

Research on the Current Situation and Characteristics of the Dissemination of Beijing Intangible Cultural Heritage in Japanese Media

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This study focuses on Japanese youth and employs a questionnaire survey to examine their cognitive structure, sources of information, and participation patterns regarding Chinese traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). A total of 299 valid questionnaires were collected. The sample was predominantly composed of respondents aged 18–25 (80.8%), with a relatively balanced gender distribution (56.6% male and 43.4% female). The findings indicate that respondents' understanding of Chinese traditional culture is characterized by symbolization and superficiality. The cultural items with relatively high levels of recognition are mainly highly visualized and consumer-friendly symbols that have gained visibility through international communication. For example, Tai Chi was recognized by 75.8% of respondents, the Lion Dance (Baizhifang Taishi) by 55.6%, and the culinary craft of Peking duck by 44.4%. In contrast, items with strong regional characteristics and deeper technical or cultural connotations were far less well known. In terms of information sources, respondents relied heavily on television documentaries and social media platforms, while school courses and print media played more supplementary roles. By comparison, the proportions of knowledge acquisition through travel, on-site experience, and interpersonal communication were relatively low, suggesting an overall lack of offline cultural contact and participation. Based on these findings, this study argues that, while continuing to make use of mass media communication, ICH content should be incorporated more systematically into school- and community-based educational settings. More interactive and sustainable experiential programs should also be developed so as to encourage Japanese youth to move beyond the symbolic consumption of “knowing the name” toward deeper understanding and active participation in the meanings and practices of Chinese traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage (ICH), mediatization of cultural communication, the broader dissemination and deeper comprehension of Chinese culture

Introduction

In the era of global networking, political, economic, and cultural exchanges have become increasingly frequent and interconnected. Advances in network technology have enabled cross-border information dissemination and communication to become faster and more convenient, thereby reinforcing a pattern of connection often described

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as a “global village.” At the same time, digital platforms that transcend national boundaries have exposed young people more continuously to diverse cultural narratives, mediatized realities, and global social trends, shaping their self-perceptions and worldviews in the process. Within such an environment of high-frequency intercultural contact, cultural context profoundly influences the ways in which information is evaluated and interpreted, and thus affects audiences’ pathways for understanding the cultural information of others.

As one of the world’s oldest civilizations, China possesses a rich legacy of traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage, both of which have attracted growing international attention. In recent years, in particular, the Chinese government and various civil organizations have sought to enhance the global influence of Chinese culture through a series of cultural diplomacy initiatives. However, although awareness of Chinese traditional culture has gradually increased worldwide, its recognition and dissemination still face certain challenges and obstacles in some countries, especially Japan. China and Japan share a long history of cultural exchange, yet in contemporary Japanese society, the understanding and acceptance of Chinese culture continue to be constrained by multiple factors. Therefore, a deeper examination of Japanese youths’ current perceptions of culture—especially their understanding of Chinese traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage—is of considerable significance for promoting mutual cultural understanding and exchange between the two countries.

The Current Landscape of the Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Japan: The Expanding Roles of Traditional and Digital Media

The dissemination of Beijing’s intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Japan has evolved into a multi-layered communication landscape shaped jointly by mainstream television broadcasting and digital streaming platforms. Among the various forms of representation, performance-based ICH—most notably Peking Opera—remains the most visible and empirically traceable category. This prominence can be attributed to its distinctive combination of visual spectacle, narrative expressiveness, and theatrical form, all of which make it particularly amenable to adaptation within television programming, serial drama, and digital video environments. In this sense, the circulation of Beijing ICH in Japan no longer relies exclusively on conventional forms of state-led or theme-based cultural promotion; rather, it is increasingly embedded within Japan’s existing media consumption structure through television dramas, animated adaptations, short-form videos of cultural events, and content distributed by institutional media accounts.

In terms of mainstream television broadcasting, the dissemination of Beijing ICH in Japan is characterized by relatively limited frequency but comparatively high cultural legitimacy and symbolic authority. On the one hand, terrestrial broadcasters and regional television stations have begun to incorporate Beijing-related ICH elements through opera-themed Chinese television dramas. For instance, TVQ Kyushu Broadcasting began airing the Chinese drama *Winter Begonia* (*Kimi, Kaidō no Kurenai ni Arazu*) on 26 April 2022, with the official program page indicating that the series comprised 49 episodes¹. On the other hand, in 2019, TV Tokyo launched a special feature titled “A Japan Tour of Chinese Animation and Comics,”² whose official webpage stated that 16 Chinese animated works were selected for limited-time streaming, including *Jing-Ju Cats*³, provided by YOUKU Information Technology (Beijing) Co., Ltd. Given the continuing cultural influence of mainstream television in Japan, the incorporation of Beijing ICH into televised drama and animation suggests that its mediated

¹ <https://www.tvq.co.jp/drama/hanakaido/>.

