

International Communication Strategies for Urban Intangible Cultural Heritage - A Case Study of Zhengzhou's 24 Solar Terms Series

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Abstract

In the context where short videos have become the mainstream arena for cross-cultural communication, the international dissemination of urban intangible cultural heritage (ICH) faces core dilemmas such as high cultural discount, weak interactivity, and insufficient narrative depth. This study takes the bilingual short video series *Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 24 Solar Terms*, launched by Zhengzhou's official external communication brand WhereZhengzhou, as the research object. Based on multimodal discourse analysis theory, a qualitative study was conducted on 50 video corpora. The findings reveal that the series effectively lowers the threshold for cross-cultural understanding by employing an innovative Solar Terms and ICH narrative framework, relying on modal synergy of language, vision, and hearing, and adopting poetic translation strategies to concretize abstract Chinese philosophy. However, issues such as superficial content excavation, residual propaganda mindset, and lack of user co-creation persist. Combining cross-cultural communication theories with digital intelligence practices, this paper proposes optimization paths including deep narrative construction, unified visual symbols, community ecosystem co-construction, and technology-enabled immersion. These measures aim to achieve a transformation from one-way output to two-way resonance, providing actionable practical references for the global expansion of urban ICH in the digital era.

Keywords

International communication, Multimodal narrative, Intangible cultural heritage, 24 solar terms

Introduction

With the profound transformation of the global media ecology, short videos have become a core carrier of cross-cultural communication due to their fragmentation, visualization, and strong social attributes [1]. According to the *Report on the Development of China's Online Audio-Video Industry (2025)*, as of December 2024, the number of short video users in China reached 1.04 billion, with a usage rate of 93.8%. This provides a new opportunity for the living inheritance and international communication of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). As a core carrier of excellent traditional Chinese culture, ICH is no longer a static display in museums but needs to leap from local inheritance to global communication through digital technology empowerment. Cities, as micro-units of cultural communication, directly impact the international expression of national cultural images through the effectiveness of their ICH dissemination.

The official external communication brand of Zhengzhou City, WhereZhengzhou, has actively responded to the national cultural digitization strategy. As of December 2024, it has opened 56 accounts on mainstream overseas social media platforms, with a total fan base exceeding 2 million. The total viewership of its overseas social media matrix has surpassed 800 million, with video views exceeding 400 million, ranking among the top cities in China in terms of TikTok influence index. Its curated series, *Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 24 Solar Terms*, cleverly binds the traditional Chinese time knowledge system with local ICH projects in Zhengzhou. Cumulatively launching 50 episodes (shown in Figure 1), the series covers well-known projects such as Huimian (stewed noodles), Bian Embroidery, and Shaolin Martial Arts, while also

digging into regionally distinctive skills like Xiangying Lion Drum, Yellow River Chengni Inkstone, and Shuangqiao Liquor Brewing. This effort allows the

world to perceive the resonant voice of Zhengzhou, the splendid stories of Henan, and the image of China as a major country.

