

Analysis of Short Video Dissemination Pathways for Chinese Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Media Technology Evolution (Postprint)

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Abstract

Short videos inherit the audiovisual technical advantages of film and television media, advancing further in simulating disintermediated human communication scenarios, fostering virtual presence experiences, and mobilizing comprehensive sensory participation, thereby providing a novel logical pathway for the dissemination of Chinese cultural heritage. They are capable of reproducing cultural meaning based on authentic cultural contexts, mobilizing multiple stakeholders to provide multi-dimensional interpretations of cultural values, and presenting cultural practices as demonstrations of cultural inheritance. However, the dissemination of cultural heritage via short video platforms remains in a stage of independent exploration and self-production by multiple entities. Future development should strengthen the construction of content matrices on short video platforms, leverage national strategies such as rural revitalization to stimulate new vitality in cultural communication, promote multi-layered content development of traditional media in the transition toward all-media, and efficiently utilize short videos for the dissemination and inheritance of Chinese cultural heritage within the framework of establishing a cultural communication community.

Full Text

Preamble

Title: An Analysis of Short Video Communication Paths for Chinese Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Media Technology Evolution

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Abstract: Short videos inherit the audiovisual technological advantages of film and television media, advancing further in simulating de-mediated human communication scenarios, creating virtual presence experiences, and mobilizing comprehensive sensory participation. This provides a novel logical approach for disseminating Chinese cultural heritage. Short videos can reproduce cultural meaning based on authentic cultural contexts, mobilize multiple users to multi-dimensionally interpret cultural values, and present cultural practices to demonstrate cultural inheritance. However, the dissemination of cultural heritage on short video platforms remains in a stage of autonomous exploration and self-production by multiple actors.

Future development should strengthen the content matrix construction of short video platforms, stimulate new vitality in cultural dissemination by relying on national strategies such as rural revitalization, promote multi-layer content development by traditional media oriented toward all media, and efficiently utilize short videos to disseminate and inherit Chinese cultural heritage within the establishment of a cultural communication community.

Keywords: media evolution; short video; audiovisual technology; cultural heritage; communication path

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Through continuous visual reproduction of objective reality, short videos allow users to encounter people, objects, and lived experiences via their screens. Cameras and microphones extend human audiovisual capacities, generating a sense of virtual co-presence. The predominant use of vertical framing in contemporary short videos simulates face-to-face interpersonal communication, restoring natural, de-mediated communication patterns that align with innate human characteristics. Furthermore, the concise, streamlined format of short videos reduces information load and noise during transmission, resonating with humanity's natural inclination to avoid communicative obstacles and thus constituting a further realization of "humanized communication."

1. Short Video Dissemination from the Perspective of Media Technology Evolution

The media ecology school introduces philosophy of technology into media studies, interpreting social and historical changes from the perspective of media technological evolution and holding that media technology constructs human

cognitive environments. School representative Paul Levinson, by tracing the history of media evolution, proposes that media technology development has always aimed to satisfy human needs and choices, evolving toward a direction that highly replicates human environments and presenting a human-centered, “media-competes-human-selects” evolutionary trend. As a recent product of media evolution, short video technology has further advanced toward “humanization” on multiple levels.

1.1 Return to Human De-mediated Communication Habits

In Levinson’s view, media evolution is not natural selection but human choice. Compared with static media texts such as text and images, short videos use dynamic visual representation to restore human de-mediated communication habits. Dynamic images continuously reproduce changes in the state of objective things, allowing users to see people, objects, and life through terminal screens. Cameras and microphones extend human audiovisual capabilities, creating a sense of virtual presence. Currently, most short videos are presented vertically, and vertical filming of people and scenes can simulate face-to-face communication in interpersonal interaction, enabling humans to return to de-mediated communication habits that align with human nature in natural states. Moreover, the concise and compact content format of short videos reduces information load and noise during dissemination, which coincides with the natural human tendency to avoid obstacles in communication and represents a further fulfillment of “humanized communication.”

1.2 Authentic Reproduction Through Spatial Replication and Parallelism

Throughout media evolution, the presentation of information has gradually transformed from black-and-white, static, and two-dimensional to color, dynamic, and three-dimensional, with the dominant logic stemming from humanity’s pursuit of media that more faithfully reproduce human perceptual modes. Levinson proposes that “the evolutionary trend of media is the continuous improvement in reproducing the real world, while such reproduction attempts to maintain the spatial-temporal extensions achieved by original media” [1]. Traditional film and television media have accomplished spatial-temporal extension through audiovisual language, particularly by replicating the spatial configurations of filmed subjects to achieve authentic reproduction. For short videos, the characteristic that everyone can film and share expands their spatial replication capacity horizontally, enabling spatial parallelism in the synchronic dimension. As a connection between virtuality and reality, short video scenarios break traditional linear concepts of space and time [2].

