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Cultural Heritage Narrative Innovation and Adaptation Mechanisms: A Case Study of the Intercultural Communication of Chinese Han Dynasty Heritage in Germany

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Abstract

The deepening of the “Belt and Road” Initiative urgently requires breaking through the dilemmas of symbolization, unidirectionality, and contextual de-embedding in the export of traditional cultural heritage. This paper takes the 2023 China-Germany “Tracing the Belt and Road” cultural heritage exchange project as the research object, employing a single-case exploratory research method to construct a theoretical model of “narrative carrier innovation—cultural heritage dimension adaptation” aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of cultural heritage dissemination. The study finds that international communication projects for cultural heritage can systematically deconstruct the cultural core (“Dao”) and innovatively adapt modernized, localized dissemination forms familiar to the audiences in the host regions (“Qi”), thereby achieving a paradigm shift from passive introduction to active resonance. The paper specifically elucidates how four types of innovative carriers—digital narrative, public participatory, competitive co-creative, and academic artistic—adapt to the dimensions of historical cognition, aesthetic experience, creative interaction, and value identification in Han Dynasty cultural heritage. This adaptation ultimately forms effective cross-cultural dissemination pathways. This research provides an operable theoretical framework and practical paradigm for “Belt and Road” humanistic exchanges, offering insights for the international dissemination of cultural heritage.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication; cultural heritage; narrative carrier; adaptation mechanism; Belt and Road



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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Cultural heritage is a shared historical witness and spiritual wealth of humanity, encompassing both tangible relics, architecture, and artworks, as well as intangible elements such as customs, language, and performing arts. These treasures embody the collective memory, worldview, and aesthetic pursuits of different civilizations. They not only serve as the foundation of national identity but also act as a vital link for all humanity to understand itself and connect with one another. Promoting the global dissemination

of cultural heritage helps foster dialogue among civilizations, preserve cultural diversity, and provides profound cultural resources to address the challenges of modernity [1,2]. Against this backdrop, the ongoing deepening of China's Belt and Road Initiative has seen its focus expand from infrastructure-centered "hard connectivity" to the domain of "soft connectivity," which emphasizes people-to-people exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations. Within this framework, the international dissemination of cultural heritage has emerged as a key pathway for promoting mutual understanding and achieving shared value recognition.

In the exchange and dissemination of cultural heritage, traditional methods such as artifact exhibitions, academic lectures, and cultural festivals have long dominated. These approaches are based on physical displays and expert commentary, emphasizing authority and authenticity, such as the British Museum's systematic exhibitions and UNESCO-supported intangible cultural heritage performances. Today's Headline. British Museum Exhibition Arrives in Shanghai, Narrating 2 Million Years of History with 100 Artifacts. <https://www.toutiao.com/article/6436800480181518594/> (accessed on 1 July 2025). However, they are often limited to one-way knowledge output, failing to fully achieve effective translation of cultural meanings and emotional resonance. In recent years, a wave of more interactive and context-sensitive emerging practices has gradually emerged, such as virtual museums, immersive theatrical tours, multinational curatorial collaborations, and creative development of cultural IP. These methods, through technological empowerment and narrative innovation, aim to embed cultural heritage into contemporary contexts and daily experiences. The effectiveness of their dissemination is highly dependent on the design of the "narrative medium"—that is, how to achieve cross-contextual transmission of cultural essence through symbolic translation, media strategies, and situational reconstruction [3,4].

The promotional video for the opening ceremony of the 2024 Paris Olympics drew global attention with its imaginative "resurrection of artifacts" scene: art pieces in the Louvre came to life, gathering by the window to watch the Olympics. This technique, through anthropomorphized storytelling, liberates cultural heritage from static, authoritative displays and integrates it into the Olympic event by the Seine River. By transforming static history into a dynamic celebration with emotional appeal, communicative power, and contemporary relevance, it significantly enhanced cultural resonance, the transmission of Olympic spirit, and global outreach [5]. It creates a fantastical narrative that bridges the ancient and the modern, breaking the traditional "gaze structure" of museums while dramatizing and emotionalizing the public's reimagination of cultural heritage [6,7]. From the perspective of narrative media, the anthropomorphization strategy effectively reduces cultural barriers, turning historical figures and artworks into relatable and empathetic "characters" [8].

Another highly inspiring case is the "Museum Meow Night" special event launched by the Shanghai Museum in collaboration with the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities. As one of the most talked-about innovations in the "Ancient Egyptian Civilization" exhibition, this event used animal narratives as an entry point, skillfully constructing a cross-temporal dialogue. The exhibition not only gathered precious cat mummies, statues of the goddess Bastet, and related artifacts but also, for the first time, invited visitors to bring their own cats into the museum. The heartwarming concept of "bringing a cat to see the cats" cleverly connected ancient Egyptian sacred beliefs with modern pet affection, invoking deep and intuitive emotional resonance through a participatory context that spans across species and millennia [9]. It broke the traditional logic of exhibitions where artifacts are mere objects of gaze, instead creating a multidimensional, life-infused narrative space. This approach guided the audience to re-interpret the spiritual system in ancient Egyptian culture, which intertwines animals, divinity, death, and eternity, based on their personal

emotional experiences [10]. This was not just an exhibition; it was a ritualized cultural experience that breathed new life and contemporary meaning into the silent artifacts.