No.	Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 24 Solar Terms	Level	No.	Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 24 Solar Terms	Level
1	The Beginning of Spring & Lanterns	/	26	Rain Water & Ancient Craft of Guqin Making	/
2	Rain Water & Clay sculpture	/	27	Awakening of Insects & Craft of Official Porcelain	/
3	Awakening of Insects & Xiangying Lion Drum	Henan Provincial ICH	28	Spring Equinox & Bian Embroidery	/
4	Spring Equinox & Kite	/	29	Qingming & Porcelain Mending	/
5	Qingming & Paper-cutting	/	30	Grain Rain & the Technique of Rubbing	/
6	Grain Rain & Yellow River Chengni Inkstone	Henan Provincial ICH	31	Beginning of Summer & Metal Engraving Craftsmanship	Henan Provincial ICH
7	Beginning of Summer & Tie-dye	/	32	Lesser Fullness of Grain & Wheat Straw Painting	/
8	Lesser Fullness of Grain & Siling Duixiu	/	33	Grain in Ear & Straw Weaving	/
9	Grain in Ear & Traditional Chinese Medicine Skills	/	34	Summer Solstice & Almond Tea	/
10	Summer Solstice & Fan-making	/	35	Lesser Heat & Peony Sachets	/
11	Lesser Heat & Huimian	Henan Provincial ICH	36	Great Heat & Jade Carving	/
12	Major Heat & Woodcarving	Henan Provincial ICH	37	Beginning of Autumn & Kou Wan	/
13	Start of Autumn & Konghou Music	/	38	End of Heat & the Craft of Clay Monkey Figurines	/
14	End of Heat & Incense-Making Craft	Zhengzhou Municipal ICH	39	White Dew & Flower Buns	Zhengzhou Municipal ICH
15	White Dew & Zhongyuan Brocade	Zhengzhou Municipal ICH	40	Autumn Equinox & Egg Carving	/
16	Autumn Equinox & Steamed Jujube Flower Buns	Zhengzhou Municipal ICH	41	Cold Dew & Chang style Boxing	Henan Provincial ICH
17	Cold Dew & Pyrography	/	42	Frost's Descent & Embroidered Insoles	/
18	Frost's Descent & Tea-whisking	/	43	Beginning of Winter & the Art of Rubbing	/
19	Li Dong (Beginning of Winter) & Cloisonné Enamel	Zhengzhou Municipal ICH	44	Minor Snow & The Craft of Baijiu Brewing	/
20	Light Snow & Root Carving	Zhengzhou Municipal ICH	45	Major Snow & Sugar Painting	Henan Provincial ICH
21	Greater Snow & Silver Craftsmanship	Zhengzhou Municipal ICH	46	Winter Solstice & Steamed Dumplings	/
22	Winter Solstice & Dough Figurines	Henan Provincial ICH	47	Minor Cold & Yellow River Golden Sand Clay Teaware	/
23	Minor Cold & Chinese Plum Blossom Seal Script	Zhengzhou Municipal ICH	48	Major Cold & Leather Carving	/
24	The Major Cold & Shadow Puppetry	/	49	Beginning of Spring & Fabric Relief Embroidery	/
25	Lichun & Paper-cutting	/	50	Rain Water & Temari	/

Figure 1. List of *Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 24 Solar Terms* series.

Cultural discount is a core bottleneck in cross-cultural communication, referring to the reduced understanding and acceptance of heterogeneous cultural content by audiences from different cultural backgrounds due to cultural differences. Through narrative innovation and communication strategy optimization, it is possible to reduce cultural discount and build emotional resonance, allowing ICH with profound historical heritage to live in the present and walk towards the world.

Based on multimodal discourse analysis theory, this paper systematically analyzes the communication advantages and realistic dilemmas of this video series.

Combined with the core laws of cross-cultural communication, targeted optimization paths are proposed to provide references for similar communication practices.

Multimodal narrative: A breakthrough attempt in international communication of urban ICH

Traditional external promotion of ICH often falls into the misconception of isolated project introduction [2]. In contrast, the *Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 24 Solar Terms* series constructs a unique communication mechanism through the multimodal

synergy of language, vision, and hearing, effectively reducing cultural discount.

Innovation in narrative framework: 24 solar terms as the bridge, ICH as the core

The series uses the 24 Solar Terms as a timeline, endowing ICH with the vitality of conforming to heavenly timing, which cleverly cracks the cognitive barriers in cross-cultural communication. First, regarding the time dimension, solar terms represent a natural rhythm common to all humanity, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. For instance, in Rain Water & Clay Sculpture, the narration states, “Rain Water is the season when nature awakens from its slumber... the soil radiates with the vitality of life.” This utilizes the global audience’s common perception of spring, summer, autumn, and winter to greatly and effectively lower the threshold for cultural understanding.

Second, regarding the space dimension, the videos deeply excavate and prominently feature local resources in Zhengzhou. As shown in the corpus selection (50 episodes), the content covers 8 provincial-level ICH items in Henan (e.g., Xiangying Lion Drum, Yellow River Chengni Inkstone, Huimian) and 8 municipal/district-level ICH items in Zhengzhou (e.g., Incense-making Craft, Zhongyuan Brocade, Steamed Jujube Flower Buns). This concretizes abstract solar term philosophy into tangible Zhengzhou stories, thus making the city image both modern and imbued with deep ecological wisdom, historical thickness, and cultural continuity. This 24 Solar Terms and ICH framework design essentially uses, as a core strategy, common human natural experience as a communication bridge, embedding ICH culture into life scenarios perceptible to global audiences, achieving a narrative shift from cultural display to life integration [3]. Such an approach fosters genuine cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding, enriching the global cultural conversation.

Multimodal synergy: Symbolic complementarity and noise reduction based on Kress & van Leeuwen’s visual grammar theory

The series breaks the limitation of single-language modality, achieving a high degree of unity in representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. Language, images, and sound are not independent symbols but form a synergistic relationship

of complementarity and reinforcement, jointly reducing “noise” in cross-cultural communication.

