Statistical Report on China's Internet Development, the number of online video users reached 1.044 billion in June 2023. This is an indication that in the new era, short-form video platforms are prominent among various media methods and an indispensable communication platform.



Figure 1. 2018-2022 Short Video User Size and Usage.

“Since the emergence of short video platforms in 2016, it has become one of the best ways to showcase Chinese culture and other cultures to the world” (Liu, 2020, p. 41). This trend is closely related to short video’s characteristics as a communication medium: “low content production threshold, convenience, smart video distribution, networking, intuitive content presentation, interactivity” (Zang & Lu, 2019, p. 44). In addition, this trend has been supported and guided by external factors such as government policies. Since General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward the guiding ideology of “telling China’s story well, presenting a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China, and enhancing the country’s cultural soft power”, international mainstream social media platforms have seen an increase in China-related content. This content includes contemporary Chinese innovation, technology and social development, as well as history, tradition, cuisine, art. In addition, a variety of cultural competitions and projects have become important platforms for cultural exchange. For example, the “FLTRP-Guocai Cup” competition series has ignited the creative passion of a large number of foreign language learners and encouraged them to promote Chinese culture in innovative ways. German language learners use these platforms to showcase their professional expertise, which not only helps to introduce Chinese culture to Germans, but also promotes intercultural communication and breaks down cultural barriers. Furthermore,

compared to mainstream media, these short videos are mostly from a civilian perspective, which makes them closer to everyday life and more attractive.

3. Method

This study adopts a case study approach, selecting 22 students from the German Department of the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology who participated in the “FLTRP-Guocai Cup” International Communication Short Video Competition. During the data collection process, semi-structured face-to-face or online individual interviews were conducted. Using an open-ended questionnaire, topics such as motivation to produce, challenges and difficulties encountered during production, interaction with the audience and self-perception of their short videos were explored.

Interview content was recorded and documented following data collection. Qualitative analysis methods were then used to identify similarities and differences between students in short video production. Through this analysis, an in-depth understanding of the potential challenges Chinese German learners face when using short videos to tell Chinese stories was gained. This provides a theoretical and practical basis for further proposing strategies for skill development.

4. Difficulties and Challenges Encountered by Chinese-German Learners

Based on the survey interviews, the difficulties and challenges encountered by German learners in actual operations mainly include the following:

4.1 Lack of Inspiration in Material Selection

When using short video platforms to tell Chinese stories, it is important to select materials objectively. Many German learners tend to focus on portraying China as a country of greatness, resulting in videos with an overtly nationalistic tone. However, “foreign audiences often pay more attention to the diverse lives of ordinary people, and are particularly interested in folk customs and ways of life with ethnic characteristics” (Li, 2014, p. 53). To ensure comprehensibility and objectivity, it is important to start exploring Chinese stories from the grassroots level.

However, some Chinese cultural themes, such as the Spring Festival, the Great Wall and Kung Fu, have already been extensively covered by creators on short video platforms. This means that German learners may struggle to find innovative content. If the material selected is not innovative, viewers may feel fatigued. For the creation of high quality, culturally relevant videos, it is essential to have a thorough understanding and insight into Chinese culture. If German learners lack this understanding, they may struggle with selecting appropriate materials, resulting in unappealing and uninformative topics.

4.2 Lack of Proficiency in Short Video Editing Techniques

The adage “one minute on stage requires ten years of practice backstage” also applies to short video production. Even though the video lasts 3-5 minutes, editing can take several hours or more. For example, in the production of a short video about Confucius: Firstly, learners need to gather audiovisual materials related to Confucius, including video clips, audio clips, or images. However, learners may not know where to find this material, how to obtain suitable content and how to use it appropriately, which may require a significant amount of time. Firstly, learners should collect audio-visual materials related to Confucius, such as video clips, audio clips or pictures. However, learners may not know where to find this material, how to obtain suitable content and

how to use it appropriately. This may require a significant amount of time for searching and selecting appropriate content. Secondly, learners may not be familiar with how to use video editing software. Video editing tools usually have complex interfaces and functions, and learners need to learn basic operations such as importing media files, editing, adding effects, and audio. After mastering these basic operations, learners also need to plan the structure, theme and narrative of the video to ensure that the audience can easily understand the information conveyed. Finally, to enhance the quality of the video, students should add special effects, sound effects or other post-production elements. This includes the use of effects, sound effects or transition effects.