1.2. Problem Statement

These successful cases demonstrate that effective cultural heritage dissemination cannot stop at the one-way output of cultural products or forms; it must deeply explain their spiritual essence and organically integrate them into the lived practices of the target context. Only by transcending superficial displays of cultural symbols and formal transplantation, and embedding the system of meaning of cultural heritage into the emotional structure and cognitive landscapes of contemporary people, can we truly overcome the phenomenon of “cultural discount”—namely, the diminished appeal and comprehensibility of cultural products when communicated across different contexts—which is often caused by differences in historical background, values, or aesthetic preferences, and achieve profound dialogue between civilizations [11,12].

Despite the innovative breakthroughs showcased in cases like the Paris Olympic opening ceremony and the Shanghai Museum’s Egyptian exhibition, most current practices still face fundamental challenges: the value connotations of cultural heritage and the methods of its presentation have not yet achieved organic unity [13]. Many attempts, although drawing on popular narrative mediums or incorporating technological methods, have failed to effectively translate cultural heritage due to a lack of systematic theoretical support and adaptive mechanisms.

Therefore, in the process of “going global,” global cultural heritage urgently needs to achieve a paradigm shift from “supply-oriented” to “demand-oriented,” and from “decontextualization” to “contextualization.” This means that we not only need to export cultural symbols but also focus on the interpretation and reconstruction of their deeper meanings, promoting their organic integration with local cultural contexts [14], and exploring narrative mediums that truly align with them. Based on the study of the 2023 China–Germany “Tracing the Belt and Road” cultural heritage exchange project, this paper draws upon and reinterprets the Chinese philosophical concepts of Dao and Qi to construct an analytical framework that integrates cultural origin and theoretical applicability, and systematically explores innovative paths and adaptive mechanisms for the “narrative medium” of global cultural heritage from the perspective of cross-cultural communication theory. In this context, Dao refers to the intrinsic spiritual core and fundamental values of cultural heritage, while Qi corresponds to its external narrative forms and communicative expressions. The research aims to contribute a theoretical solution and practical wisdom with Chinese characteristics to the global dissemination of world cultural heritage.

2. Literature Review and Model Analysis

2.1. The Paradigmatic Dilemma of International Cultural Heritage Dissemination

To solve the dilemma of international cultural heritage dissemination, theoretical guidance is essential. Research shows that the effectiveness of cultural heritage’s international dissemination fundamentally depends on the strength of its cultural heritage competitiveness. A competitive cultural heritage dissemination system is not simply a display of resources; it must include a diversified production system, a multi-channel communication system, a collaborative innovation system, and an integrated support system [15–17]. This means that effective cultural export must shift from “one-way output” to “two-way adaptation,” and its success largely depends on a profound understanding and application of cross-cultural adaptability [18,19].

The theory of cross-cultural adaptability suggests that cultural symbols inevitably generate cognitive biases and acceptance barriers when crossing heterogeneous contexts. Empirical examination of the differences in cultural heritage value recognition among audiences from different

cultural backgrounds is the cornerstone for constructing effective dissemination strategies [20]. Research indicates that visitors of different nationalities exhibit significant differences in their interpretative pathways and perceptions of the deep structure of culture when engaging with cultural heritage [21]. These differences are rooted in varying philosophical ideologies, thinking patterns, and aesthetic approaches. Therefore, effective communication is far from simple language translation; it requires the “creative transcreation” of heritage values, reshaping them into narratives and experiences that are comprehensible and resonate within the target cultural context [22]. Semiotic theory provides the core framework for this, stating that communication is a process of creating and sharing meanings through symbols. The “narrative medium,” as the “signifier,” profoundly influences how audiences with different cultural competencies decode the “signified” (i.e., heritage values) [23–25].

Currently, existing research has pointed out that “digitalization” and “experientiality” are key directions for breaking the deadlock [26,27], but most studies remain at the level of technological applications or activity descriptions. The Book of Changes states, “What is above form is called the Dao; what is under form is called the Qi.” If we understand Dao as the spiritual core of cultural heritage and Qi as its forms of communication, existing research still lacks a systematic theoretical framework for how the two should be adaptively aligned. Which type of medium can more effectively carry and translate which dimensions of cultural heritage values? This question has not yet been fully addressed.

This study aims to construct and validate an analytical framework for “narrative medium innovation–cultural heritage dimension adaptation,” with the goal of addressing the aforementioned dilemma at a theoretical level and providing a new approach to solving the challenges of cross-cultural dissemination of cultural heritage.

