

An Analysis of Chinese Traditional Culture in the Video of “Li Ziqi” under the the Perspective of Cross-cultural Communication

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Abstract: The proliferation of short video platforms in recent times has ushered in a proliferation of self-media accounts, with Li Ziqi’s channel standing out prominently. Her series depicting idyllic rural life in China swiftly garnered international acclaim on global video platforms, earning high accolades from esteemed institutions such as CCTV for the superior quality of her content. By harnessing the immediacy of video, Li Ziqi pioneers a novel avenue for audiences worldwide to immerse themselves in Chinese traditional culture. This paper delves into three salient facets of this cultural heritage as embodied in her productions: traditional attire, craftsmanship, and culinary arts. Subsequently, the paper combs out insights and lessons her approach offers for practitioners and scholars in the realm of cross-cultural communication, underscoring the potential of visual storytelling in transcending cultural boundaries.

Keywords: Cross-cultural Communication; Traditional Chinese Culture; Social Media; Li Ziqi

Introduction

In today’s accelerated globalized era, where short videos pervade and social media deeply integrates across borders, international communication dynamics evolve. Platforms like YouTube serve as new conduits for understanding diverse cultures, particularly through content creators who share Chinese traditional culture with global audiences. Notably, Li Ziqi, since her 2017 debut, swiftly garnered YouTube’s Silver and Gold Creator Awards and, by February 2, 2021, set a Guinness World Record with 14.1 million subscribers for the “Most Subscribed Chinese Channel.” Her enchanting rural-themed videos innovatively depict Chinese traditions, sparking international curiosity and motivating viewers to explore Chinese culture further.

Known as the lifestyle guru of oriental cuisine by overseas netizens, Li Ziqi’s videos have captured the hearts of audiences worldwide. In China, the official media outlet Guangming Daily has praised her for her ability to showcase the humanistic spirit embedded in Chinese traditional culture through her works, which document the daily life of an ordinary Chinese^[1]. This paper aims to delve deeper into the vivid portrayal of Chinese traditional culture in Li Ziqi’s videos and explore strategies for effectively engaging in cross-cultural communication of Chinese culture, enabling audiences to perceive its essence more directly and drawing valuable insights from her remarkable success.

1. Overview of Cross-cultural Communication

1.1 Definition of Cross-cultural Communication

The groundbreaking studies on cross-cultural communication trace their origins to Edward T. Hall’s work, *The Silent Language*. The ability to engage in cross-cultural communication does not arise spontaneously but is cultivated through deliberate efforts, encompassing cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and linguistic facets. In essence, cross-cultural communication refers to the process of cultural exchange among individuals, groups, and nations hailing from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Guo Qingguang (2011) further elaborates that cross-cultural communication involves the mutual exchange between people who possess distinct cultural values and representational systems. This phenomenon is not only an ancient aspect of human history and culture but also a modern lifestyle and a crucial skill. It serves as one of the primary driving forces behind the flourishing of national and global cultures. Unlike conventional communication, cross-cultural communication transcends mere information transmission and exchange; it is a process wherein specific cultures encode and decode information^[2]. Indeed, the extent of a nation’s cross-cultural communication outreach has become a yardstick for assessing its cultural soft power. cross-cultural communication has emerged as a vital conduit for people worldwide to

interact and comprehend the diverse cultural landscapes of the globe.

1.2 The Current State of Cross-Cultural Communication in China

As China's international stature rises, bolstered by rapid advancements in science and technology and expanding influence in political and economic domains, the nation plays an increasingly pivotal role on the global stage, actively fostering friendly diplomatic relations with countries worldwide. In terms of cultural dissemination, the proliferation of Confucius Institutes across the globe serves as a vital window for cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, a myriad of outstanding films and television programs, such as *Empresses in the Palace*, and *A Bite of China*, have reached overseas audiences.