4.3 Lack of Foundation in Language Skills

“To achieve the goal of college students telling Chinese stories effectively in foreign languages, they need to possess four abilities: understanding of Chinese stories, language proficiency, intercultural communication skills, and international communication abilities” (Shi & Cheng, 2022, p. 95). German is a relatively difficult foreign language to master. Therefore, in order to tell Chinese stories effectively, German learners need to have higher language proficiency. For example, when learners produce short videos introducing the Chinese Spring Festival, they will encounter numerous proper nouns and Chinese-specific vocabulary that require translation. Learners must skillfully use various translation strategies and methods, such as literal translation, free translation, domestication and foreignization, to ensure that the translation retains the essence of the original while being understandable and acceptable to foreign audiences. Producing short videos that skillfully deal with various language issues is therefore a major challenge for learners of German.

4.4 Lack of Competence in Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication skills are also crucial in the process of using short videos to tell Chinese stories. “Students’ intercultural communication skills refer to their ability and level of practice in interacting with members from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds under certain cultural values” (Gao, 2016, p. 71). However, according to research by Xu Haining and other scholars in 2020, “students’ overall Intercultural pragmatic ability is still relatively low” (Xu, Tian, & Huang, 2020, p. 57).

Based on interviewing Chinese learners of German, the reasons for this include the following:

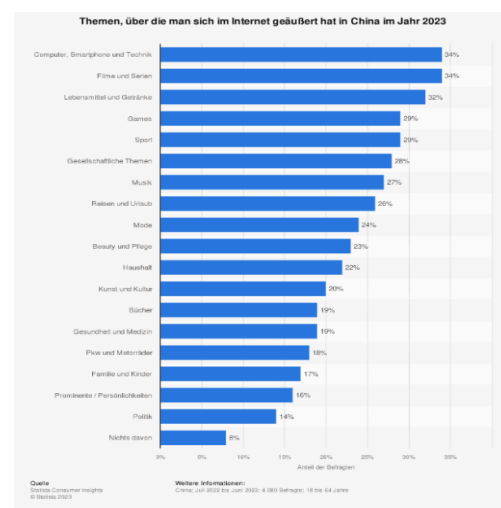
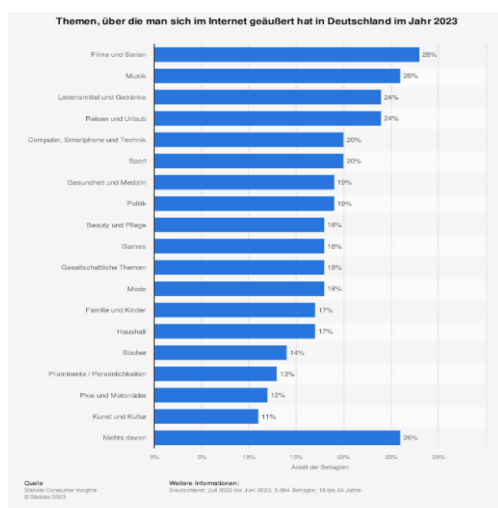


Figure 2. Topics Germans Like to Discuss on the Internet in 2023. Figure 3. Topics Chinese Like to Discuss on the Internet in 2023.

Firstly, cultural insensitivity. Chinese German learners may not be sensitive to the features, values and social customs of German culture. Figure 2¹ and Figure 3² show the topics that Germans and Chinese like to discuss on the internet in 2023. From a comparison of the two statistical charts, it is clear that there are significant differences in the topics that internet users in China and Germany are interested in discussing. For example, the most popular topics in China are related to science and digital products. In Germany, this topic ranks fifth. Due to the different cultural backgrounds, communication barriers may arise between the communicating sides, similar to the differences in communication topics. These include differences in mindsets, religious etiquette and lifestyles. Due to a lack of sensitivity to these differences, some German learners may encounter problems such as low traffic when engaging in intercultural communication activities on short video platforms, or even misunderstandings and ambiguities. It can happen that they do not understand the meaning of certain German words and therefore misuse these. For example, when translating “宣传部”, some learners translate it directly as “propaganda”, but in reality this word carries derogatory connotations associated with the Nazi Party in Germany. Another example is that in Chinese culture, it is usually considered rude to stare at someone, but in Germany, making eye contact during communication is an important means of communication, indicating interest in the content of the conversation. These communication failures resulting from a lack of cultural sensitivity are problems that Chinese German learners must try their best to avoid.

