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RECONSTRUCTING INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES' COGNITION OF CHINESE CULTURE: THE EFFECTS OF LI ZIQI'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE SHORT VIDEOS ON STEREOTYPE DISMANTLING AND CURIOSITY ACTIVATION

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Abstract:

This qualitative study examines how Li Ziqi's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) short videos reshape international audiences' perceptions of Chinese culture. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 15 participants from 10 countries and pre-post cognitive contrast data, the study identifies two major cognitive reconstruction effects, interpreted through Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's high-low context theory, this study extends these frameworks by demonstrating how everyday-embedded heritage representations mediate stereotype reconfiguration and activate cross-cultural engagement mechanisms.

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First, the videos dismantle monolithic stereotypes that associate China primarily with technological modernity. Second, they activate cross-cultural curiosity and stimulate active cultural exploration behaviors. In addition, bicultural participants demonstrate deeper interpretive engagement than monocultural audiences. The findings highlight the role of everyday-embedded heritage representation in reducing cultural distance and promoting intercultural understanding.

Keyword:

Bicultural Audiences; Cultural Cognition Reconstruction; Cross-Cultural Perception; International Audiences; Li Ziqi's Ich Videos;



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Introduction

Digital communication and media framing scholarship on Chinese intangible cultural heritage suggests that global audiences mostly form their perceptions of China through selectively curated platform representations. Heritage-related content is capable of building emotionally resonant transnational cultural spaces, which effectively challenge and weaken simplistic national stereotypes (Ni, 2024; Tong et al., 2023). Existing studies have documented that many international audiences largely equate China with advanced technological infrastructure such as high-speed rail and mobile payment systems, as well as iconic mega cities including Shanghai and Beijing, while remaining barely aware of the richness and diversity of traditional intangible cultural heritage. Such one-dimensional cognitive bias not only hinders the holistic global dissemination of Chinese culture but also limits opportunities for equal and in-depth cross-cultural exchange (Scollon & Scollon, 2013).

The rise of Douyin and TikTok has further reshaped ICH communication routes, with algorithmic curation, professional creator production and short-form content circulation becoming pivotal to cultural heritage dissemination (Paquenseguy & Guo, 2025; Cao, 2025). This trend reflects the logic of hybrid media systems, in which platform mechanisms profoundly shape cultural visibility and audience cognition across national boundaries (Chadwick, 2017). Li Ziqi's intangible cultural heritage videos capitalize on such platform

strengths. Products al. (2022) note, video-sharing platforms like YouTube and TikTok employ a universal audiovisual language that facilitates cross-cultural understanding, and Li's productions fully leverage this medium. Unlike traditional cultural communication dominated by grand narratives, her work embeds ICH practices into ordinary daily life: preparing osmanthus cakes in autumn, crafting handmade paper for Spring Festival couplet-traditional festive calligraphy inscribed with auspicious phrases—and weaving bamboo baskets for household storage. Such sensory, life-oriented portrayals offer a vivid and tangible depiction of traditional Chinese culture (Zhang & Wang, 2021). Although prior research has explored digital heritage immersion, emotional resonance, algorithmic circulation and identity performance, fewer studies have closely examined audience-level stereotype reconstruction from a fine-grained qualitative perspective. This leaves a clear research gap for exploring cognitive changes triggered by short-video exposure (Tong et al., 2023; Zhang & Xu, 2024; Wang & Feng, 2025).

Based on the results of a larger-scale examination of cross-cultural interpretation of ICH symbols, this paper will focus on the cognitive changes in the international audience prior to and after watching the ICH videos of Li Ziqi.

It answers two underlying research questions:

- (1) How do ICH videos by Li break the established stereotypes of the cultural background of international viewers?
- (2) How do process mechanisms of cross-cultural curiosity activation and active exploration behaviors of viewers work? Based on the cognitive contrast data of the key participants (such as the Russian P1, Brunean P2 and the bicultural respondent, P3), the study confirms the cognitive reconstruction value of ICH short videos and provides theoretical implications to purposely disseminate Chinese cultural content.

Literature Review

Cultural Stereotypes of China in International Media Discourse

The predominance of one-dimensional stereotypes has always been recorded in scholarship about international perceptions of Chinese culture. An initial set of research by Zhang and Wang (2021) showed that the portrayal of China in the Western media is characterized by technological progress and urban modernization, where it is perceived as a technological superpower with traditional cultural heritage being overlooked. This inaccurate framing has made most audiences with low levels of cultural exposure to associate the Chinese culture with modern infrastructure and digital innovations without much knowledge about the traditional Chinese culture, including bamboo weaving, indigo dyeing, or ancient papermaking (Ge et al., 2024).