2.2. Construction of the “Narrative Medium-Cultural Heritage Dimension” Adaptation Model

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, this study constructs a theoretical model that matches the four core value dimensions of cultural heritage with four types of innovative narrative mediums. The model not only presents the static correspondence between “dimension–medium” but also reveals the dynamic progression logic in the effectiveness of communication that can be achieved by the four adaptation relationships.

The model aims to provide an operational path for effectively “transcreating” cultural heritage for cross-cultural audiences (particularly in tourism and cultural exchange contexts). The model is shown in Figure 1.

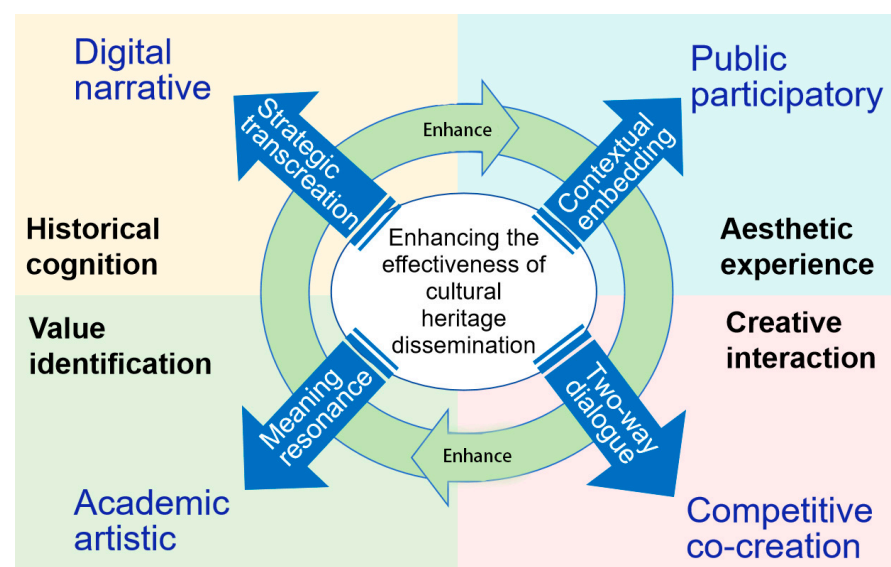


Figure 1. Narrative Medium-Cultural Heritage Dimension Adaptation Mode.

2.3. Research Propositions

Based on this model, the authors propose the following core research propositions: the use of four types of innovative narrative mediums—digital storytelling, public participatory, competitive co-creation, and academic artistic—can effectively enhance the cross-cultural dissemination effectiveness of Han Dynasty cultural heritage in the corresponding dimensions of historical cognition, aesthetic experience, creative interaction, and value identification.

This study will conduct an in-depth exploratory validation of these propositions using the 2023 China-Germany “Tracing the Belt and Road” project as a case study.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Methodology Choice: Single-Case Study

This study adopts the single-case study method, with the 2023 China-Germany “Tracing the Belt and Road” project as the analysis object. Case study methodology is suitable for in-depth, longitudinal examination of complex phenomena, particularly for constructing and validating theoretical models. As a comprehensive and information-rich case, this project systematically implemented all types of media in the theoretical model, providing an ideal empirical foundation for exploring the “narrative medium-cultural heritage dimension” adaptation mechanism.

3.2. Case Description

This study focuses on the China-Germany “Tracing the Belt and Road” project as the research case. The project was jointly initiated by the Han Jingdi Yangling Museum and the German Center for Han Culture and Arts Exchange, centered on Han Dynasty cultural heritage. It integrates digital technology and localized activities, aiming to construct a new model of cultural heritage dissemination. The project consists of four main components: the production and dissemination of “The Code of Han Dynasty Chic” promotional video, the Hanfu (Traditional Han Chinese Clothing) parade at the Berlin Cultural Carnival, TAGESSPIEGEL.Nihao: Die Gruppe “Hello China” zeigte die bunte traditionelle Tracht der Han-Chinesen. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/federn-flugel-regenschirme-das-sind-die-schonsten-bilder-vom-26-karneval-der-kulturen-in-berlin-11686145.html> (accessed on 1 July 2025), the Han Culture Art Design Competition, and the China-Germany Dual-City Art Exhibition. Through a multidimensional dissemination system of “cultural storytelling, technological empowerment, and industrial collaboration,” the project aims to achieve the global transmission of Han Dynasty cultural heritage, from “academic research” to “industrial value.”

3.3. Data Sources and Analysis Strategy

The data collection and analysis strategy of this study primarily includes document analysis and participatory observation. The researcher systematically collects and analyzes various documents related to the project, including project proposals, activity implementation plans, promotional materials, promotional video scripts, design competition entries, exhibition curatorial plans, internal reports, social media content, and relevant media coverage. Through qualitative analysis of these documents, the study extracts specific strategies and outcomes regarding the innovation of media and the adaptation of cultural heritage within the project.