1.3 Increasingly Rich Sensory Participation

Levinson argues that all technologies emerge as remedial technologies, and all media are compensatory media—new media compensate for old media in a cycli-

cal, upward spiral that foregrounds human agency. The history of media technology development is essentially a process of technology continuously improving its capacity to imitate human perceptual and cognitive modes, with emerging media filling functional gaps left by old media through remedial approaches. Humanity employs constantly updated media to expand information transmission and reception capabilities, thereby transcending biological limits of seeing and hearing to satisfy the desire to perceive and integrate with the world. Short videos inherit traditional film and television media's capacity to mobilize audiovisual senses, while their marriage with social media endows them with interactive and shareable characteristics. Compared with film and television media's singular mobilization of visual and auditory senses, short videos possess stronger social participation functions—whether through static symbols such as text and emojis attached to video texts or user comments on short videos, all further evoke users' perceptual participation in video content. Meanwhile, mobile short videos can integrate diverse media technologies and functions to generate forms such as H5, animation, and virtual simulation, creating greater audiovisual impact and expressiveness that mobilize multi-sensory participation.

2. Dissemination Content: Multi-dimensional Construction of Cultural Meaning

The media ecology school regards media as environments: “Any medium (that is, any extension of man) has an effect on personal and social contexts, and this effect is due to the introduction of a new scale; any extension of ours introduces a new scale into our affairs” [3]. This “new scale” essentially means new structures and new relationships [4]. In other words, changes in media form bring changes in information production, information characteristics, and information structure, which in turn transform the information environment people inhabit and subsequently influence human cognition and behavior.

Short videos alter the characteristics of independent production and unidirectional transmission in film and television media, enabling diverse narratives within rich, flexible text formats that facilitate the public's grasp of the deep values of Chinese cultural heritage from multiple dimensions.

2.1 Reproducing Cultural Meaning Based on Cultural Context

Chinese culture is profound and has a long history. Continuing historical cultural contexts requires not only “knowing what” but also “knowing why,” necessitating the appreciation of cultural meaning within specific cultural contexts. Compared with the contextual construction achieved by text and images, dynamic visuals offer more intuitive contextual reproduction. Moreover, short videos, with their convenient filming and flexible content characteristics, more easily mobilize inheritors and witnesses in cultural heritage locations to film videos, presenting authentic cultural contexts to the public and helping them further comprehend cultural meaning. Particularly for the dissemination and

inheritance of intangible cultural heritage such as handicrafts and theatrical performances, context itself constitutes part of cultural value. Short videos possess an innate advantage in vividly restoring the contexts where cultural heritage exists, and “returning to the source” reproduction of cultural heritage enables the public to experience authentic cultural connotations.

Peking Opera inheritor “Guo Xiaojing” combines Peking Opera with beauty makeup on the Douyin platform, showing users the makeup and removal process for Peking Opera painted faces. She highlights the sophistication and profundity of Peking Opera through the complexity of the makeup while popularizing various Peking Opera-related cultural knowledge in an everyday linguistic style. Beyond inheritors, multiple actors including cultural workers and researchers can interpret cultural meaning and contemporary value for the public through short videos, eliminating the sense of distance and estrangement between cultural heritage and the public. Blogger “Xi’ an Aben” is a professional docent at major museums in Shaanxi who uploads video clips of his museum explanations of artifact history to short video platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu, gaining substantial user attention through his plain language and witty commentary. Consequently, short videos enable multiple actors to serve as cultural interpreters and disseminators, opening paths for cultural meaning interpretation beyond canonical knowledge and authoritative media and bringing cultural dissemination closer to the public and integrating it into daily life.

2.3 Value Activation in Real Application Scenarios

The vitality of cultural heritage inheritance lies not only in protecting its cultural forms but, more importantly, in returning culture to everyday life— “protecting it within the ecological scenarios of people’ s reality” [5]. On one hand, we must promote the integration of cultural heritage with public life, seeking junctures where cultural heritage can embed itself in contemporary social life in terms of morphology, form, and content, thereby “bringing culture to life” and allowing cultural values to be carried forward and continued in lived practice. For instance, during the COVID-19 outbreak in China, the Beijing Jingxi Shadow Puppet Troupe created a series of short videos featuring anti-epidemic shadow puppet plays, using traditional culture to tell contemporary stories and receiving widespread attention. On the other hand, short video platforms actively develop visual effect technologies, extracting classic symbols from cultural heritage as technical effects embedded in short video applications, creating novel forms of cultural practice. The Douyin platform has developed a set of special effect makeup based on traditional opera facial designs, including Sichuan opera face-changing effects and makeup effects for different roles (sheng, dan, jing, mo, chou) in Peking opera, allowing Douyin users to experience the sensation of “applying national essence makeup.” This enables opera art to open new cultural communication paths through modern technology. Additionally, many professional opera practitioners use short videos to popularize opera singing knowledge and employ live streaming technologies to sing classic repertoire together with

opera enthusiasts and provide guidance on singing techniques. Consequently, cultural heritage enters public life through short videos, with its cultural values further manifested in public cultural practices.

