



Short Video Dissemination Strategy for Suzhou Wu Songs

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Abstract. This paper explores the international dissemination challenges of Suzhou Wu Songs, a national intangible cultural heritage, on short video platforms. It identifies core pain points including rigid narrative traditions, insufficient interactivity and fragmented content production in overseas communication. Centered on content, commerce and platform dimensions, the study proposes systematic optimization strategies: improving cross-cultural communication efficiency by enhancing creators' professional capabilities; building a cultural-commercial ecosystem through live streaming, e-commerce and cross-industry collaboration; and establishing derivative content incentive mechanisms on platforms to amplify the international influence and cultural communication effect of Wu Songs.

Keywords: Suzhou Wu Ge; international dissemination; cross-cultural communication;

1 Introduction

Suzhou Wu Ge, a representative of Jiangnan folk song culture, was inscribed in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage in 2006, bearing the unique water-town culture, dialect expressions and collective memory of the Wu region. However, the acceleration of globalization and urbanization has led to the decline of its traditional transmission environment, bringing challenges such as audience loss and communication gaps. The rapid rise of short video platforms represented by Douyin, TikTok and YouTube has created new paths for the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and cross-cultural dialogue.

2 The Dissemination and Reception of Wu Songs in Short Videos

The dissemination of Suzhou Wu Ge's content on short video platforms is still in its infancy. The creation of content is characterised by a dual-track model, with official

institutions and local media outlets publishing festival performances, interviews, and documentaries. These publications are characterised by an authoritative yet traditional style and limited interactivity. Inheritors and their teams adopt first-person perspectives, documenting daily rehearsals and blending Wu Ge performances with scenes of Jiangnan labor and life, enhancing authenticity and appeal. It is frequently observed that overseas feedback conveys admiration for the craftsmanship, appreciation of the unique aesthetics, and longing for the depicted way of life.

3 Existing Challenges in the International Dissemination of Suzhou Wu Song via Short Videos

Official accounts for the international promotion of Wu Songs still adopt the traditional narrative framework of intangible cultural heritage communication, with a solemn and orthodox communication style, leading to poor memorability of overseas dissemination content. In terms of content production, these accounts mainly focus on the historical origin of Wu Songs, inheritor documentary interviews and complete staged performances, with slow narrative pace and uneven information density, which is inconsistent with the short and concise characteristics of short video formats and thus difficult to achieve effective traffic conversion under algorithm recommendation mechanisms. In terms of communication expression, official content has a strong didactic nature: it neither translates and adapts content according to the cultural cognitive background of overseas audiences, nor sets up topic challenges and participation mechanisms in line with the interactive logic of short video platforms, resulting in long-term low engagement and failure to effectively penetrate overseas cultural circles. Intangible cultural heritage overseas communication faces dilemmas including insufficient subject coordination, weak content memorability and low media acceptance.^[4]

The advent of the new media era has provided more diverse communication channels for the international dissemination of China's intangible cultural heritage.^[5] Individual creators serve as an important supplementary force in the international dissemination of Wu Song via short videos. However, constrained by the nature of the media format and their own professional expertise, their content production tends to be fragmented and one-sided, which can easily lead to cultural misinterpretation among overseas audiences. Furthermore, in terms of professional competence, some individual creators lack both specialized knowledge of Wu Song as an intangible cultural heritage and fundamental skills in cross-cultural communication. This deficiency often leads to informational inaccuracies during content interpretation and multilingual translation.

4 Optimization Strategies for the Dissemination of Suzhou Wu Song via Short Videos

4.1 Enhancing Content Creators' Professional Competence

Suzhou Wu Songs, a distinctive regional intangible cultural heritage, face inevitable "cultural discounting" in international dissemination. Its core Wu cultural elements—Wu dialect, Jiangnan water-town imagery and culture-specific sentiments—pose notable comprehension barriers for overseas audiences. Therefore, reducing such cultural discount and enhancing cross-cultural communication effectiveness are critical priorities for the global dissemination of Wu Song short videos.