At the same time, as a deeply involved participant and observer in the project, the researcher tracks and records the entire process of planning, implementation, and feedback (Figure 2). By participating in project meetings, observing activities on-site, and engaging in informal conversations with project team members and participants, the researcher obtains

firsthand data and in-depth background information, thereby gaining a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the case.



Figure 2. Han Culture Ambassadors Explaining Han Dynasty Historical and Cultural Heritage to German Audiences at the Event. (Source: China News Service. <https://m.chinanews.com/wap/detail/chs/zw/10118493.shtml> (accessed on 6 July 2025)).

4. Research Content and Significance

4.1. Research Content and Theoretical Framework

The main content of this study includes: first, the construction of a theoretical model for “narrative medium-cultural heritage dimension” adaptation; second, using the China-Germany cultural heritage dissemination project as a case study, a detailed analysis of how the four types of innovative narrative mediums align with the four cultural heritage dimensions; and finally, a discussion of the theoretical contributions and practical insights of the model, as well as providing directions for future research. The theoretical framework of this study is derived from the integration of cross-cultural communication theory and semiotics.

4.2. Research Significance and Core Argument

The significance of this study lies in the following: Theoretically, it breaks through the “technological determinism” tendency in traditional cultural heritage dissemination research and innovatively proposes a more systematic and operational analysis framework. Practically, it provides a replicable and assessable planning and implementation paradigm for global cultural heritage exchange projects. The core argument of this study is that effective cross-cultural communication is not simply about simple content transfer, but requires the precise design and innovation of narrative media that align with the cultural heritage dimensions intended to be conveyed, thereby achieving the harmonious integration of the essence and the medium.

5. Case Analysis: The Practice of Medium Innovation and Cultural Heritage Adaptation

5.1. Adaptation of Digital Narrative Medium and the Historical Cognition Dimension

The project's promotional video, *The Code of Han Dynasty Chic*, innovatively introduces the “personification of artifacts” digital narrative strategy (Figure 3). Using a Han Dynasty female figurine as a first-person perspective, and leveraging 4K&3D digital technologies, the video immerses viewers in the cultural, economic, and daily life of Han Dynasty society. This strategy effectively lowers the cognitive threshold for viewers regarding Han Dynasty cultural heritage. The video employs high-precision digital modeling and scene restoration to visually reconstruct life scenes and material environments of Han Dynasty society on the original Han Dynasty site. Abstract cultural knowledge, such as rituals, architectural forms, and artifact craftsmanship, is transformed into an interactive, perceptible, and empathetic immersive experience. This technological empowerment not only enhances the entertainment and appeal of the viewing experience but also aims to convey a profound sense of historical authenticity and cultural grandeur, making distant cultural memories tangible and accessible.



Figure 3. The Code of Han Dynasty Chic Promotional Video's First-Person Perspective of Han Dynasty Female Figurine.

This type of digital narrative medium, centered around personification, possesses strong adaptability and scalability, making it particularly suitable for cultural tourism scenarios such as museums and heritage parks. In physical exhibition halls, visitors can use AR guides to overlay comparisons between the ancient and the modern, and with VR headsets at heritage sites, they can virtually return to historical scenes, thus achieving a shift from “watching” to “experiencing,” and from “static display” to “dynamic storytelling.” It not only enriches the visitor experience but also creates a cultural dialogue that transcends time and space, providing an effective pathway for the sustainable dissemination and innovative use of cultural heritage.

The systematic digital transcreation and medium reconstruction of this promotional video have opened new pathways for the cross-cultural dissemination of historical cognition. Its innovative breakthroughs are primarily reflected in the following aspects:

First, the personified perspective changes the traditional path of historical cognition, shifting from knowledge reception to embodied immersion. Compared to previous methods that relied on static explanations of artifacts and texts—especially for cross-cultural audiences, which tend to have higher cognitive thresholds—this video uses the terracotta figurine as a “guide,” imbuing it with emotion and behavioral logic. Through first-person narration, the figurine leads the audience on a stroll through Han Dynasty markets, experiences in craft production, and participation in ceremonial activities. This multi-sensory immersion creates an intuitive and approachable historical understanding, significantly alleviating the comprehension barriers caused by cultural distance. Such immersive, interactive virtual environments have been shown to facilitate deeper “learning by doing” and emotional engagement [28].

Furthermore, the micro-narrative effectively connects the broader civilizational context, facilitating the localization of cultural content. The video avoids presenting artifacts in isolation and, instead, uses the terracotta figurine’s “first-hand” perspective to reinsert items like jade bi and bronze chariots into their original contexts of rituals, trade, and daily life. For instance, by having the figurine participate in ceremonial activities, the social function of the jade bi is demonstrated, and its travel experiences recreate the actual use of chariots and horses within the transportation system. In this way, individual encounters reflect the larger picture of the era, making abstract systems and cultural concepts tangible and accessible, thereby providing cross-cultural audiences with an emotional cognitive entry point for understanding Han Dynasty civilization.

