

An Exploration of the Impact of Short Video Platforms on the Transmission of Folk Art

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ABSTRACT

Folk art is a vibrant carrier of China's fine traditional culture. In the past, limited dissemination channels led to a discontinuation of many categories. Some traditional handicrafts are on the verge of extinction due to a lack of continuity, and local operas average fewer than 50 performances per year. Short video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou, with their low barriers to entry, strong user interaction, and wide reach, have opened up new avenues for the transmission of folk art and injected fresh momentum. Drawing on practical examples such as Douyin's "Intangible Cultural Heritage Partners" and Kuaishou's "Laotie Liyuan," and drawing on authoritative data such as the "2025 Douyin Intangible Cultural Heritage Data Report," this article analyzes the practical impact of short videos on the transmission of folk art from five perspectives: dissemination model, inheritor population, content format, commercial transformation, and the inheritance ecosystem. The study finds that the algorithmic recommendation mechanism of short videos can break down regional barriers, enabling local arts such as Northwest Qinqiang and Southern Fujian Baizi Opera to reach nationwide audiences. It also attracts a large number of young people to participate, with the number of post-2000s intangible cultural heritage video creators increasing significantly year-on-year. However, platform-based dissemination has also exposed problems: some content excessively pursues entertainment, simplifies artistic processes, and neglects cultural connotations, diluting the core value of folk art. To address this, the study proposes the need to build a heritage system that combines "technological empowerment, content development, and ecological protection": leveraging platform technology to optimize dissemination efficiency, in-depth content to explore the core artistic essence, and integrating policies and market forces to improve support mechanisms, thereby promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of folk art in the digital age.

KEYWORDS

Short Video Platform; Folk Art; Cultural Heritage; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Communication Innovation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Folk art is a vibrant carrier of regional cultural genes, encompassing diverse forms such as traditional performing arts, handicrafts, and folk customs. my country currently has over 100,000 representative intangible cultural heritage items at all levels. However, due to a lack of dissemination channels and a fragmented audience, these folk arts have long been trapped in a predicament of being "hidden in the boudoir, unknown to the world." Among the 348 local operas, over 60% of private troupes perform fewer than 50 shows annually. Many handicrafts, such as Shanxi Pingyao polished lacquerware and Zhejiang Longquan celadon, face the risk of extinction due to aging inheritors and low participation from young people. Digital technology is providing a key opportunity to break through this barrier. Short video platforms, with their daily user traffic exceeding hundreds of millions,

convenient mobile phone filming and creation mechanisms, and fragmented dissemination models, have become a core platform for the dissemination of folk art. By 2025, Douyin (TikTok) had over 200 million videos related to national intangible cultural heritage, with 749.9 billion views and an average of 65,000 live broadcasts of intangible cultural heritage daily. Kuaishou's coverage of traditional drama projects has reached 97.4%. This scale and efficiency of dissemination are unmatched by traditional channels such as theatrical performances and offline exhibitions. This article focuses on the specific impact of short video platforms on the transmission of folk art. Combining real-world cases with authoritative data, it explores their transformative role in expanding transmission pathways, optimizing subject composition, and innovating business logic. It also analyzes potential risks and proposes optimization paths, providing practical references for the dynamic transmission of folk art.