3. Dissemination Subjects: Three-dimensional Participation of Multiple Actors

According to media evolution theory, the humanization trend of media and its compensatory characteristics both point to the foregrounding of human subjectivity. Cultural heritage possesses public characteristics, and its protection and inheritance should be accomplished through public participation. The feature that everyone can produce and broadcast short videos further releases human agency in communication, making it possible for multiple actors to participate in the inheritance and dissemination of cultural heritage.

3.1 Individual Disseminators: “Breaking the Circle” Performances by Inheritors

In analyzing protection paths for intangible cultural heritage, scholar Sun Facheng argues that the key to protection lies in “constructing a living space with inheritors as the main body and carrier, using inheritors as the link to connect the physical and spiritual spaces where heritage exists” [6]. Inheritors of intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter referred to as ICH) constitute an important foundation for cultural inheritance and development. Traditionally, inheritors disseminate culture through oral instruction and personal demonstration within their living spheres, with physical spatial barriers and other factors limiting ICH dissemination within specific cultural circles and constraining cultural promotion. Short video platforms provide inheritors with greater freedom and broader space for content creation and dissemination, enabling them to exert subjective agency for continuous, diversified content output on short video platforms. This allows dissemination scope to extend infinitely through network channels, overcoming physical spatial barriers to achieve cultural “circle-breaking” and allowing the public to experience cultural charm and pay attention to traditional culture. In fact, with its diverse forms and exquisite content, intangible cultural heritage can better capture attention in the cluttered information age, as evidenced by the continuous positive feedback for painting artistry creation, the firegrass hemp weaving techniques of Lisu women, and the exquisite embroidery works of various embroidery inheritors on short video platforms.

3.2 Institutional Disseminators: Using Multiple Narratives for Cultural Popularization

Short videos not only grant individuals full autonomy in dissemination but also provide organizations with novel communication approaches. The cultural heritage industry constitutes an important support for cultural heritage inheritance,

particularly for material cultural heritage bearing profound history, where cultural heritage institutions' significance in physical preservation and cultural promotion is self-evident. Currently, the new communication model of "museum + internet" is maturing, with short videos, characterized by their brief and vivid content, becoming a new channel for museums to popularize cultural knowledge and develop cultural heritage brands. The Henan Museum promotes cultural relic knowledge on its WeChat official account through a "text + short video" format, with each video lasting approximately two minutes and employing professional production techniques similar to traditional media in terms of visuals and voice-over, presenting authoritative and professional narratives. On the Henan Museum's Douyin account, short video narratives are more diversified, including long-take direct filming of cultural relics in a style close to popular production, the "Dengke Takes You Around Henan Museum" series that follows host "Dengke" to learn about cultural relics from a personal perspective, and professionally produced cultural short videos. These various forms create a narrative morphology where authoritative discourse, personal discourse, and popular discourse coexist, popularizing cultural knowledge among the public in flexible ways.

3.3 Media Disseminators: Multi-dimensional Output of Quality Content

Amid the wave of media convergence, it has become imperative for traditional media to leverage emerging technology platforms or communication forms to produce content adapted to new media channels. While short videos enable the general public to become disseminators, the lowered production threshold also brings issues of information clutter. Within the content landscape of short videos, professional mass media remain necessary for content input, using this popular format to disseminate quality content and provide value guidance to the public. Television media represents an important channel for inheriting and promoting traditional cultural spirit. With authoritative, cutting-edge, and professional content production, cultural variety shows such as *National Treasure*, *New Arrivals at the Palace Museum*, and *Encountering the Temple of Heaven* have achieved excellent quality and reputation in recent years. Beyond television broadcasting, producers also utilize short videos for content promotion. On the Douyin platform, the *National Treasure* program established an official peripheral account called "Hello History," launching a sub-column "Make National Treasures Trendy" that selects clips from the *National Treasure* program for secondary dissemination. Most cultural programs typically use short video platforms as secondary dissemination channels. Additionally, relying on platforms such as WeChat official accounts and Weibo, program teams supplement short video dissemination with text and images to further highlight the cultural spirit in video clips, fulfilling the ideological guidance function of mainstream media.

4. Dissemination Mechanisms: Resource Integration to Build a Cultural Value Ecosystem

Following the logical path of “the medium is the environment,” the medium of short videos constructs a new information environment for the public. Effective inheritance of Chinese cultural heritage requires injecting cultural genes into the information environment constituted by short videos, which necessitates multi-party collaboration to establish a scientific and orderly dissemination mechanism.