Ultimately, emotional immersion transcends traditional knowledge dissemination, achieving an elevation in communication at the level of values. Digital technology here becomes the key medium for emotional awakening. By narrating the terracotta figurine’s life journey—from creation and use to becoming a burial item—the narrative creates a path that evokes empathy. In the immersive environment constructed by technology, the audience not only gains knowledge but also experiences profound emotional engagement, leading to a deeper recognition and memory of Han Dynasty culture. This form of communication, which strikes at “human nature” through the “physicality” of objects, successfully crosses language and cultural boundaries, advancing the goal of communication from mere information transfer to value resonance.

Thus, the effectiveness of strategic transcreation is realized, and the key lies in the digital narrative’s reconstruction of the path to historical cognition. Through techniques like personified perspectives, micro-narratives, and emotional immersion, abstract historical knowledge is transformed into a perceptible, empathetic cultural experience, significantly lowering the cognitive threshold for cross-cultural understanding.

5.2. Adaptation of Public Participatory Medium and the Aesthetic Experience Dimension

After the Code of Han Dynasty Chic promotional video was widely disseminated in Germany and sparked initial public interest and awareness of Han Dynasty culture, the “Hanfu Parade at the Berlin Cultural Carnival” emerged as a core on-the-ground activity, creating a public participation-based cultural dissemination paradigm (Figure 4). By embedding Hanfu as a symbol of Chinese traditional aesthetics into the localized festival context in Berlin, the project achieved a transformation from one-way display to multi-dimensional interaction, and from visual reception to experiential participation in aesthetic communication.



Nihao: Die Gruppe „Hello China“ zeigte die bunte traditionelle Tracht der Han-Chinesen.

© dpa/Monika Skolimowska

Figure 4. German “Daily Mirror” Using the Hanfu Parade as the Cover Photo for Berlin Art Carnival Coverage.

The project, using cultural IP (intellectual property) from the Han Yangling Museum as the creative source, designed a series of themed Hanfu and cultural props. Leveraging the carnival as a highly open and emotionally fluid public platform, the project guided participants to immerse themselves in the aesthetic characteristics and cultural meanings of Han Dynasty clothing through embodied practices such as wearing, parading, and performing. This participatory medium-based aesthetic communication strategy effectively broke through cognitive barriers in traditional cultural dissemination, providing cross-cultural audiences with a perceptible, empathetic, and actionable aesthetic experience pathway [29].

This type of narrative medium, characterized by public participation, demonstrates significant contextual adaptability and social mobilization potential, especially in mass, high-interaction scenarios such as street festivals and cultural celebrations. In the Berlin Cultural Carnival, the audience not only exists as spectators but can also engage through activities like trying on Hanfu, participating in the parade, and taking photos as souvenirs, thus transforming from “passive watching” to “active participation” and from “aesthetic cognition” to “embodied experience.” This approach not only strengthens the emotional penetration of cultural symbols but also creates a shared aesthetic space that breaks cultural boundaries, providing an innovative model for the revitalized dissemination of traditional culture in the contemporary international context.

It is noteworthy that the initial dissemination of the promotional video laid a solid audience foundation for the subsequent offline event. For example, participant Anton mentioned in an interview that he had previously watched The Code of Han Dynasty Chic promotional video and had gained an intuitive impression of Han Dynasty clothing and cultural scenes. China News Service. Chinese Hanfu Squad Makes Debut in Berlin. <https://m.chinanews.com/wap/detail/chs/sp/10220426.shtml> (accessed on 3 July 2025). He expressed that he enjoyed the fun brought by Han culture at the event and was eager to try on Hanfu and experience its beauty. This feedback indicates that the “strategic transcreation” effectiveness achieved by the digital narrative attracted a broader and more prepared participant group for the subsequent “contextualization” activities, creating an effective connection in the dissemination chain.

The major innovation of this project lies in the fundamental shift in cultural dissemination paradigms through participatory aesthetic practices. Unlike traditional static museum displays, this project transforms Hanfu into a “wearable cultural text,” allowing cross-cultural audiences to understand the functionality, aesthetics, and ceremonial aspects of Han Dynasty clothing through embodied participation, such as wearing the garments and engaging in street parades. This body-based aesthetic communication method not only significantly reduces the comprehension barriers caused by cultural distance but also creates a profound connection between cultural memory and personal experience.

At the same time, the project conducted in-depth research on the participant demographics, activity characteristics, and atmospheric features of the Berlin Cultural Carnival, accurately planning the timing and route of the Hanfu parade. It fully leveraged the openness and emotional fluidity unique to public festivals, allowing the Hanfu display to naturally integrate into the local cultural ecosystem. This approach avoided the sense of “cultural enclave” and achieved the localized fusion of cultural symbols. By successfully transplanting Hanfu culture from institutionalized exhibition spaces to the everyday urban streets, the festive atmosphere and collective participation mechanism provided by the Berlin Cultural Carnival endowed Hanfu culture with shareability, interactivity, and contemporary relevance. It transformed Hanfu from a distant “other” symbol into a perceptible, interpretable, and resonant living cultural practice. This contextual transformation strategy greatly enhanced the affinity and penetration effectiveness of cultural dissemination.

