

# Research on the Path of Chinese Cultural Communication on Short Video Platforms under the Theory of Symbolic Interaction

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**Abstract**—Cultural symbols are the essence of a nation, a country or a region's material culture and spiritual culture, and an excellent way to construct cultural identity. Short video platforms can quickly meet their communication needs, and help users quickly construct cultural identity through interaction and other ways. The article explores cases of cultural symbols on short video platforms from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, providing suggestions for the dissemination of cultural symbols on short video platforms in China.

**Keywords**— Symbolic interactionism; Short videos; cultural communication.

## I. INTRODUCTION

On August 29, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 54th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development (hereinafter referred to as the Report) at the "Smart Economy Innovation and Development" exchange activity of the 2024 China International Big Data Industry Expo. The Report shows that as of June 2024, the number of Internet users in China is nearly 1.1 billion (1.09967 billion), an increase of 7.42 million over December 2023, and the Internet penetration rate is 78.0%. In the initial six months of the year, the Internet sector in China continued to grow steadily. Internet basic resources laid a solid foundation for development. Digital consumption stimulated domestic demand potential, digital applications unleashed innovative vitality, and more people accessed the Internet to share the convenience and dividends of the digital era. This article attempts to explore the path of Chinese cultural dissemination by exploring cultural symbols in short video platforms.

## II. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

### (1) Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism, also known as symbolic interactionism theory, is an important theory that analyzes social communication and social relationships from a semiotic perspective. Symbols are the external forms or material carriers of information. In Hawkes' classification, symbols are divided into signals and symbols. Signals refer to the corresponding causal relationships between things, while symbols can not only express things, but also express abstract emotions and viewpoints. They are an important way of expressing meaning that distinguishes human society from animals. It can be said that humans have created the most

complete system of symbolic symbols. Using this system, humans can preserve and convey their wisdom and experience, coordinate and control social behavior, create and inherit social culture. Therefore, symbolic activities are an important mechanism for promoting human social progress, development, and change. The theory of symbolic interaction is a theoretical expression of human symbolic activities.

### 1. From Symbolic Interaction to Symbolic Social Interaction

The founder of the theory of symbolic interaction was American social psychologist Meade, and later scholars such as Blumer further developed this theory to describe social interaction behavior from the perspective of symbolic symbols. The theory of symbolic interaction regards humans as social animals with symbolic behavior, viewing human activities as a positive and creative process, and a vitality for humans to create a wide range of cultures. People interact and influence each other through the transmission of symbols and meanings, and communication is primarily an activity in which both parties communicate or exchange meanings through symbols. The meaning in the process of dissemination can only be established through exchange in essence. Therefore, the theory of symbolic interaction reveals the fundamental concept of communication as a social process.

### 2. Redesign the symbolic interaction of communication behavior

The theory of symbolic interaction brings the concept of "social communication" from the perspective of "social information communication and social information system movement" in information science to the sociological perspective of "human beings form social culture by manipulating symbolic systems for social interaction". In the perspective of symbolic interaction theory, all human social practices are cultural and meaningful, and communication is the social practice of meaning production through symbols. It is through interactive practice that humans construct systems of institutions and various conceptual systems, thus forming the structure of social action. Therefore, starting from the communication research of the Chicago School and this theory, communication research has also entered into perspectives such as social interaction and cultural studies. Such works as Baudrillard's "The Consumer Society" and the study of meaning consumption, as well as Stuart Hall's

decoding and coding research, are all in line with this tradition.

## (2) Cultural symbols

Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure first proposed the terms "referent of symbols" and "referent of symbols", explaining how symbols convey meaning through symbolic means. He emphasized that from a functional perspective, symbols are the starting point for information dissemination. Cultural symbols are particularly important due to their profound referent content, and they have four significant characteristics: profound value significance, distinct ethnic characteristics, communicative influence, and cohesion. The term "cultural symbol" first appeared in the 1980s, when the Moscow Tartu School played an important role in the theoretical development of cultural semiotics. Meanwhile, American cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz also delved into the connection between culture and symbols, believing that culture is composed of a series of symbols that reflect people's lifestyles and attitudes. Chinese scholars have provided localized interpretations of cultural symbols, emphasizing their unique national and ethnic characteristics.

Meng Xiangfei defined cultural symbols as: "Cultural symbols are the concentrated embodiment of cultural resources accumulated over a long period of time by a nation, country, or region. They embody the essence of the material and spiritual culture of a nation, country, or region, reflecting the unique characteristics of a specific society or group in multiple dimensions such as spirit, material, wisdom, and emotion." In the field of cultural construction, cultural symbols play an important role in shaping national image and building cultural identity as an important form of expression.