"In order to provide user-centric functionalities (such as relevant searches, content adaptation, customization and recommendation), both the annotation of contents with semantically rich metadata and an accurate model of the individual users and their respective contexts of use are needed."^[6] This means creators must tag Wu Song lyrics, cultural symbols, and musical features with semantic metadata while profiling overseas audiences' cultural backgrounds and viewing habits to improve matching accuracy. Meanwhile, Wu Song communication should adopt localized framing while retaining authentic regional cultural features to balance global acceptance and cultural uniqueness in that "the heritage discourse is built on the selection of certain aspects—namely, culinary and architectural assets—which are emphasized through the combined use of local and national frames."^[8]

Cultivating Creators with Relevant Skills.

Creators of overseas Wu Song short videos must master two core professional competencies. Cultural preservation capability is the fundamental foundation: creators need to not only accurately grasp Wu Song's vocal techniques and dialectal rhythms, but also deeply understand the folk tales and cultural symbols embedded in the lyrics, to avoid decontextualization caused by superficial cultural understanding. Cross-cultural expression capability is the core of effective global outreach: creators should leverage the visually driven nature of short videos to transform abstract dialect elements into perceptible narrative frameworks, using scene-based visual symbols to bypass linguistic barriers and evoke universal emotional resonance among global audiences. In the production of intangible cultural heritage short videos, visual and narrative techniques become central to symbolic reconstruction. Traditional intangible cultural heritage symbols are transformed through this reconstruction into more appealing and easily understandable communication symbols.^[1]

Furthermore, creators must prioritize content credibility. "Individuals working in isolation may assess information credibility systematically, although they routinely apply short-cuts by using cognitive heuristics (e.g., reputation, endorsement) to evaluate the credibility of online information."^[7] Thus, creators must highlight professional backgrounds and authoritative sources to help overseas audiences judge content reliability via cognitive heuristics.

Breaking Dialect Barriers: Bilingual Subtitles and IPA Annotations.

As the core carrier of Wu Songs, Suzhou dialect is a geographically specific linguistic system carrying unique regional cultural context, which overseas audiences often lack corresponding cultural conventions to accurately interpret the signifier and signified, easily leading to misunderstanding or indifference. Therefore, the application of bilingual subtitles and International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) annotations in overseas Wu Song short videos is particularly crucial. “Effective translation requires not only linguistic accuracy and fidelity but also bicultural sensitivity to fully convey source text information into target text expressions. ^[2]” Bilingual subtitles convert dialect-specific cultural imagery into a semantic system comprehensible to international audiences, while IPA annotations can “preserve the phonetic characteristics and lexical features of the dialect, enabling target-language readers to tangibly experience the original text’s unique linguistic style and flavor” ^[3], facilitating audiences’ further imitation and learning on the basis of comprehension. The combination of the two approaches builds a dual bridge for overseas audiences to understand Wu Songs from both linguistic and cultural dimensions. Subtitles and annotations can be adjusted adaptively based on audience context, such as adding cultural notes for viewers unfamiliar with Jiangnan culture to lower cognitive barriers.

Balancing Entertainment and Cultural Depth via PUGC.

Entertainment value is the core competitive edge of short video dissemination, but for Wu Songs, the enhancement of entertainment should never come at the expense of cultural depth. Current Wu Song short video dissemination mainly relies on two models: user-generated content (UGC) and professionally generated content (PGC). UGC offers flexibility but often suffers from fragmentation and superficiality due to creators’ limited expertise, while PGC guarantees professionalism but lacks appeal due to excessive formality and orthodoxy. Therefore, overseas Wu Song short video production should shift to a PUGC hybrid model, which balances entertainment value and cultural depth through the dual mechanism of “professional oversight anchoring cultural essence + user co-creation invigorating dissemination vitality”. A professional core layer—consisting of Wu Song inheritors and cross-cultural researchers—ensures content accuracy, while a public participation layer of pop-culture savvy creators explores innovative, engaging expressions of the art form. “Users always keep a pivotal role throughout the whole process: providing new contents, contributing to moderated folk-sonomies, overseeing their own user model, etc.” ^[6], which supports the PUGC model’s user-centered logic. Meanwhile, “The end-user-generated contents are not peer-reviewed, they have no source citations, and therefore it is often difficult to verify the sources or the credibility of the content” ^[7], so professional review is essential to avoid cultural misinterpretation. By assistance and surveillance of the professionals and specialists, communicators are guided to highlight core cultural features rather than over-entertaining, helping maintain heritage authenticity.