Language modality: Poetic translation and cultural interpretation

Addressing the pain point of ICH terminology translation, the series avoids rigid literal translation, adopting a poetic strategy of free translation and interpretation to shift from information transmission to emotional resonance. In Major Heat & Woodcarving, the craftsman’s polishing process is described as: “shed its rough exterior, and reveal its inner warmth and luster”, sublimating a physical process into spiritual tempering. In Rain Water & Temari, the ending line “One rain awakens spring; one thread opens a world” conveys Eastern aesthetics with minimalist poetic language. Such short, poetic expressions adapt to the fast-paced communication characteristics of short videos.

Visual modality: Close-up focus and scene construction

The videos extensively use macro close-up shots to concretize abstract ICH skills [4]. For example, in Frost’s Descent & Tea-whisking, the camera focuses on the delicate foam on the tea soup surface, associating it with the visual imagery of frost, aiding the textual understanding of “a single leaf heralds the arrival of frost”. Simultaneously, placing ICH inheritors in natural environments constructs visual evidence of harmony between man and nature, making abstract philosophical concepts perceptible.

Auditory modality: Soundscape creation and emotional rendering

Auditory modality plays a key role in creating immersion. The videos skillfully mix original ICH production sound effects (iron beating, paper cutting) with solar term natural sound effects (thunder, bird songs), accompanied by a Chinese folk music baseline. This soundscape construction not only strengthens the Chinese style aesthetic experience but also compensates for semantic understanding deficiencies through the emotional tension of sound when language barriers exist.

The synergy of the three modalities is not a simple addition but truly forms an organic whole: Vision provides intuitive evidence, hearing renders the emotional atmosphere, and language provides logical highlights. In practice, this completely breaks pure text/language barriers, thereby enhancing cultural appeal

and memory points, ultimately perfectly adapting to the very communication habits of overseas short video social platforms. Different combinations of solar terms and

ICH construct diverse, unique multi-dimensional cultural images through highly effective multimodal symbol encoding (see Table 1).

Table 1. Case Analysis of Multimodal Symbol Encoding.

Solar term	Corresponding ICH	Core visual/Audio symbols	Key English translation	Image dimension
Awakening of insects	Xiangying Lion Drum	Four drums sounding together, spring thunder roaring	With spring's thunder, life burgeons.	Spiritual power: reverence for nature
Grain rain	Yellow River Chengni Inkstone	Yellow River sediment, ink grinding close-up	As rain gives life to countless grains...	Civilization inheritance: heavy history
Major snow	Sugar Painting	Copper pot boiling sugar, syrup pulling threads	Only when the cold reaches its extreme...	Life aesthetics: folk childlike fun
Winter solstice	Steamed Dumplings	Steamer white steam, family reunion	In every tiny pleat... promise that spring will return.	Emotional resonance: warm reunion

Note: Table data is based on qualitative analysis of 50 video corpora by the author.

Realistic dilemmas: Deep contradictions in international communication of urban ICH

Although the series has achieved certain positive communication results, in-depth corpus analysis reveals deep fundamental contradictions in content, positioning, and interaction, which severely restrict further improvement of overall international communication effectiveness [5].

Insufficient content cultivation: Imbalance between superficial display and historical depth

While the series has excavated some distinctive Zhengzhou ICH projects (e.g., “Shuangqiao Liquor Brewing Technique”, “Yellow River Golden Sand Clay Teaware”), it lacks sufficient depth in exploring the skills’ social functions and inheritors’ personal journeys. It fails to fully present the connection between ICH and Zhengzhou’s urban history. Most videos focus on superficial skill presentation, lacking in-depth interpretation of cultural connotations, historical changes, and contemporary values, making it difficult for overseas audiences to form a three-dimensional cognition of Zhengzhou ICH.

Deviation in functional positioning: Disconnection between propaganda mindset and life aesthetics

Traditional external promotion often focuses on grand narratives and achievement displays. Although this series attempts to shift towards a lifestyle orientation, some videos start by directly introducing the Henan Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage status and the originating dynasty, lacking lifestyle-oriented scene introductions. This does not align with the light narrative and experience-heavy communication characteristics of platforms like TikTok. Overseas audiences prefer to see how ICH intervenes in modern life rather than viewing purely historical archives [6]. This positioning deviation leads to a disconnection between communication content and audience needs.