2. RECONSTRUCTING THE COMMUNICATION PARADIGM: FROM REGIONAL LIMITATIONS TO UNIVERSAL SHARING

Leveraging technological features such as lightweight dissemination and intelligent recommendations, short video platforms have opened up a gap in the spatial and temporal nature of folk art transmission, establishing a new communication framework characterized by "universal coverage + precise reach." The transmission of traditional folk art is often tightly bound to a specific region. Qinqiang, rooted in northwestern dialects and the loess cultural landscape, has a largely restricted audience in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia region. Baizixi, relying on a Minnan-speaking audience, is rarely known outside the Pearl River Delta. Dialect barriers and geographical distance act like two walls, trapping many local arts within their own borders. Short videos have completely changed this landscape. Their 15-second to 3-minute duration perfectly fits the fragmented time of modern commutes and leisure activities. High-definition cameras clearly capture the curves of Qinqiang's sleeves and the intricate patterns of Baizi Opera's facial makeup. More importantly, the ease of capturing videos on mobile phones allows inheritors to record their skills from their own yards without specialized equipment. This lightweight format has enabled folk art to break free from the traditional model of relying solely on theaters and exhibitions for dissemination. Algorithmic recommendations have further revolutionized the "culture finds its audience" model: platforms promote local art to potential audiences based on user browsing habits. For example, the Gansu Anwan Qinqiang Opera Troupe's livestream on Kuaishou garnered 140 million views in just eight days. Audiences in Hainan and Fujian province heard the roar of Qinqiang through their screens for the first time, and overseas Chinese communities even contacted them through private messages in the livestream room to arrange performances [1]. Of the over 300 livestreams at the Baizi Opera Heritage Center in Haifeng County, Guangdong, 40% of the million viewers from outside the province were from northern China who had never experienced Minnan opera. The breakthrough in dissemination has not only broadened its reach but also deepened its interaction. When a viewer posted a comment asking, "Is the flag behind the general decorative?", the performer immediately paused their performance to analyze the flag's balance and command functions in simulated battle scenes, creating a real-time closed loop of "watch-question-answer." The platform's support programs are further amplifying the impact. Kuaishou's "Laotie Liyuan" program not only provides traffic and cash subsidies to 500 opera troupes, but also teaches performers how to edit short videos combining unique opera skills and knowledge points. Douyin's "Intangible Cultural Heritage Partner" project has attracted 230 professional troupes, establishing a systematic dissemination matrix. The data clearly shows the changes: videos related to Shaanxi storytelling have seen an average monthly increase of 35%, and under videos about Jianshui purple pottery firing, netizens often ask, "How can I buy the finished product?" These local skills have finally transcended regional limitations and reached audiences nationwide.

3. REVITALIZING THE MAIN BODY OF INHERITANCE: FROM AGING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Short video platforms have bridged the age gap in folk art transmission, transforming the legacy system from one dominated by the elderly to one where young people are willing to take over. In the past, folk art transmission relied heavily on the traditional "master-apprentice" model. Many inheritors, past their sixties, struggled with even editing and livestreaming on their phones. Their skills, like warm rice held in their arms, quickly cooled if they couldn't pass them on [2]. However, platforms like Douyin offer thoughtful, age-friendly design. Their large fonts and simple user interface make it easy for inheritors over 50 to master the art. Take, for example, the oil-paper umbrella maker "Uncle Wen's Umbrella." He captures the process of splitting bamboo, shaving bones, and pasting paper, even capturing the sheen of tung oil applied to the paper. Without complex editing, he has amassed a large following. More importantly, short videos have unleashed the passion of young people, gradually fostering a legacy ecosystem where "elderly teach the craft, young people engage in dissemination." The "2025 Douyin Intangible Cultural Heritage Data Report" features a striking statistic: the number of national-level intangible cultural heritage inheritors under the age of 30 has increased by 24% compared to last year, and the number of people born after 2000 posting videos about intangible cultural heritage has nearly doubled. Lang Jia Ziyu, a third-generation inheritor of the "Noodle Lang" craft, born after 1995, is a master at making traditional dough figurines while incorporating 3D printing technology. In just 15-second videos, dough is transformed into traditional Chinese-style figurines, leaving young viewers exclaiming, "I never knew dough figurines could be so trendy!" Even 21-year-old Fujian blogger @Chenchunian (Chenchunian) went even further, creating a robotic arm dancing while wearing a Nuo mask. The video garnered 32 million likes upon its release, prompting many to research the history of Nuo dance. These young people understand the essence of the craft and know how to communicate through short videos, becoming a "mouthpiece" between tradition and modernity. Even the general public is joining in, adding to the excitement of the heritage movement. Currently, 14 million users on Douyin are sharing videos of themselves experiencing intangible cultural heritage. Some film themselves learning to make sugar figurines, while others share photos of themselves learning brocade weaving from veteran artisans. The most persistent is 22-year-old Zhejiang native @Wu Da'an, who traveled through Zhejiang's ancient villages to film a series titled "Promoting 100 Intangible Cultural Heritage Items." Each video begins with a smile, "Today I'll introduce you to the Xth intangible cultural heritage item." The 4.11 million likes are filled with comments like "Learn more with Da'an." This structure of "professional inheritors leading the way, while ordinary enthusiasts follow along" keeps the tradition of folk art constantly alive.

4. INNOVATION IN CONTENT FORMAT: FROM TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCES TO IMMERSIVE EXPRESSION

Short video platforms are driving folk art content away from traditional, single-format performances and towards diverse and innovative content, significantly enhancing its appeal through immersive presentations and cross-disciplinary integration. In the past, folk art relied heavily on theatrical performances or static offline displays, characterized by slow tempos and limited interactivity, making it difficult to adapt to modern audiences. Today, creators are leveraging technology to reshape content. For example, blogger "Shanbai" films the making of Hui ink and rice paper, following the artisans as they knead the ink and dry the paper. Against the backdrop of the Xiangxi landscape, he amplifies the crackling of firewood and the pounding of wooden mallets, complemented by stringed instruments, to immerse the audience in the scene. His video, "Weaving Linen into Cloth, Xiabu," has garnered over 7 million likes and his account has gained over 11 million followers. This video has introduced many to the art of making Xiabu cloth. The combination of fragmented presentation and in-depth interpretation is the core of content innovation. To address the complex connotations of