4.1 Strengthening the Content Matrix Construction of Short Video Platforms

As the hub for aggregating and distributing short videos, short video platforms play a leading role in content construction. Platform operators should, while obtaining commercial benefits, earnestly undertake their social responsibilities as platform-based media to promote the dissemination and inheritance of Chinese cultural heritage. First, collaborate with quality content providers to jointly create premium content. Identify cultural content producers both within and outside the platform, including ICH inheritors with short video production capabilities, and support them throughout the production and dissemination process to incubate quality cultural content. Partner with professional cultural entities such as film and television production institutions and cultural heritage institutions to integrate and disseminate premium video content or jointly produce lively, diversely formatted cultural content. Second, improve platform algorithm construction to effectively channel traffic to cultural content. Establish algorithmic values rich in social responsibility, tilting content recommendation toward excellent traditional Chinese culture to guide users toward traditional culture. Finally, develop original cultural content and build proprietary communication brands. Establish regular short video columns for broadcasting or create special programs based on festivals and celebrations, leveraging the ideological mobilization function of festive contexts to strengthen the dissemination effect of cultural content.

4.2 Stimulating New Vitality in Cultural Dissemination Through National Strategies

The rapid development of short videos largely stems from their low production threshold and flexible dissemination formats, which maximally mobilize the creative vitality of stakeholders related to cultural elements, representing another pathway for empowering short video dissemination of cultural heritage. In recent years, the protection and inheritance of rural intangible cultural heritage have demonstrated a rapidly rising trend, occupying an increasingly important position in the overall landscape of cultural heritage inheritance [7]. The rural revitalization strategy proposed in the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has also brought new opportunities for cultural development and inheritance in rural areas. On one hand, we must enhance

short video production and dissemination literacy among rural managers, establishing awareness of short videos' positive role in excavating excellent rural culture, building rural cultural brands, and developing rural cultural tourism industries, thereby guiding managers to actively layout short video dissemination of rural cultural heritage. On the other hand, create clusters of rural cultural short video accounts, with rural managers, rural cultural groups, and individual villagers conducting clustered short video dissemination. Strengthen content linkage and collaborative production among accounts, allocate resources preferentially to key accounts, enhance rural cultural consciousness, and form a systematic mechanism for rural cultural short video dissemination.

4.3 Multi-layer Content Development for All Media by Professional Institutions

Professional film and television production institutions represented by television media remain the core producers of premium content within electronic media. In the current dissemination of cultural television programs and documentaries, media institutions have relatively effectively utilized self-media platforms for secondary dissemination of program content. However, such dissemination methods offer limited information renewal and have not fully released the content production potential of professional media institutions. In cultural program production, hosts, cultural scholars, cultural inheritors, various guests, and filming scenarios all constitute program production elements. Leveraging the concise and compact characteristics of short videos, these various production elements can be used to design brief yet meaning-concentrated clips for distribution on short video platforms. Currently, derivative variety shows are gradually becoming value-extending products of popular variety programs, with the former utilizing program characters, scenarios, and other elements for entirely new content production, effectively expanding program influence and creating positive viewership interaction effects. For cultural variety shows, designing concise derivative clips or disseminating via short videos content that, due to duration constraints and other factors, was not included in the main program but holds cultural value will effectively increase the program' s information capacity and attract greater audience attention with novel content.

Conclusion

Short videos inherit the audiovisual technological advantages of traditional film and television media, advancing further in simulating de-mediated human communication scenarios, creating virtual presence experiences, and mobilizing comprehensive sensory participation, thereby manifesting the "humanization" trend of media technology evolution described by Paul Levinson. The capacity of short videos to vividly reproduce cultural scenes, combined with the low threshold that enables universal production and broadcasting, provides novel approaches for the dissemination and inheritance of Chinese cultural heritage and can further activate public agency in cultural transmission. Currently, short video dissem-

ination of cultural heritage remains in a stage of autonomous exploration and self-dissemination by multiple actors. Future development should follow a strategy of parallel “localization” and “globalization” development. On one hand, we should leverage the agency of various disseminators in cultural heritage locations to reproduce authentic cultural connotations based on local contexts. On the other hand, we should rely on professional production forces such as media production institutions and short video platforms to create premium short videos integrating technologies like virtual reality and artificial intelligence while carrying cultural guidance value for global dissemination. The formation of such a communication landscape will depend on the collaborative cooperation of short video platforms, cultural management departments, cultural group institutions, and short video users, promoting the orderly flow of short video production and broadcasting resources, and efficiently utilizing short videos to protect and inherit Chinese cultural heritage within the establishment of a cultural communication community.

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