## III. SYMBOL CONSTRUCTION AND INTERACTIVE MODE OF SHORT VIDEOS

### (1) The Selection and Meaning Construction of Cultural Symbols

There are various types of symbols in short videos, including text symbols, visual symbols, audio symbols, paralanguage symbols, and source symbols. These symbols together form the foundation for the inheritance and dissemination of cultural memory in short videos. Text symbols directly express culture through titles, subtitles, and labels, alleviating misunderstandings in cultural communication. Visual symbols cross cultural barriers through images and scenes, enhancing the intuitive perception of culture. Sound symbols such as background music and sound effects carry specific cultural emotions and inspire cultural empathy among the audience. Paralinguistic symbols enhance the emotional resonance of the audience through body language and facial expressions. The source symbols, such as historical relics and souvenirs, are displayed and explained to enable the audience to intuitively understand the deep meaning of these cultural symbols. Every selected symbol, whether it is a cultural symbol, a historical figure, or a specific scene, carries rich historical connotations and social significance. When choosing symbolic symbols, consideration should be given to their universality and comprehensibility. Priority should be given to selecting symbol forms that can

cross cultural backgrounds and reduce comprehension barriers, while also emphasizing the diversity and innovation of symbols to meet the needs of different audience groups. By carefully selecting and using these symbols, short videos can not only attract the audience's attention, but also subtly influence their cognition and attitude towards cultural memory, achieving the goal of inheriting and promoting historical and cultural heritage.

The symbols and symbols in short videos are not only carriers of cultural memory, but also tools for creating and reproducing cultural meanings. Creators need to find a balance between cultural historicity and technological modernity in the process of symbol selection. On the one hand, symbols must be deeply rooted in cultural traditions, carrying specific historical and social meanings to maintain the continuity of cultural memory; On the other hand, technological means and interactivity endow symbols with new vitality, enabling them to be widely disseminated and recognized in diverse digital environments.

### (2) Interpersonal interaction in virtual space

Goffman's performance theory emphasizes that individuals influence others through controlling their impressions of the situation in social interactions, that is, managing others' impressions of themselves through various activities. In the era of integrated media, this theory is applied to explain how media shapes public image. Integrated media platforms are breaking the authoritative image of traditional media, customizing content according to user needs, and reshaping their front-end image in the public opinion arena. At the same time, by moderately showcasing the backend image, increasing affinity, and enhancing public trust and recognition. For example, central level media use Vlog series videos by hosts such as Kang Hui and Wang Bingbing to change their voice, enhance their connection with the public, and break the boundaries between official and private public opinion fields, achieving the integration and unity of the two. This strategy not only enhances the interactivity and affinity of the media, but also strengthens the public's acceptance and participation in media content.

## IV. THE DEVELOPMENT STATUS OF SHORT VIDEO CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

### (1) Content innovation and diversified forms

Content innovation is the core driving force for the development of the short video industry. In 2023, short video platforms have achieved significant results in content innovation, with numerous excellent cases emerging. One example is the "Escape from the British Museum" collection of short clips that focuses on the dynamic between a slender jade vessel with twisting branches and a Chinese reporter living abroad. By telling the story of Chinese cultural relics fleeing to their homeland and returning to China to spread messages, the videos anthropomorphize the relics and give them life and emotions. This innovative content format not only aroused the audience's attention and reflection on cultural heritage protection and cultural inheritance, but also successfully attracted a large number of users' attention and love. This series of short videos has been played more than