Lack of interaction mechanism: Separation between one-way output and user co-creation

Currently, most videos remain dominated by exquisite one-way output. Although the copy frequently uses invitational phrases like “Let’s enjoy...” or “Let’s feel...”, there is a lack of mechanisms in actual operations to activate user participation, such as comment section interactions or challenge campaigns. Users remain in the

role of bystanders rather than co-creators of the story. For instance, in Autumn Equinox & Egg Carving, the mention of “you might as well try standing a fresh egg” fails to transform into actual communication fission without online challenge hashtags (#) and comment guidance, making it difficult to form a community effect in cross-cultural communication.

Concept innovation: Premise and core logic of empathetic communication

Cross-cultural communication in the digital age is characterized by polyphony and stratification. Achieving emotional connection through empathy is an effective way to build consensus, while Common Knowledge is the prerequisite for empathy. International communication of urban ICH must be based on common knowledge (excavating universal human life, spiritual, and emotional experiences); taking empathy as the core (building emotional connections through multimodal symbols); and aiming for resonance (achieving audience cultural identification and communication fission).

Common knowledge of life experience: Cross-cultural connection of natural perception

Utilizing natural perceptions common to all humanity to build a communication starting point is key to reducing cultural discount. For example, in *Lesser Heat and Huimian*, the custom of “eating new” is explained as “following your heart”, connecting diet with psychological comfort. In *Major Cold and Shadow Puppetry*, the light and shadow of shadow puppetry are compared to the hope of “extreme cold turning to warmth”. These activate common experiences rooted in human nature [7]. The 24 Solar Terms themselves represent the ecological wisdom of harmony between humans and nature. As mentioned in *Grain in Ear and Straw Weaving*, “the wisdom of bowing to the earth will one day rise to the timeless heights of civilization.” This reverence for and conformity with nature aligns with global sustainable development topics, providing a natural foundation for cross-cultural resonance.

Common knowledge of craftsman spirit: Universal values behind ICH

The craftsman spirit behind ICH skills is a common value across borders. Whether it is the focus and persistence in Major Heat & Jade Carving or the creativity of turning

decay into magic in Light Snow & Root Carving, these are spiritual cores that global audiences can understand and identify with [8]. Videos construct cross-cultural identity by featuring close-ups of craftsmen’s rough fingers and focused eyes (e.g., in End of Heat & Clay Monkey Figurines, “the artisan’s rough fingertips are gently kneading sun-dried peony petals”), elevating ICH communication from skill display to the sharing of spiritual values.

Common knowledge of emotional needs: Universal human emotional pursuits

Emotional needs such as reunion, hope, and resilience are universal. ICH communication must accurately grasp these emotional touch points. For instance, *Winter Solstice and Dough Figurines* focuses on “family reunion”, and *Beginning of Spring and Lanterns* conveys the joy of “bidding farewell to the old and welcoming the new”. These emotional expressions can cross cultural boundaries and trigger emotional resonance among overseas audiences. Binding ICH skills with common human emotions shifts cultural communication from “knowledge transmission” to “emotional exchange”, which is the core logic for achieving deep resonance.

Path optimization: Enhancing communication effectiveness through integrated practice

Based on the above analysis, international communication of urban ICH needs to be optimized from four dimensions: content, vision, interaction, and technology [9]. A communication system of “Deep Narrative + Unified Symbols + Community Co-construction + Technological Immersion” should be constructed to achieve a transformation from “one-way output” to “two-way resonance”.

Content cultivation: From superficial display to deep narrative

To strengthen character storylines, the study suggests increasing micro-narratives of ICH inheritors. Adopt documentary techniques to tell the joys and sorrows behind the skills, showcasing the persistence and innovation of inheritors, making “people” the core carrier of cultural communication. For example, recording the learning journey, challenges, and innovation attempts of the Yellow River Chengni Inkstone inheritor to convey the vitality of the skill through personal stories. Furthermore, it is crucial to

excavate historical correlations. Deeply sort out the deep connections between ICH and urban history, such as the origins of Zhengzhou ICH with Shang Capital Culture and Yellow River Culture. Combine skill display with urban historical narratives to construct three-dimensional communication content of “Skill + Person + City”. Additionally, content should integrate into modern life scenarios. Reducing rational information such as historical dynasties and ICH lists. Focus on displaying application scenarios of ICH in contemporary life, such as the innovation of Bian Embroidery in modern clothing or the cultural connotation of Huimian as Zhengzhou’s daily diet, allowing overseas audiences to perceive the “living inheritance” of ICH. Finally, empowerment by digital intelligence technology is essential. Utilize AIGC technology to restore historical scenes of ICH skills or construct virtual ICH experience scenarios to enhance the historical thickness and immersion of content [10].