² <https://www.tv-tokyo.co.jp/anime/chinaanime2019/>.

³ <https://www.recordchina.co.jp/b155156-s10-c70-d0035.html>.

representation has shifted from direct cultural display to more narrative-based and audience-oriented forms of communication.

By contrast, digital streaming platforms demonstrate a significantly greater capacity for the diffusion of Beijing ICH in Japan, particularly through their affordances of on-demand accessibility, repeated exposure, and long-term content retention. According to data released by TVer, the official streaming platform for Japan's commercial television broadcasters, the platform recorded 40 million monthly unique browsers and 490 million monthly video views in July 2024⁴. Against the backdrop of such a vast platform user base, Beijing intangible cultural heritage—Peking Opera in particular—has been able to move beyond the constraints of fixed broadcasting schedules and enter the streaming logic of on-demand access and repeated viewing. In 2025, ABEMA launched its “Chinese Drama Channel” and announced that it would offer Chinese television dramas free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Within such platform-based media environments, Peking Opera and the broader cultural imagery associated with Beijing are no longer confined to isolated appearances in one-off cultural programs. Instead, they are incorporated into a more complex communicative ecology structured by serialized storytelling, platform operation, and algorithmic recommendation. Compared with traditional broadcasters, the advantage of streaming platforms lies less in institutional authority than in their stronger capacity for audience retention, repeated reach, and cross-platform circulation. These features have enabled the dissemination of Beijing ICH in Japan to move beyond episodic exposure and acquire a more pronounced long-tail communication effect.

Questionnaire Implementation Process and Analysis of Results

This study targeted Japanese youth and employed a questionnaire survey to examine their cognitive structure, information sources, and participation patterns regarding traditional Chinese culture and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). A total of 299 valid questionnaires were collected. In terms of data processing and analysis, the study mainly adopted quantitative methods, using statistical tabulation and proportional analysis of the survey responses. By further relating different questionnaire items to one another, it comprehensively investigated the overall characteristics of Japanese youths' perceptions of traditional Chinese culture and ICH, as well as their sources of information, contexts of exposure, and levels of participation. Through this approach, the study seeks to systematically reveal the cognitive structure through which Japanese youth perceive Chinese culture and the mechanisms underlying its formation, thereby providing empirical evidence and data support for subsequent discussions on China-Japan cultural communication, youth exchange, and pathways for the international dissemination of ICH.

Questionnaire Implementation

This study adopted a questionnaire survey as its primary research method in order to capture, within a unified measurement framework, Japanese youths' cognition of traditional Chinese culture and ICH, their exposure to relevant information, and the distribution of their participation patterns. At the same time, it aimed to interpret differences in meaning-making from the perspective of cross-cultural context. Relevant cross-cultural studies have shown that questionnaires can be used to measure context dependence and compare how different groups evaluate communication styles, thereby helping to explain possible shifts in context and deviations in

⁴ https://tver.co.jp/news/20240815.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

understanding during cross-cultural interaction (Wu, Yama, & Zakaria, 2023). On this basis, the present study conducted data collection and statistical presentation through a questionnaire survey.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section gathered demographic information. The second examined respondents' cognition of traditional culture and ICH, including item recognition, self-rated familiarity, and first impressions. The third focused on channels of information acquisition, such as television documentaries and social media platforms. The fourth investigated forms of contact and participation, including frequency of participation, places of engagement, and types of activities, so as to support a layered analysis of "recognition-understanding-participation" (Wang et al., 2025, pp. 1146–1155). In terms of statistical treatment, this study used descriptive statistics and frequency analysis to present an overall profile of the respondents. Guided by the concern in cross-cultural communication research with the relationship among context, media, and understanding, it further identified the possible structural gap between media exposure and depth of cultural cognition (Wang et al., 2025).

Analysis of the Questionnaire Results

With regard to respondents' awareness of specific items of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, the sample exhibits a clear pattern in which highly symbolic and iconic items enjoy strong visibility, whereas regional and niche items are almost entirely absent from public awareness. The most frequently recognized item was Taijiquan, with 75.8% of respondents indicating that they had heard of it. This was followed by the lion dance, known by 55.6% of respondents. Among food-related heritage items, the culinary technique of Peking duck was recognized by 44.4%. Awareness of shadow puppetry reached 25.3%, while xiangsheng (crosstalk) was known by 23.2%, and Peking opera by 20.2%.