420 million times on the Tiktok platform, becoming one of the hottest content of the year. The "Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance in Mountain Villages" series of short videos focuses on the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in Chinese mountain villages. By recording the daily lives and work scenes of intangible cultural heritage inheritors, it showcases the unique charm and value of intangible cultural heritage to the audience. These clips not only help viewers learn about the historical background and technological legacy of intangible cultural heritage but also ignite their passion and appreciation for traditional culture. One particular short video showcasing the creation of Miao silver jewelry received over 10 million likes and shares on the Kwai platform. As a new form of content that has emerged alongside short videos, micro dramas have performed remarkably well in the past year. As reported by iMedia Consulting, the value of China's micro drama industry hit 37.39 billion yuan in 2023, marking a rise of 267.65% compared to the previous year. At the same time, according to data from YiEn Data Content Think Tank, more than 1400 short dramas were launched in the market in 2023, with a year-on-year growth rate of over 50% for two consecutive years. Among them, Tiktok and Kwai will launch 455 and 214 new mini dramas from October 2022 to August 2023, respectively, exceeding the number of long video platforms. In terms of content, Tiktok's "More than a Moment of Heart Beating" has a cumulative broadcast volume of 1.19 billion, and the two seasons of "29" have a cumulative broadcast volume of 1.27 billion, showing an absolute advantage in the proportion of urban themes. Kwai set up the "Star Short Drama" to focus on the development of micro short drama, and evenly distribute five themes, namely, youth motivation, national charm and ancient style, urban workplace, family empathy, and era melody. Based on the precise user profile of short video platforms, the creation of micro drama content can accurately match user preferences. Coupled with the ups and downs of the story plot, micro dramas have strong content appeal and high user stickiness at the user viewing level.

## (2) Technological Innovation and Platform Upgrade

Technological progress is an important factor driving the development of the short video industry. In 2023, short video platforms have made significant progress in technology applications and platform upgrades, especially in innovative breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, interactive video, AR technology, and other areas. Firstly, the application of artificial intelligence technology in the short video industry is becoming increasingly widespread. With the support of deep learning and big data technology, short video platforms can achieve precise analysis and prediction of user behavior, thereby recommending content that better suits their preferences. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence technology has also been applied in video editing, dubbing, special effects, and other areas, improving the quality and viewing experience of videos. Secondly, interactive videos have become a major highlight of the short video industry. By introducing interactive elements, viewers can participate in the video content, interact with characters, and even change the plot direction. This form of video increases user engagement and

stickiness, allowing viewers to immerse themselves more deeply in the video content. In addition, the short video platform is also actively engaged in the development, promotion and application of AI tools. For example, on August 18, 2023, Kwai announced the latest progress in the application based on the self-developed big language model, and the "AI dialogue" function has been open for internal testing in the Android version of Kwai App. In addition, Kwai has independently developed the big language model "Joy" and the big model "Pictorial" of Wenshengtu, which have been combined with multiple scenarios such as search, review, commercialization, etc., and has internally tested a number of landing short video live broadcast products, creating intelligent applications such as "AI intelligent dialogue", "AI Xiaokuai", and intelligent customer service, which can create greater business value while improving user experience and platform activity.

(3) The short video content industry is becoming increasingly mature, fully empowering economic and social development.

With the rapid rise of video accounts, the landscape of the short video industry has evolved from the initial "two male competition" to a "three strong competition" situation. In the field of short video in China, the number of daily active users of Tiktok has remained above 600 million; The monthly active users and daily active users of Kwai reached 685 million and 387 million respectively, both hitting a new high; Through continuous iteration and updates, WeChat Video Account has achieved seamless integration with other functional modules within the WeChat ecosystem, becoming an undeniable new force in the field of short videos. In addition, other short video platforms such as CCTV, Xigua Video, Tencent Weishi, and Haokan Video have all deeply cultivated and refined their respective niche markets, forming unique competitive advantages. Short videos, as an emerging form of digital media, have demonstrated their strong ability in cross-border integration. It is gradually transforming from a single content publishing platform to a comprehensive online digital community, where users can achieve diversified needs such as entertainment, shopping, life services and knowledge learning. For example, relying on its platform ecology, Kwai continues to make efforts in several vertical fields, such as short plays, small games, real estate, local life, and recruitment. In the third quarter of 2023, the total volume of e-commerce commodity transactions (GMV) of Kwai increased by 30.4% year on year, reaching 290.2 billion yuan; The business of Kwai Ideal Home has covered more than 120 cities nationwide, and the accumulated real estate transaction volume has reached 14 billion yuan; At the same time, the Kwai platform also bred and expedited 174 new jobs, and the average daily resume delivery times of its fast employment business increased by more than 200% year on year.