folk art, creators use a combination of "deconstructing techniques and popularizing knowledge" to lower the barrier to understanding. For example, a Baizi Opera inheritor avoids filming the entire play, focusing on special skills like "water sleeve flips" and "low-stance exercises," accompanied by accessible explanations like "swinging the sleeves three times expresses excitement." In three months, they have garnered 870,000 followers, 42% of whom are aged 18-25. The Hebei Bangzi Opera Troupe focuses on the craft of Bangzi production, explaining topics like "which wood to choose and how to carve it to create a crisp sound." A single video garnered 180,000 likes, engaging even audiences unfamiliar with opera. This "watching unique skills and learning knowledge" model allows audiences to shift from "watching the excitement" to "seeing the ins and outs." Digital technology and cross-disciplinary integration are further broadening the boundaries of expression. The number of AI-powered intangible cultural heritage videos increased by 1625%. Creators used animation to personify intangible cultural heritage and had paper-cut characters speak out about science. The integration of intangible cultural heritage with short dramas has also yielded significant results. The films "Surpass Ajuan" and "You Are My Bowl" incorporated paper-cutting and ceramic crafts into their plots, transforming intangible cultural heritage from a static display into a narrative role. Post-95 blogger @ParkourLaMian went a step further, combining iron flower making with parkour. Leaping figures in the flames were accompanied by flying iron flowers. The video garnered 13.13 million likes, with many commenting, "Odds are folk art can be this cool," completely shattering stereotypes about traditional crafts [3].

5. UNLEASHING COMMERCIAL VALUE: FROM PUBLIC WELFARE PROTECTION TO MARKET EMPOWERMENT

Short video platforms have helped folk art navigate the commercial path from exhibition to sales. By leveraging the closed loop of "attracting content, spending, and retaining customers," this legacy no longer relies solely on transfusions, but can instead generate its own sustainable growth. In the past, folk arts relied heavily on government subsidies and public exhibitions, leaving them struggling to generate revenue. Artisans struggled to sell their works, and theater troupes struggled to raise performance fees, making it difficult to pass on their skills. However, the traffic advantage of short videos has broken this impasse. On Douyin alone, over 6.5 billion orders for intangible cultural heritage products were placed annually. Users who searched for intangible cultural heritage increased their orders by 51% compared to the previous year. These substantial sales have given folk arts a revitalized market. Livestreaming can also attract consumers to offline shopping, creating a synergistic effect. Anhui anchor Zheng Dongjiao livestreamed a "Village Evening" show, showcasing dragon lantern dances and stilt-walking, recreating the lively atmosphere of the "One Night of Fish and Dragon Dance." 2.74 million people watched the "cloud folk custom" online, many of whom subsequently placed orders for local bamboo baskets and handmade paper-cuts. Small cities with hidden gems of intangible cultural heritage, such as Quanzhou and Shantou, have also become popular tourist destinations thanks to platforms [4]. The number of intangible cultural heritage shops has nearly tripled compared to last year, and group purchases for intangible cultural heritage experiences have increased by over 170%. This "see new things online, experience them offline" model has transformed folk art from a relic relegated to screens, becoming something tangible and participatory in modern life. Theater troupes and artisans have also benefited from this wave of commercial opportunities to improve their lives. The Gansu Anwan Qinqiang Opera Troupe has amassed 1.9 million followers on Kuaishou. Previously confined to Northwest China, they now have audiences from other regions who have watched their livestreams and invited them to perform in Hainan and Fujian, significantly reducing operational pressure. Wang Maolin and his wife, inheritors of the Inner Mongolian "Errenzhuan" (two-person opera), are even more down-to-earth. After their troupe disbanded, they earned money through livestream merchandise sales and commercial performances, and have since brought back their old troupe members to form a new troupe. Some intangible cultural heritage vendors have raked in tens of millions of yuan in sales through livestreams

alone. Handmade small twisted dough sticks and Yixing purple clay teapots have become top sellers, proving that folk art doesn't lack a market; it simply lacks a channel for public exposure and willingness to buy. More importantly, the profits earned can in turn contribute to its preservation. Young people inheriting intangible cultural heritage can make money selling their works and livestreaming, no longer worrying about making a living. More and more people are willing to join the industry. The profits troupes make allow them to upgrade to better rehearsal spaces and recruit apprentices to teach their craft. This virtuous cycle of "passing on the art to earn money, and earning money to pass on the art" has transformed the transmission of folk art from a passive, "I have to pass it on" mentality to a proactive, "I want to pass it on" mentality.