In contrast, items closely associated with Beijing's local folk arts and legends showed extremely low levels of recognition. Examples include cloisonné Beijing embroidery, the legend of the Badaling Great Wall, the legend of the Yongding River, Beijing rabbit figurines (Tu'er Ye), Beijing clay figurines by the Zhang tradition, and Mianren Lang. Most of these items were recognized by only 0%–10% of respondents. Notably, none of the respondents had heard of the legend of the Yongding River or Beijing rabbit figurines (Tu'er Ye). In addition, 8.1% of respondents stated that they were unfamiliar with all of the heritage items listed above.

These findings suggest that Japanese youths' understanding of Chinese intangible cultural heritage is concentrated primarily on globally symbolized representative elements, such as Taijiquan, the lion dance, and Peking duck, while they possess almost no basic awareness of items with strong regional characteristics or those requiring a certain level of cultural background knowledge to be understood.

Table 1

Awareness of Intangible Cultural Heritage Items

Item	Awareness Rate
Taijiquan	75.8%
Lion Dance (Baizhifang Taishi)	55.6%
Peking Duck Cooking Techniques	44.4%
Shadow Puppetry	25.3%
Xiangsheng (comic dialogue)	23.2%
Peking Opera	20.2%

From the perspective of self-assessed familiarity, most respondents demonstrated only a rather superficial

understanding of these cultural forms. Only 1% of respondents reported that they had a detailed understanding, while 31.3% said they had some knowledge. In contrast, as many as 63.6% indicated that they only knew the names, and 9.1% stated that they knew nothing about them at all. This suggests that even when respondents were aware of these items at the level of name recognition, very few had a genuine understanding of their historical background, technical craftsmanship, or cultural significance. Overall, their awareness remained largely at a label-based and superficial level.

Regarding respondents' first impressions of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, 65.7% selected "classical," and 41.4% chose "mysterious." By contrast, the proportions describing it as "boring," "irrelevant to modern life," "gorgeous," or "bold" were all between 0% and 1%. In other words, Japanese youth generally perceive Chinese intangible cultural heritage as a form of traditional culture marked by a strong sense of history and a certain aura of mystery. It has not been widely associated with negative labels such as "backward" or "boring." At the same time, however, it is rarely understood as a living cultural practice that is closely connected to contemporary life.

In terms of information sources and media exposure, the survey shows that mass media and social media are the primary channels through which Japanese young people encounter Chinese intangible cultural heritage (ICH). In response to the question, "Through which channels did you learn about the items you know?", 73.7% of respondents mentioned television programs and documentaries, 41.4% cited social networking platforms (such as YouTube and TikTok), 19.2% referred to school courses, and 16.2% indicated books and magazines. By contrast, only 8.1% reported learning through travel to China or on-site experiences, while merely 6.1% cited introductions from relatives or friends. These findings suggest that the representation of Chinese ICH in Japan relies heavily on audiovisual media and digital platforms, with the education system and formal publications playing only a supplementary role, whereas genuine cross-border communication and first-hand experience account for only a very limited share of the overall knowledge structure.

In contrast, responses to the question, "Do you often encounter Chinese traditional culture in Japanese media or on social media?", reveal a rather low level of regular exposure. Only 8.1% of respondents stated that they "often see it" (at least once a week), while 41.4% answered that they "occasionally see it" (around once a month). Meanwhile, 34.3% believed that they "hardly ever see it", and 16.2% said that they had "never paid attention to it". This indicates that the presence of Chinese traditional culture in Japanese media and social platforms is neither continuous nor frequent. Rather than forming a stable and familiar cultural landscape in audiences' everyday information flow, it tends to appear only sporadically as an "occasional foreign cultural element".

Compared with media exposure, respondents' offline contact with and participation in Chinese traditional culture within Japan were far more limited. When asked whether they had encountered Chinese traditional culture in Japan, only about 3% of respondents reported "frequent contact (at least once a month)," while 27.3% indicated "occasional contact (a few times a year)." By contrast, 55.6% described such contact as "almost nonexistent", and 14.1% stated that they had "never" had any contact at all. This overall pattern is corroborated by the statistics on specific venues and activities of contact. In response to the question, "If you have encountered Chinese traditional culture in Japan, where did this mainly take place?", 55.6% selected "Chinatowns (such as those in Yokohama and Kobe)," 44.4% chose "Chinese restaurants/tea houses," 25.3% cited "museum or art gallery exhibitions," 19.2% mentioned "local cultural festivals or international exchange events," and 14.1% referred to "university clubs or courses," while only 3% reported "online events." These results suggest that, for Japanese youth, the main settings in which Chinese traditional culture is encountered domestically are spaces characterized

by tourism and consumption, such as Chinatowns, restaurants, and tea houses. This is followed by museums and art galleries, which emphasize education and display, as well as regional cultural events organized around festival occasions. Within this framework, China-related courses in higher education play a comparatively secondary, yet still non-negligible, role.