## V. EXPLORING THE PATH OF SHORT VIDEO CULTURAL COMMUNICATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTION THEORY

### (1) Enrich symbol content and tell Chinese stories



The "storytelling" method in traditional cultural dissemination is also applicable in short videos. Innovative storytelling methods can better capture the attention of international audiences. For example, combining traditional Chinese cultural elements with modern popular culture, reinterpreting traditional stories from a modern perspective, or combining Chinese cultural stories with global hot events to increase their international relevance and appeal. When introducing traditional festivals or customs, combine the stories of specific characters, and show the Chinese people's feelings for their families and the importance of the Spring Festival through a family's Spring Festival preparation and celebration. This way of storytelling is more vivid and relatable to daily life, and can easily resonate with international audiences. If short videos are used to showcase the historical depth and modern development of Chinese culture, the continuity and innovation of Chinese culture can be demonstrated through the influence of ancient poetry in modern life. Stories are the bridge that connects people's hearts, able to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. In the dissemination of short videos of Chinese culture, innovative storytelling methods can more effectively attract international audiences, allowing them to not only see the surface of Chinese culture, but also delve into its rich connotations and historical context. Through stories, the audience can experience Chinese traditional festivals, legends of historical figures, and the daily life of Chinese people, so as to establish emotional connection with Chinese culture. For example, by telling stories behind traditional Chinese festivals, such as the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, short videos not only introduce the origin and customs of festivals, but also show the vitality and inclusiveness of Chinese culture through modern people's celebration. These types of short videos usually use high-quality images, vivid stories, and interactive elements, such as Q&A sessions, to allow international audiences to enjoy a visual feast while increasing their interest in understanding Chinese culture.

## (2) Innovate symbol forms to showcase China's image

In the wave of globalization, the international dissemination of Chinese culture has received increasing attention, and short videos, as an emerging form of media, have shown unique advantages in the international dissemination of Chinese culture due to their vivid and easy to spread characteristics. By utilizing high-quality visual effects and creative visual expression techniques, short video content can be made more appealing. Through animation, special effects, and modern visual design combined with traditional Chinese aesthetics, the viewing and dissemination of short videos can be increased without changing their cultural connotations. In visual design, cultural elements from China and other countries can be integrated to create a unique visual style. For example, in short videos introducing Chinese tea culture, tea culture elements from different countries can be added to showcase the beauty of cultural integration. Utilizing 360 degree video, VR, and AR technologies to create immersive experiences for the audience. For example, through VR technology, the audience can "step into" the Forbidden City and personally experience the grandeur and beauty of

palace architecture. Visual expression is one of the key elements that attract viewers to short videos, and innovative visual expression can better convey the connotation and charm of Chinese culture. In international communication, how to use visual language to bridge cultural differences and enable global audiences to understand and appreciate Chinese culture is a question worth exploring in depth. Innovative visual expression can be the combination of traditional Chinese cultural elements with modern visual aesthetics. For example, using modern graphic design technology to reinterpret traditional Chinese painting, calligraphy or Paper Cuttings art, so that it not only retains the traditional charm, but also conforms to modern aesthetics. This approach not only attracts the attention of international audiences, but also deepens their understanding and interest in traditional Chinese art. The application of high-tech means is also an important direction for visual expression innovation. For example, through augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies, viewers can interact with Chinese cultural elements in three-dimensional space, providing a brand new viewing experience. In addition, AI technology can be used to generate visual art works with Chinese style, which not only shows the unique charm of Chinese culture, but also reflects the progressiveness of science and technology. Targeted content customization is crucial in the production of short videos for international dissemination of Chinese culture. Understanding the cultural background, interests, preferences, and acceptance habits of the target audience can effectively enhance the attractiveness and dissemination effect of the content.

## (3) Strengthen user attributes and encourage diverse stakeholders to participate

In the context of new media, short video platforms have opened up new avenues for users to create and share cultural symbols in virtual environments. With the help of special effects technologies such as AR, these platforms further enhance the interactivity of cultural symbols, thereby strengthening users' abilities in creating and disseminating cultural symbols. Cultural symbols, as the main carrier of information transmission, are not only used by users, but also involve them in the creation of cultural symbols, transforming them into unique identifiers for users' personal creations. This process greatly enhances users' participation and creative enthusiasm. Strengthening the user attributes of cultural symbols can help them exert their dissemination and cohesion functions in virtual spaces.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The role of short video platforms in the dissemination of Chinese culture is becoming increasingly important. It not only provides new possibilities for the modern expression of traditional culture, but also opens up new windows for global users to understand and engage with Chinese culture. In the future, with the continuous improvement of platform functions and the increasing user engagement, short video platforms are expected to become an important bridge for Chinese culture to go global. At the same time, we should also realize that how to effectively protect and inherit the essence of culture, avoid cultural distortion and misreading, is an important issue that

short video platforms need to face and solve in the process of cultural dissemination. Let us look forward to and work together to make short video platforms a new engine for promoting the prosperity and development of Chinese culture and facilitating international cultural exchanges.

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