Ultimately, the project realized the creative transcreation and reproduction of cultural meaning through the meticulous design of participatory media. While preserving traditional forms and symbolic motifs, the Hanfu design integrated modern aesthetic considerations and local cultural elements, enabling it to both carry historical memory and align with the experiential needs of contemporary international audiences. This strategy of “traditional expression in a contemporary context” transformed Hanfu into a dynamic, extensible, and co-creatable aesthetic medium, thereby achieving the deeper objective of shifting from cultural export to cultural dialogue. This case illustrates that the success of contextual embedding lies in the activation of the aesthetic experience domain through public participatory mediums. By leveraging localized festival engagement and embodied practices, the aesthetics of Hanfu are no longer distant symbols but immersive experiences seamlessly integrated into the local cultural texture, thereby constructing a dissemination space with considerable appeal and penetrative power.

5.3. Adaptation of Competitive Co-Creation Medium and the Creative Interaction Dimension

As the most open segment of the project, the “Han Culture Art Design Competition” was successfully launched following the widespread social attention generated by the Hanfu parade at the Berlin Cultural Carnival. The embodied experience of the Hanfu parade during the carnival not only popularized the aesthetics of Han culture but also

sparked a strong desire among some deep participants to transition from “experiencers” to “co-creators.” The competition, driven by a contest mechanism, effectively activated co-creation potential within a cross-cultural context, fostering contemporary creativity and dialogue based on elements of cultural heritage.

For example, Alex, China News Service. “The Beauty of Hanfu”: Hanfu Show and Experience Event Held in Berlin. <https://m.chinanews.com/wap/detail/chs/zw/10118493.shtml> (accessed on 5 July 2025), who participated in the Hanfu parade, stated in an interview that after wearing Hanfu and taking part in the parade, he developed a strong interest in Han culture and the Han Yangling Museum. He was particularly intrigued when he saw the design competition themed around the “CHE QI General.” (Commander of Chariots and Cavalry) He felt that this was an opportunity to transform his interest into creative work and was eager to participate in such a co-creation design process. This feedback indicates that the “contextual embedding” effect created by public participatory activities has helped establish a core audience with transformative potential for subsequent “two-way dialogue” activities.

As the most open segment of the entire project, the “Han Culture Art Design Competition” used a competition mechanism to effectively activate co-creation power within a cross-cultural context, generating contemporary creativity and dialogue based on cultural heritage elements. By establishing the “Reinterpretation” core track, the competition encouraged global participants to contemporize and express Han Dynasty cultural heritage in personal ways, transforming one-way cultural “dissemination” into two-way “dialogue,” thus fostering the creation of cultural meaning for global audiences. The competition, using cultural artifacts from the Han Yangling Museum as the creative theme, invited works from international designers, university students, and traditional culture enthusiasts. Relying on the local network of the German Han Culture and Arts Exchange Center, it created an open, inclusive, and interactive cultural production space. This co-creation model, using the competition as a medium, not only expanded the boundaries of cultural heritage dissemination but also achieved a paradigm shift from cultural export to the co-existence of shared meaning.

This type of cultural co-creation medium, centered around a competition, possesses broad participatory engagement and a strong innovative driving force, making it especially suitable for international dissemination scenarios that require breaking cultural barriers and stimulating diverse interpretations. The competition established a complete value chain through four key phases: theme release, work collection, selection and exhibition, and dissemination and promotion. This process connects individual creation to collective display, and offline activities to online diffusion. It not only injects fresh energy into traditional culture but also shapes a cultural innovation ecosystem that spans regions and disciplines, providing a systemic pathway for the sustainable revitalization and global dissemination of cultural heritage.

The innovation of this competition lies in its systematic construction of a complete ecology for cultural co-creation and value transformation. By restructuring the power dynamics of cultural dissemination through a competition mechanism, it shifted from traditional authoritative interpretation to an open, pluralistic narrative. Unlike the one-way interpretive model of cultural heritage institutions, this project centers around “Reinterpretation,” encouraging participants to creatively reinterpret Han Dynasty artifacts based on their own cultural backgrounds. This mechanism breaks the monopoly of cultural dissemination, making Han Dynasty art no longer a static historical heritage, but a dynamic, dialogical, and re-creatable resource, effectively stimulating the participation enthusiasm of cross-cultural audiences.