The survey as a whole presents a relatively consistent picture: among this predominantly young Japanese sample, Chinese intangible cultural heritage is generally perceived as an “ancient” and somewhat “mysterious” form of cultural otherness. Its visibility depends largely on fragmented representations in television programs and social media, as well as on tourism- and consumption-oriented spaces such as Chinatowns and Chinese restaurants, while both in-depth knowledge and hands-on experiential engagement remain clearly insufficient. At the same time, the questionnaire results do not indicate strong negative sentiment toward Chinese traditional culture. Rather, they reveal a sense of distance and an aestheticized unfamiliarity: it is neither regarded as a cultural resource closely connected to contemporary everyday life, nor has it yet been effectively activated through education and interpersonal interaction.

Discussion

This study investigated the current state of Japanese youths’ perceptions of Chinese traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage. The findings not only reveal the deeper structure of cultural cognition, but also reflect both the challenges and opportunities involved in cultural communication. Based on an in-depth interpretation of the results, it is possible to further examine the factors shaping cultural transmission, identify the major existing problems, and propose corresponding improvement strategies.

First, the survey results indicate that, although Chinese culture has established a certain foundation of dissemination in Japan—especially through culturally symbolic elements with global visibility, such as Taijiquan and Peking duck—Japanese youths’ understanding of Chinese traditional culture and its underlying connotations still remains largely at a superficial level. This phenomenon reflects the widespread presence of “labeled culture” in cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural communication theory emphasizes that cultural context shapes the encoding of information and the pathways through which it is interpreted, while differences between high-context and low-context communication may weaken or distort implicit meanings in intercultural understanding (Wang et al., 2025). Even when visual presentation is highly refined, linguistic and cultural differences may still persist in users’ perceptions, making additional contextual compensation necessary for audiences to comprehend complex cultural symbols. From the perspective of symbolic mechanisms, analysis of symbolic systems is regarded as an effective way to access the distinctive meaning structures of a culture. Moreover, when intercultural communication takes into account differences in symbolic systems and communication patterns, the successful transmission of meaning becomes more likely. This suggests that cultural communication needs to move beyond the mere display of symbols toward the interpretation of symbols and the structured presentation of meaning (du Preez, 1985).

Secondly, respondents’ understanding of Chinese culture relies heavily on mass media and social media platforms. This trend is widespread on a global scale and reflects the broader mediatization of cultural cognition among contemporary youth. Television programs and social media platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok, have become major vehicles of cultural dissemination by delivering vivid images, videos, and short-form content. However, the limitations of these media platforms are equally evident: they tend to attract

audience attention through entertainment value and surface-level appeal, while neglecting the presentation of deeper cultural meanings. In Japan, particularly among younger audiences, the consumption of cultural content is often passive in nature. Most respondents encounter Chinese culture through short videos, variety shows, and other forms of light entertainment, but seldom engage in more substantive cultural discussion or interaction. Existing studies have pointed out that, although short-video platforms facilitate rapid dissemination, their fragmented and commercialized nature may dilute deeper cultural meanings. Moreover, digital platforms—especially short-video media—are effective in achieving large-scale reach, yet are among the least conducive to the transfer of in-depth knowledge, thereby widening the gap between visibility and understanding. Therefore, taking platform “reach” alone as the primary goal of cultural communication may be insufficient to improve the depth of cultural cognition (Wang, 2026). This model of “rapid cultural consumption,” driven by media and social platforms, tends to confine cultural transmission to the level of sensory stimulation rather than enabling deeper cognitive reflection. To effectively enhance Japanese youths’ understanding of Chinese culture, communication strategies should move beyond entertainment-oriented attraction and instead emphasize deeper interaction and understanding. In other words, more academic, educational, and participatory forms of cultural engagement are needed to foster greater audience initiative and more meaningful involvement in the process of cultural transmission.