While globalization has narrowed the distance between peoples, media remains the primary conduit through which individuals comprehend the world. Despite some achievements in cross-cultural communication, China still grapples with a deficit in international communicative agency. Given the stark contextual differences between Eastern and Western cultures—manifested in divergent values, thought patterns, and historical backgrounds—the high-context nature of Chinese culture encounters issues of cultural discount and misinterpretation in cross-cultural transmission, potentially creating cultural barriers. Consequently, the promotion of Chinese culture abroad struggles to achieve broad cross-cultural reach, with foreign publics often lacking comprehension with it. This context underscores the complexity and urgency of enhancing cross-cultural communication strategies that bridge these gaps, fostering deeper mutual understanding.

In conclusion, China necessitates a more amiable and emotionally resonant platform for communication, one typified by figures like Li Ziqi who effectively transmit Chinese traditional culture on social media. Her content, characterized by low accessibility thresholds, brevity, and swift audience engagement, coupled with its multidimensional portrayal of China's heritage, exemplifies a successful model for cross-cultural communication. This paper, through examining the depictions of traditional Chinese culture in her videos, aims to distill the key elements behind the success of Li Ziqi's antique Chinese-style videos in transcultural dissemination. It explores how short video enhances global understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture in cross-cultural communication, offering insights and inspirations.

2. Presentation of Traditional Chinese Culture in Li Ziqi's Videos

2.1 Traditional Chinese attire

Traditional Chinese attire stands as a significant conveyor of the nation's rich cultural heritage, imbued with profound folk traditions and spiritual essence. Li Ziqi's videos, centered on promoting Chinese cultural legacy, notably feature the protagonist donning traditional Chinese attire inspired by Han elements. Rooted in an extensive historical lineage, these costumes embody the unbroken transmission of the Chinese spirit across millennia, serving as a distinctive marker setting the Chinese ethnicity apart from others.

In Li Ziqi's videos, she dons a variety of attire, including crossed-collar short jackets, cheongsams, hooded capes, and modern Han-inspired garments—innovative adaptations of traditional Hanfu, designed for modern wear while incorporating traditional elements such as traditional knotted buttons (*pan kou*), blue calico (*lan ran*), front-opening designs, embroidery, and primarily crafted from natural materials like cotton, linen, and silk, underlining the perfect blend of aesthetics and functionality in Chinese attire. From short jackets and black cotton pants for farm work, to coarse cloth jackets with knotted buttons for cooking at home, to elegant, adapted cheongsams for tea ceremonies and meals, Li Ziqi adorns herself in attire befitting each activity^[3].

Despite the subtle distinctions in Asian physical appearances, Li's choice of traditional garb visibly sets her apart from others in video, instantly signaling Chinese cultural symbolism to viewers. The universality of aesthetic appreciation is evident as numerous viewers marvel at the beauty of the Hanfu she wears, facilitating the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese traditional costume culture.

2.2 Traditional Chinese Crafts

Li Ziqi's YouTube channel is replete with vivid demonstrations of traditional Chinese craftsmanship, displaying the series of intangible cultural heritage crafts, offering global audiences a glimpse into the millennia-old wisdom of China. In the video titled *Scholars four treasures*, she illustrates the intricate processes of creating brushes, ink, paper, and inkstone, culminating in a painting of bamboo using her

own handcrafted stationery set. Another video, Woodblock printing, delves into the technique of wood type printing, demonstrating its creation and usage, revealing to overseas viewers how Chinese ancients used these small blocks to produce books that would be passed down through generations, enabling scholars of the past to acquire knowledge. This channel further exhibits the diversity of traditional Chinese clothing-making skills, including silk flowers, Sichuan embroidery, and blue calico, showcasing the variety of Chinese traditional attire to the world. In the video Silk Flowers, she creates garments and hair accessories using the silk flower techniques from the Tang Dynasty. In 2008, silk flower making was included in the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage list.