Second, insufficient cultural self-identity. In actual communication, studies have shown that learners may be more inclined to maintain links with their own culture than to actively integrate into the target culture. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as ‘cultural maintenance’ or ‘cultural insularity’ rather than ‘cultural assimilation’ or ‘cultural adaptation’. Learners may worry about losing their cultural identity in the process of integrating into the target culture, fear cultural conflict, or even lose important values and identities associated with their own culture. As a result, they may rely more on their own cultural habits rather than actively seek integration into the target culture. They may encounter prejudices or barriers from the target culture which make themselves feel unwelcome or marginalized. This may reinforce their attachment to their own culture rather than promoting target culture integration.

5. Solutions and Suggestions

5.1 Sparking Creative Inspiration

To overcome the challenge of finding inspiration for content creation, it is recommended to regularly organize creative workshops. These workshops should invite domain experts or teachers from relevant fields and focus on specific topics such as social issues, cultural phenomena, scientific discoveries, artistic works, or historical events. It is important to ensure that the selected topics are internationally relevant. Before the workshops, furnish students with pertinent resources and materials, such as articles, videos, reports, or expert opinions. During the workshops, group students into small teams to discuss and exchange their views, comprehension, and innovative perspectives on the topics. To ensure that the workshops are not reduced to mere

¹ Come from Statista Consumer Insights. From:
<https://de.statista.com/prognosen/1349019/china-themen-ueber-die-man-sich-im-internet-geaeussert-hat>

² Come from Statista Consumer Insights. From:
<https://de.statista.com/prognosen/999843/deutschland-themen-ueber-die-man-sich-im-internet-geaeussert-hat>

presentations, include creative thinking activities such as brainstorming, storyboarding, role-playing or scenario simulation, which will allow students to gain new inspiration in a more relaxed and enjoyable environment.

5.2 Enhancing Short Video Editing Skills

A multi-level course module should be established within the professional training program to comprehensively cultivate students' short video editing skills. The module should cover basic concepts and practical project applications. The short video editing skills training course module is shown in the table below:

Table 1
Curriculum Overview for Video Production Courses

Stage	Course	Content
Introduction to Video Production Course	Basics of Photography	Principles, techniques, lens selection
	Planning and Creativity in New Media	Planning skills, narrative structure
Fundamentals of Video Editing Course	Online Communication Technologies	Video editing software operation
		Basics of audio editing
		Adding and synchronizing subtitles
Project Course	Students participate in real projects, applying learned skills	

5.3 Boosting Language Proficiency

During the process of editing short videos, students mainly use German to narrate Chinese stories. Therefore, expressing themselves and articulating their points of view in German should be the focus of students' language improvement. To achieve this, targeted course projects can be designed, such as organizing free speech exercises where students select a China-related topic and prepare a 3-5-minute speech. Role-playing activities can be conducted in class to simulate real-life scenarios of intercultural communication and interaction in German, where students are required to play different roles, such as tour guides, historical figures or cultural ambassadors.

Outside the classroom, extracurricular activities such as exhibitions, lectures and book exchanges can be organized to help students gain a deeper understanding of cultural similarities and differences, to improve their German oral and expressive skills, to enable them to better articulate their points of view and tell Chinese stories in German, and to help students express themselves confidently and fluently in intercultural communication. Furthermore, it is possible to initiate Sino-German cultural exchange activities, such as student exchange programs, partnerships with German schools or institutions, and summer or semester exchange programs. These activities provide students with the opportunity to experience cultural immersion and practice their oral communication skills in real-life settings.