Beyond the mediatization of cultural communication, the depth of cultural cognition also warrants urgent attention. The survey found that most respondents’ understanding of Chinese intangible cultural heritage (ICH) remained largely at the level of name recognition, with only a superficial grasp of its content. This phenomenon reflects a fundamental problem in cultural exchange between the two countries: the lack of deep cultural understanding. In cross-cultural communication, cultural cognition often begins with “knowing its name”, whereas “knowing its meaning” usually requires sustained learning and deeper engagement. ICH is understood as a “cultural ecosystem” sustained by the everyday practices and emotional identification of community members. This means that meaningful cross-cultural understanding of ICH requires, to some extent, practical settings and affective connections; otherwise, audiences are likely to remain at the symbolic level of merely “seeing” it, without moving toward genuine understanding and identification (Yang, 2025). In Japan, respondents’ perceptions of Chinese culture show a clear tendency toward superficiality, and many are unfamiliar with the connotations and historical backgrounds of these cultural items. Such surface-level understanding often generates a sense of alienation, whereby culture is perceived as a “strange” or “othered” cultural presence. This phenomenon of “surface culture” is particularly evident in Japanese society, especially in relation to Chinese traditional culture, where the cognitive and emotional distance between audiences and the culture remains considerable. To change this situation, cultural communication needs to shift from shallow, label-based presentation to more in-depth cultural explanation and interaction. This is not merely a matter of transmitting information, but of embedding cultural values in ways that can be meaningfully received. If Chinese traditional culture is to achieve a real breakthrough in its dissemination in Japan, it is essential to design more targeted educational and cultural experience programs that enable audiences to develop a fuller and deeper understanding of the complexity and multidimensionality of Chinese culture.

Beyond this, the limited participation in cultural activities is another issue that cannot be overlooked. The survey results show that although a certain number of Chinese cultural experience programs do exist in Japanese society—such as Tai Chi classes, lion dance performances during spring festivals, and screenings of Chinese

films—the overall level of participation remains low. Behind this phenomenon lies a central challenge in cultural transmission: the “sense of reality” and contemporary relevance of traditional Chinese culture have not been effectively conveyed. For Japanese youth, the traditional and ancient image of Chinese culture often makes it difficult to connect with their modern everyday lives. This sense of cultural unfamiliarity makes it hard for Chinese culture to be accepted and incorporated as part of ordinary daily cultural experience among young people. The low level of participation in cultural activities is therefore a direct reflection of this cognitive gap. Accordingly, the design of cultural activities should move beyond one-way, exhibition-style presentation and instead place greater emphasis on interactivity, audience engagement, and a contemporary sensibility, so as to bring culture closer to everyday life and to the interests and needs of the target audience.

In sum, although Chinese traditional culture has gradually attracted greater attention in Japanese society and has achieved a certain degree of dissemination through mass media and social media platforms, significant gaps remain in both the depth and breadth of public understanding. The symbolic reduction of culture, the overreliance on mediated forms of communication, limited participation, and the lack of systematic support within the educational sphere all constrain the broader dissemination and deeper comprehension of Chinese culture among Japanese youth. To address this situation, it is necessary to pursue comprehensive improvements in communication strategies, educational frameworks, and the design of cultural activities. By enhancing interactivity and participation, while also increasing educational input and opportunities for first-hand cultural experience, it will be possible to foster a deeper understanding of the connotations of Chinese traditional culture among Japanese youth and, in turn, promote more meaningful cultural exchange between China and Japan.

Conclusion

Based on 299 valid questionnaires, this study provides a descriptive account of Japanese youths’ cognitive patterns, information channels, and participatory practices regarding Chinese traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and interprets these findings through the theoretical lenses of cross-cultural context, platformized communication, and the living nature of ICH. The results show that respondents’ perceptions are concentrated on a limited number of highly visual and easily recognizable cultural symbols, while their self-reported familiarity largely remains at the level of “knowing the name.” In addition, exposure to such cultural content relies primarily on television documentaries and social media platforms, yet its sustained visibility remains limited. Offline contact and active participation are generally insufficient, revealing a pattern of “more viewing, less practice.”

At the theoretical level, this study links the interpretive shifts caused by differences in cross-cultural contexts with the fragmenting tendencies of platform-based communication, thereby explaining the gap between visibility and understanding. From the perspective of ICH as a “cultural ecosystem,” the study further emphasizes the crucial role of practice and emotional identification in the formation of meaningful understanding (Wang et al., 2025).

In practical terms, previous studies suggest that hybrid communication strategies are significantly more effective than digital-only approaches in fostering deeper participation, and that high-quality cultural translation can help bridge the divide between superficial engagement and genuine understanding. Accordingly, this study proposes that culturally recontextualized content production and integrated online-offline experiential design should serve as the core pathways for enhancing Japanese youths’ understanding of and participation in Chinese ICH. At the same time, the participatory culture of social media offers a possible mechanism for cross-cultural

negotiation of meaning, while youth dialogue platforms and collaborative creation may function as complementary approaches to promoting deeper mutual understanding.

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