It becomes evident from these videos that some traditional crafts utilize easily accessible materials, inspiring viewers to attempt their own creations at home. This not only effectively disseminates China's intangible cultural heritage but also portrays China as a major nation with a long-standing tradition of cultural heritage.

2.3 Traditional Chinese Cuisine

China has a clear distinction between the four seasons, a concept that is vividly portrayed in Li Ziqi's videos. Through her lens, viewers witness the traditional Chinese countryside cycle through the phases of spring growth, summer flourishing, autumn harvest, and winter storage. Each seasonal change brings forth its own culinary delights: tender and sweet bamboo shoots emerge in spring; during the scorching summer, a refreshing bowl of mung bean jelly offers relief; summer also yields an abundance of fruits, perfect for crafting homemade jams; as autumn arrives, the yellowing pears inspire the brewing of pear syrup, while plump crabs are transformed into succulent dishes; and as winter takes hold, it's the ideal time for communal hotpot gatherings amidst the snow.

Each video featuring traditional Chinese cuisine meticulously details recipes and cooking methods, allowing viewers to discover the diverse culinary applications of common ingredients across cultures. Li Ziqi's videos excel in tapping into local culture, sourcing ingredients directly from nature, focusing on traditional dishes that chronicle the simple pleasures of rural life. These are the universal exchanges of ordinary people, enabling international audiences to embrace and comprehend Chinese culinary culture in a relaxed setting^[4]. Her joyful, succinct cooking videos evoke nostalgia, showcase China's culinary richness, spreading Chinese gastronomy worldwide.

3. Inspiration

3.1 Redefining China's Image

Li Ziqi's videos predominantly feature the daily lives of ordinary people, detached from political contexts, focusing on the core content of Chinese culture without ideological or political undertones, thus reducing viewer resistance. Moreover, these videos are rich in the essence and depth of Chinese traditional culture, showcasing the vastness and sophistication of Chinese heritage. She has successfully portrayed China as a broad-minded nation.

Despite the persistent lack of positive, multifaceted, and objective evaluations of Chinese women in the global public consciousness, which often depicts them as weak and inferior^[5], Li Ziqi presents herself as an independent, hardworking, courageous, and benevolent individual. She bridges the emotional gap between Chinese and foreign audiences.

Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, presenting a more relatable national and personal image facilitates acceptance among audiences from diverse cultures. According to research conducted by the Academy for Contemporary China and World Studies, an ancient and charming oriental country remains the most prominent impression of China among overseas respondents^[6]. Therefore, it is even more important to target segmented cultural communities and create content with distinct characteristics of Chinese civilization in cross-cultural communication.

3.2 Overcoming Linguistic Barriers

Different civilizations possess distinct languages and scripts, and the greatest obstacle to cross-cultural communication is often the linguistic barrier. China, being a high-context culture, faces even greater challenges in preserving the original cultural nuances during translation in cross-cultural exchanges.

Surface-level cultural elements like clothing, food, shelter, and transportation are more culturally accessible in cross-cultural communication^[7]. In her videos, intangible cultural heritage skills closely tied to everyday life, such as food and clothing, garner heightened interest and discussion from foreign audiences. Li Ziqi's videos predominantly feature visuals of the preparation processes for traditional Chinese cuisines and crafts, interspersed with ample scenic shots and minimal spoken dialogue, with textual descriptions taking up a negligible portion. This approach significantly lowers the language barrier, enabling viewers from diverse cultural backgrounds to intuitively appreciate the allure of Chinese traditional culture.

4. Conclusion

Amidst the incessant transformation of the international communication landscape and the ascendance of digital media, cross-cultural communication is witnessing novel trends and characteristics marked by multipolarity. The challenge lies in how to uphold cultural confidence while breaking through cultural barriers, ensuring the accurate and effective dissemination of Chinese culture onto foreign soil. Li Ziqi has provided a commendable response to this challenge. Capitalizing on the technological prowess of new media, she narrates compelling stories about China, unveiling to the world an authentic and comprehensive image of the country.

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