The competition further promotes the contemporary transcreation and global adaptation of cultural heritage through the “Reinterpretation” track. The entries respect the spiritual core of Han Dynasty culture while emphasizing innovation, practicality, and cross-disciplinary integration. In previous years’ works, Han Dynasty figurine patterns were transformed into modern fashion designs, and Han Dynasty astronomical concepts became the inspiration for digital art. This transcreation practice not only expands the dimensions of meaning of cultural heritage but also integrates it into the daily life and aesthetic contexts of global audiences.

Most importantly, the competition established a complete outcome transformation and sustainable innovation chain: award-winning works will receive industrial support and enter the museum’s cultural and creative development sequence; outstanding designers will be incorporated into talent pools and gain ongoing collaboration opportunities with cultural heritage institutions and brand enterprises; all entries will be added to the digital resource library, providing open support for future creations and research. This mechanism effectively ensures the sustainability of cultural innovation and the long-term transformation of its outcomes.

Ultimately, the competition, through its process design and resource integration, achieved an upward shift in the paradigm, transitioning from cultural heritage dissemination to value co-creation. Through workshops, international exhibitions, and media collaborations, the competition transformed individual creations into public cultural topics, establishing a sustainable cross-cultural dialogue space. This communication model, using the competition as a link and creativity as dialogue, not only expanded the dimensions of cultural heritage dissemination but also injected sustainable innovative vitality into international cultural heritage exchange under the “Belt and Road” initiative. The core contribution of the competitive co-creation medium lies in the establishment of a mechanism for two-way dialogue, which stimulated the vitality of creative interaction. The open competition mechanism and the “Reinterpretation” track broke the monopoly of cultural dissemination, transforming cross-cultural audiences into active co-creators and achieving a paradigm shift from one-way dissemination to meaning co-existence.

5.4. Adaptation of Academic Artistic Medium and the Value Identification Dimension

As the integration and elevation phase of the entire project, the “Han Culture Art Exhibition” not only systematically presented outstanding co-creation results from the design competition but also incorporated images, artifacts, and interactive outcomes from earlier activities, such as the promotional video and Hanfu parade, into the exhibition narrative. This created a multi-media, multi-level, comprehensive display platform. The exhibition innovatively transcreated academic resources (cultural artifact IP, archeological research results) through artistic curation, establishing a serious but non-didactic dialogue space within the authoritative cultural setting of the museum, effectively enhancing both the depth of cultural identity and the effectiveness of its dissemination.

The exhibition centers around the cultural artifact IP from the Han Yangling Museum as its core narrative element. Through modern exhibition design and cross-media expression, it transforms professional archeological discoveries and cultural research findings into perceptible, interactive, and resonant artistic experiences. This curatorial strategy, based on academic foundations and expressed through art, not only maintains the rigor of cultural dissemination but also breaks through the cognitive barriers of traditional museum displays, providing cross-cultural audiences with an effective pathway for a deeper understanding of Han culture. This aligns with contemporary museum communication strategies that leverage multi-mediated approaches to create more accessible and engaging narratives [30,31].

This narrative model, characterized by academic curation, possesses significant cultural authority and contextual adaptability, making it particularly suitable for exhibition spaces with cultural credibility, such as museums and art galleries. In the exhibitions held in both Xi'an and Cologne, the curatorial team, through academic analysis and visual transcreation, transformed Han Dynasty cultural heritage and its underlying stories into a systematic narrative sequence. At the same time, by utilizing digital displays, interactive installations, multilingual guides, and other media methods, they achieved a transformation from “knowledge display” to “cultural dialogue” in the exhibition. This not only enhanced the academic depth and cultural significance of the exhibition but also created a two-way dissemination space for both knowledge exploration and emotional experience, providing an innovative approach for the in-depth dissemination of cultural heritage.

The innovation of this exhibition primarily lies in its systematic curatorial methodology and differentiated audience participation strategies. The exhibition creatively implemented localized field adaptation and audience strategy differentiation mechanisms to address the different cultural contexts and reception habits of audiences in both China and Germany. The Xi'an exhibition area leveraged academic resources from universities, strengthening the exhibition's academic depth and professional influence through scholar talks, specialized seminars, and youth workshops. In contrast, the Cologne exhibition area cleverly took advantage of the high mobility and openness of urban public spaces, using participatory designs such as interactive experience zones (Figure 5), cultural and creative markets, and outdoor performances to enhance the visual appeal and public engagement in cultural heritage dissemination. This strategy differentiation, based on regional cultural characteristics and audience cognitive habits, not only achieved an organic unity between academic seriousness and widespread accessibility but also highlighted the core value of contextual adaptation in cross-cultural communication.



Figure 5. German Participants Wearing Hanfu and Immersively Experiencing Han Dynasty History and Culture at the Event.