6. REFLECTION ON THE DILEMMA OF INHERITANCE: PRESERVING VALUES AMIDST THE TRAFFIC CRAZE

While short videos have accelerated the transmission of folk art, they also harbor the hidden dangers of "losing the core" and "failing to pass it on." We must be wary of a degeneration of inheritance that "sacrifices the fundamentals for traffic." The excessive pursuit of entertainment has diluted the artistic essence. Research data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism shows that 72% of short opera videos focus on showmanship and close-ups of painted faces, with less than 8% featuring full-length excerpts. Audiences only remember the Monkey King's impressive golden cudgel wielding, but are unaware of the cultural connotations of resistance and freedom in "Havoc in Heaven." To attract traffic, a Yue Opera troupe in Henan province had its actors dress up in costumes and sing pop songs. Longtime fans, feeling the "drama" had been lost, unfollowed by 65%, leaving the troupe in the awkward position of "losing its soul but not its fans." The imbalance between commerce and art has become a more serious problem. Some creators focus solely on sales, losing the essence of their craft. For example, one crafts account replaced wood carvings that once took two weeks to carve with mass-produced machines. While sales appeared to be higher, the warmth and essence of the craftsmanship were lost, ultimately damaging the company's reputation. A 2024 survey by the China Dramatists Association is revealing: 78% of opera fans are open to "formal innovation," such as adding new music or short storylines to opera, but they have zero tolerance for "changing the core." This draws a clear line in the sand for cultural heritage: while the presentation method can change, the fundamentals of the art cannot [5]. Failure to disseminate information also hinders cultural heritage. While short videos generate billions of impressions, most fail to translate into genuine engagement. For example, the Ningbo Performing Arts Group attracted 4.96 million new viewers through short videos, but only 3.8% of these viewers followed the online format and attended the shows in person, and most of these viewers only purchased low-priced tickets. This shallow level of attention, often spurred by a simple "like" on a mobile phone, cannot sustain a stable foundation for cultural transmission, ultimately creating a vicious cycle of crowded livestreams and empty theaters. Even more problematic is the high rate of content duplication, with 65% of accounts simply copying the "traditional Chinese background + craft demonstration" template: pottery one day, embroidery the next, or simply posting a different craft name. This lack of originality has gradually spurred audiences to tune in, leading to a diminishing impact on the dissemination of content.

7. CONCLUSION

Leveraging technological innovation and ecosystem restructuring, short video platforms have revolutionized the preservation of folk art, becoming a crucial engine for cultural preservation in the digital age. In terms of dissemination, it breaks the limitations of time, space and region, and relies on algorithms to accurately push content, allowing local niche art to gain national attention; in terms of the main body, it activates the power of youth, forms a team of "professional inheritors + mass enthusiasts", and alleviates the dilemma of aging; in terms of content, it adapts to modern aesthetics with immersive expression, technology empowerment and cross-border integration; in terms of

business, it builds a closed loop of "dissemination-consumption-feedback" to inject market vitality - Douyin's intangible cultural heritage videos have been played 749.9 billion times, and Kuaishou's opera project has a coverage rate of 97.4%, which confirms its driving role. However, the inheritance of short videos still faces deep challenges: excessive entertainment dissolves the core of art, such as the Henan Yue Opera Troupe wearing costumes and singing pop songs, which has lost old fans; commercialization has caused the taste of skills to change, and some wood carvings have been replaced by machines instead of manual work; shallow dissemination is difficult to become deep recognition. Only 3.8% of the 4.96 million new online viewers of Ningbo Performing Arts Group have switched to offline. In the future, it needs to be optimized in three aspects: the platform can imitate Kuaishou's "Laotie Liyuan" to jointly open operation courses with colleges and universities, and Douyin can build an "online theater + traffic support" system to guide in-depth Creators must uphold artistic authenticity, achieving innovation through "explaining technique and understanding its essence." Society must build bridges from online interaction to offline experience, as exemplified by the Ningbo Performing Arts Group's "attract traffic, cultivate depth, and transform" model for cultivating a stable audience. The core of folk art heritage lies in "living continuity." The value of short videos lies not only in generating traffic but also in fostering a dialogue between tradition and modernity. When technology serves the purpose of aesthetic transmission and traffic is transformed into artistic respect, young audiences will proactively consult Kunqu opera rules to understand "The Peony Pavilion." Only then can folk art truly "come alive" and be "passed down" in the digital age, becoming a crucial pillar of cultural confidence.

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