Visual innovation: Building a unified image recognition system

Establishing typological visual language by creating fixed visual identifiers, such as a unified solar term ink-wash animation at the beginning, and exclusive color filters like “Yellow River Yellow” or “Green-and-Blue Landscape” within the video, forming distinct visual memory points. Strengthen sensory experience. Drawing from the detailed capture of sound (boiling copper pot) and texture (syrup pulling) in Major Heat & Sugar Painting, increase the sensory presentation of ICH skills. Examples include implying the aroma of Huimian through visuals or highlighting the texture of tie-dye fabrics through close-ups to enhance immersion. Adopt a symbolic presentation strategy. Extracting core visual symbols of ICH (e.g., “sediment texture” of Yellow River Chengni Inkstone, “drum surface totem” of Xiangying Lion Drum) and reinforce cultural recognizability through repeated appearance, helping overseas audiences memorize quickly.

Community co-construction: Creating a cross-cultural interactive ecosystem

Relying on video interaction points, initiate topics such as #My Solar Term Life or #Zhengzhou Craft Challenge. Encourage overseas users to film local solar term customs or imitate simple ICH actions (standing eggs, paper cutting) to achieve UGC (User Generated Content) fission communication. Facilitate inheritor overseas

interaction. Invite ICH inheritors to settle on overseas social media platforms for live demonstrations, skill teaching, or Q&A interactions to enhance the authenticity and affinity of communication. Building multi-language interaction channels. Setting up interactive questions in video comment sections (e.g., “Does your country have similar solar term customs?”) and equip multi-language customer service to respond timely, forming two-way cultural exchange.

Additionally, offering virtual badges or reward points to incentivize ongoing user engagement and content sharing. Designing ICH-related mini-games or quizzes to increase user participation and extend the communication chain. Promote cultural tourism integration linkage. Designing ICH study tour routes like “Travel Zhengzhou Following Solar Terms”, converting video traffic into offline cultural tourism momentum, allowing overseas tourists to experience the skills shown in videos onsite, forming a communication closed loop.

Technology empowerment: Building immersive multimodal experiences

Using AI tools to optimize the localized expression of multi-language subtitles, adjusting wording according to the language habits of target countries to avoid Chinglish or cultural misreading. Implementing algorithmic precision push. Through big data analysis of preferences for tags such as food, handicraft, and philosophy in different countries, we can achieve precise cross-cultural communication. For example, prioritizing pushing food-based ICH to Southeast Asian audiences, while prioritizing handicraft ICH and philosophical content for European and American audiences. Developing VR/AR immersive experiences. Creating a “Cloud Tour Zhengzhou ICH” mini-program, allowing overseas audiences to virtually experience processes like clay sculpture or paper cutting via mobile phones, constructing immersive experiences. Ensuring multi-platform collaborative communication. Customize differentiated content for the characteristics of different overseas platforms (TikTok for short videos, YouTube for in-depth content, Instagram for visual presentation) to form a communication matrix. Building an ICH knowledge base. Linking detailed ICH encyclopedias, inheritor maps, and cultural creative purchase channels below the videos to meet the audience’s need for in-depth

understanding, achieving a conversion from content to service [11].

Conclusion

Inheritance and international communication of ICH is long-term infiltration that moistens silently. The *Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 24 Solar Terms* series launched by Zhengzhou's communication brand "WhereZhengzhou", through 50 vivid slices, proves the key to ICH "going global" is integrating into daily life. By using storytelling, emotional, and lifestyle-oriented expressions, culture is quietly embedded into the daily experience and cultural memory of the masses.

Exploring innovative paths for international communication of ICH in Central Plains cities, narrative of "Solar Terms + ICH" and communication logic of "Common Knowledge-Empathy-Resonance" provide practical references for digital international communication of traditional Chinese culture. This aids Yellow River Culture and Central Plains Culture in becoming important carriers for international expression of national image.

International communication of urban ICH in the digital era requires breaking traditional one-way propaganda mindset. It must be based on "common knowledge", take "empathy" as the core, excavate local resources, construct a unified multimodal narrative system, use digital technology to create immersive experiences, and build a cross-cultural community ecosystem. This ensures Chinese stories are not only heard but also understood and spread widely, enhancing national cultural soft power.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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