4.2 Enhancing the Commercial Attributes of Wu Songs

Building upon short video dissemination, integrating the live streaming and e-commerce functionalities of overseas social platforms to construct an ecosystem of "cultural communication-commercial monetization-cross-boundary breakthrough" can provide sustained support for the global promotion and living inheritance of Wu Song. Establish a Wu Song cultural live streaming matrix on platforms like TikTok Live to shift from one-way broadcasting to interactive communication. Facilitate live collaborations with overseas local influencers and music creators to reinterpret Wu Song within familiar cultural contexts, thereby lowering cognitive barriers for international audiences.

Develop cross-border e-commerce channels to use commercial success to support cultural endeavors. Additionally, offer services like "Wu Song Vocal Coaching" or "Yangtze River Delta Intangible Cultural Heritage Study Tours" to overseas enthusiasts, generating revenue to fund further dissemination efforts. Partner with renowned music producers to blend Wu Song elements with popular music arrangements, creating tracks for short video promotion and audience drive traffic. Collaborate with popular overseas film, television, and games projects to integrate Wu Song as part of their soundtracks, enabling cultural infiltration.

4.3 Platform Increases Investment in Wu Ge Short Videos

Platforms' resource allocation and rule design directly determine the reach and depth of Wu Ge's international dissemination via short videos. Currently, Wu Song content on overseas short video platforms is mostly scattered individual shares, lacking systematic professional production and targeted promotion. Secondary creation—where users adapt, parody, remix or cover original works—is the core mechanism transforming audiences from "information receivers" into "cultural co-creators". Therefore, overseas short video platforms should leverage their interactive advantages to set up dedicated secondary creation topics and incentive mechanisms for Wu Songs. Within the short video ecosystem, content creators extend beyond mere video publishers to encompass all users who watch, comment on, and share videos. These users interact with creators through likes, comments, and reposts. More importantly, they actively participate in the process of content reproduction. Compared to long-form videos with complex production workflows and high professional barriers, short videos in the "15-second music era" offer simplicity, templatization, and low costs. These characteristics significantly lower the threshold for content creation, providing fertile ground for secondary creation. For instance, platforms can collaborate with intangible cultural heritage institutions to launch challenges like "Wu Song Melody Remix" or "Learn to Sing in Wu Dialect" with incentive prizes, and partner with top influencers to release template videos, to encourage wider user participation and expand the global reach of Wu Songs.

Platforms should thus build semantic annotation systems for Wu Song content and user profile databases to improve recommendation precision. Secondary creation—where users adapt, parody, remix or cover original works—is the core mechanism transforming audiences from "information receivers" into "cultural co-creators". Therefore,

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5 Conclusion

Suzhou Wu songs are a national intangible cultural heritage, but they face many problems in international dissemination on short video platforms. Official accounts have authoritative content but are slow-paced and preachy, making it difficult to attract overseas audiences. Individual creators are more flexible, but their content is fragmented and lacks professional knowledge of intangible cultural heritage and cross-cultural communication skills, resulting in a serious cultural discount phenomenon, with the Wu dialect and water town imagery creating comprehension barriers for international audiences. Optimization strategies should focus on three aspects: cultivating creators who understand Wu song culture and can express it across languages, using bilingual subtitles and international phonetic symbols to aid understanding, and building a commercial monetization ecosystem, leveraging live streaming, e-commerce, and cross-industry collaborations to enhance dissemination momentum. Platforms also need to establish secondary creation incentive mechanisms, guiding users to become cultural co-creators through themed challenges and template videos, thereby increasing the global influence of Wu songs.

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