The artistic transcreation of academic resources has restructured the narrative logic of the museum, achieving a shift from knowledge authority to an invitation for dialogue. Unlike traditional museums, which focus on the classification of artifacts and chronological

narratives, this exhibition adopts “cultural exchange” as its curatorial concept, placing Han Dynasty cultural heritage within the macro context of the Silk Road. Through comparative displays, scene reconstruction, and multimedia interpretation, the exhibition reveals the historical connections and contemporary insights between Han culture and Eurasian civilizations. This curatorial approach not only maintains the rigor of academic research but also creates an open space for interpretation, guiding the audience to shift from passive reception to active exploration.

The authority of the museum context provides credible support for cultural identity. As a recognized institution of cultural heritage, the museum naturally endows the exhibition content with credibility and seriousness. The curatorial team made full use of this advantage, maintaining academic accuracy while breaking the potential distance created by “authoritative narratives” through carefully designed language, spatial creation, and interactive experiences. This allowed the audience to establish an emotional connection and value identification with Han Dynasty cultural heritage, based on respect for historical authenticity.

The exhibition also achieved a higher dimension of cultural dissemination through multidimensional experience design. On the visual level, a complete cognitive experience was constructed through the layered presentation of restoration models and digital images. On the interactive level, an immersive experience zone based on the Han Culture Art Design Competition’s results was set up, allowing visitors to directly experience the achievements of Han Dynasty technology, art, and daily life. On the educational level, multilingual academic tours and workshop activities were provided to meet the cognitive needs of audiences at different levels. This curatorial approach, which integrates academic, artistic, and experiential elements, allowed cultural heritage dissemination to transcend simple information transfer and achieve a deeper transformation from knowledge reception to value identification.

Ultimately, the achievement of meaningful resonance relies on the depth of value identification explored through the academic artistic medium. By transcreating academic resources and localizing the curation, it creates a profound empathetic space within an authoritative context, guiding the audience through a sublimation from surface-level cognition to internalized value.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

6.1. Research Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the efficient international dissemination of cultural heritage is a complex system engineering task, with the key being the strategic adaptation between the core of cultural heritage and its narrative medium. The China-Germany “Tracing the Belt and Road” project, through the design of four “dimension-medium” pairings, provides us with a successful example of moving from “promotion” to “dialogue” and from “output” to “resonance.” Specifically, the digital narrative medium effectively promoted historical cognition, the public participatory medium deepened the aesthetic experience, the competitive co-creation medium stimulated creative interaction, and the academic artistic medium laid the foundation for value identification. Furthermore, these four dissemination effects—“strategic transcreation,” “contextual embedding,” “two-way dialogue,” and “meaning resonance”—formed a progressive and cyclical “communication flywheel” effect [32,33]. The core mechanism lies in how strategic transcreation lowers cognitive barriers, creating conditions for contextual embedding; contextual embedding stimulates emotional experience, providing motivation for two-way dialogue; two-way dialogue facilitates deeper involvement, paving the way for meaning resonance; and finally,

meaning resonance consolidates the dissemination effect, which in turn motivates more in-depth strategic transcreation, contextual embedding, and two-way dialogue.

6.2. Theoretical Contributions and Practical Insights

The theoretical contributions of this study are as follows: First, it transcends “technological determinism,” pointing out that the effectiveness of technology depends on its adaptability to specific cultural heritage dimensions. Second, it emphasizes “audience subjectivity,” revealing the core role of innovative media in reversing power dynamics in dissemination. Finally, it provides a replicable “cultural heritage dimension-narrative medium” analysis framework, offering a new perspective for cross-cultural communication theory.

In terms of practical insights, this study offers an actionable planning and implementation model for global cultural heritage exchange projects, particularly those related to the “Belt and Road” initiative. Project planners should first clearly define the core cultural heritage dimensions they wish to convey and then choose or innovate the most appropriate narrative medium accordingly, rather than blindly following trends in new technologies or formats. Additionally, it is essential to establish a cooperative mechanism involving universities, museums, and cultural institutions to effectively integrate resources, technology, and markets.

6.3. Future Prospects

Based on the practical foundation and preliminary results established in this project, future research will focus on developing a systematic evaluation framework for dissemination effectiveness, strengthening long-term tracking and quantitative analysis of each activity segment. This will help establish multidimensional indicators that cover audience cognition, cultural attitudes, and behavioral participation, enabling precise assessment of the dissemination effectiveness of different narrative media [34]. Building on this foundation, the adaptive application of this communication model in diverse cultural contexts around the world can be further promoted. By conducting comparative practices in various countries along the Belt and Road, the cross-cultural adaptation mechanism can be validated and refined, thereby developing a more universally applicable theory for cultural heritage dissemination. At the same time, with the evolution of technologies such as artificial intelligence and the metaverse, the various innovative narrative mediums in this study will also be adaptable to future fields such as smart museums and digital cultural creativity. Therefore, continued exploration of the application potential of these emerging technologies in cultural heritage narrative transcreation, immersive experiences, and remote interaction is essential. In-depth research into their adaptation patterns with different cultural contexts and audience cognitive habits will provide cutting-edge support and future pathways for the innovative dissemination and sustainable revitalization of cultural heritage.

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