5.4 Promoting Intercultural Education

Intercultural communication is a long-term learning process that requires continuous practice and improvement. To improve the intercultural communication skills of German learners, to adapt them to a diverse society and international environment, and to enable them to tell Chinese stories better, the following measures can be taken:

5.4.1 Improving intercultural communication course design

In the design of intercultural courses, students should be systematically and comprehensively introduced to knowledge about intercultural communication, covering various aspects such as cultural differences, non-verbal communication, cultural conflict resolution, international business communication, etc. The course content

should focus on both theoretical knowledge and practical applications. For example, students could design simulated scenarios of international business negotiations and engage in actual business communication using German in simulated environments, which would help to cultivate their intercultural communication skills in business settings. In addition, to enhance their cultural creativity in the production of short videos, the course design could include guiding students in the analysis of German media, such as films, music and news, to deepen their understanding of German society, values and contemporary culture.

5.4.2 Participating in intercultural communication activities

To promote cultural sensitivity, students should receive intercultural education to understand the characteristics, values, and social customs of German culture. As school administrators, it is important to make full use of available resources and organize various types of intercultural activities, such as workshops, cultural exhibitions, intercultural lectures, international food festivals, cultural exchange nights, and more. Inviting international experts, cultural scholars, or lecturers from different countries to campus to conduct lectures and workshops can help students better understand other cultures. Schools can also encourage collaboration among teachers from different disciplines to incorporate intercultural education into their curriculum, allowing students to encounter intercultural content in the classroom.

For students, it is essential to participate actively in various school activities and seek opportunities to interact with Germans. By engaging in these activities, students can experience firsthand life and communication in different cultural backgrounds, better adapting to and understanding German culture. During participation, students are encouraged to reflect and document their cultural experiences, observations, and learning to help them retain these valuable experiences after the project ends.

5.4.3 Cultivating cultural confidence

Cultural self-identity is a personalized process. Students must learn self-reflection to gain a deep understanding of their cultural identity. They should also identify the intersections and differences with other cultures. With this foundation, they can learn to respect different cultures and accept cultural diversity. Open-mindedness, openness to new cultural experiences and gradual adaptation and integration into German culture are of crucial importance. For instance, when students participate in cultural exchange activities, they establish connections and friendships with people from different cultural backgrounds, gaining a deeper understanding of other cultures while also sharing their own. Through intercultural dialogue, students are able to discuss with people from other cultures about cultural differences, similarities and challenges. It is important to maintain an open-minded attitude to avoid missing opportunities to learn and understand other cultures. Furthermore, a closed attitude can result in increased cultural barriers. When individuals from different cultures perceive that students are unwilling to accept them, it can lead to communication difficulties and mutual misunderstandings. Maintaining an open and inclusive attitude and learning appropriate cultural adaptation strategies can help reduce misunderstandings and prejudices, promote better understanding of other cultures, and facilitate the establishment of closer relationships. This promotes personal and societal intercultural development. However, it is important for students to understand that embracing diversity does not require them to completely abandon their cultural identity. Rather, it involves being inclusive and accepting of foreign cultures while strengthening their own cultural identity.

Educators play a crucial role as guides and supporters in this process, providing psychological support and counseling services to help students navigate cultural conflicts, emotional distress, and issues related to cultural identity. At the same time, educators should encourage students to maintain an open mind, be willing to accept new cultural experiences, and gradually adapt to and integrate into the target culture. By integrating these methods into education and campus culture, educators can help students better address cultural self-identity issues, cultivate an attitude of openness and respect for multiculturalism, and achieve greater success in intercultural communication.

Conclusion

The research identifies the challenges faced by Chinese-German learners in disseminating Chinese stories through short videos. These challenges include editing techniques, language proficiency, and intercultural communication. To overcome these issues, learners are advised to actively improve their editing skills, language proficiency, and gain a deeper understanding of the target audience's culture. The study indicates that these guidelines can assist not only German learners but also other language learners and cultural communicators. By promoting a better understanding of Chinese culture, it can help foster international friendly relations, achieve the objective of effectively communicating China's story, and contribute to building a diverse, inclusive, and harmonious world.

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