As an example, Zhang and Wang (2021) discovered that more than 60 percent of Western audiences with low cultural exposure equate China with high-speed rail and e-commerce, and do not know anything about the traditional ICH practices. Nevertheless, the recent research also indicates the importance of the digital platform in the de-escalation of such stereotypes: Video-streamed representations of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) can promote positive intercultural attitudes and alleviate stereotypes (Ge et al., 2024), as heritage meaning is not inherent but actively constructed and framed through media representation (Waterton &

Watson, 2013). As Whyke et al. (2022) note, video-sharing sites use a common audiovisual language, which appeals to transnational viewers, thus aiding in interpreting unknown cultural signifiers. These stereotypes are biased and based on minimal media exposure, which causes a hindrance in creating a comprehensive view of cultural diversity in China (Hofstede Insights, 2023; Hofstede, 2011).

Digital Cultural Content and Cross-Cultural Cognitive Change

The impact of digital media on cross-cultural cognition remaking has already been discussed by an increasing number of scholars (Li, 2022). Braun and Clarke (2019) posited that, by utilizing multimodal digital content, i.e. visual, audio, and narrative elements, it is possible to overcome linguistic obstacles to experience more in depth cultural content, especially when it is based on the relatable daily experience. Within heritage communication, the current literature suggests that cultural content based on the everyday lives of the audience is more prone to spark interest and initiate additional active learning, especially when it is represented with sensory and narrative stimuli (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Whyke et al. (2022) further demonstrated that Li Ziqi's ICH videos, which embed traditional crafts into domestic routines, have enhanced global audiences' awareness of Chinese heritage, though the study did not explore the specific mechanisms of stereotype dismantling or long-term cognitive change. Scholarly work on multimodal cultural discourse has complemented this by identifying how sensory and narrative cues in short videos can reshape audience cognitive frameworks by connecting unfamiliar cultural elements to universal human experiences (e.g., family care, seasonal labor). Additionally, Castillo-Montoya (2016) emphasized that targeted stimulus materials (such as key video frames) can help audiences articulate cognitive shifts more clearly, which provides methodological support for tracking cultural cognition changes in this study.

Bicultural Audiences as Mediators of Cultural Cognition

Bicultural individuals, who possess dual cultural identities and flexible cognitive schemas, have long been identified as critical intermediaries in cross-cultural communication (Berry, 2017). Grounded in Berry's acculturation theory, bicultural people exhibit the unique capacity to integrate two distinct cultural systems and switch between cognitive perspectives, enabling them to interpret unfamiliar cultural content through multiple lenses. Empirically, Li (2022) notes that Li Ziqi's videos facilitate global audiences' active construction of cultural meaning, which supports the idea that viewers with bicultural frameworks are particularly adept at drawing parallels between traditional Chinese practices and their own heritage.

This capability allows them to bridge interpretive gaps between high-context and low-context cultural groups, as they can contextualize unfamiliar cultural symbols within both their native and host cultural frameworks.

However, research on how bicultural audiences' cognitive depth differs from that of monocultural audiences in the context of Chinese cultural cognition remains underdeveloped, leaving a gap in understanding the heterogeneity of cross-cultural cognitive responses to digital heritage content (Malterud et al., 2016). Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that phenomenological qualitative designs are particularly suited to exploring such differentiated cognitive experiences,

as they prioritize the subjective meaning-making processes of individual participants from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Theoretical Dialogue: Complementarity and Boundaries of Core Frameworks

In order to fill the gaps in applying theories in previous studies, this section theoretically integrates three complementary frameworks to explain how cross-cultural cognition is formed, interpreted, and differentiated in digital heritage contexts. The high-low context theory of Hall (1976/2018) describes the way the cultural cognition is built and primed in the first instance, when low-context audiences use explicit, decontextualized information in the media to develop stereotypes, and in the second instance, high-context audiences are sensitive to implicit cultural signals. Conversely, the Hofstede (2011) theory of cultural dimensions (revised through Hofstede Insights, 2023) sheds some light on the value basis of the differences between cultures: collectivist groups of culture emphasize relational and community cultural factors (e.g. intergenerational craft inheritance), whereas individualist groups emphasize technical or utilitarian factors of heritage. The bicultural identity theory proposed by Berry (2017) closes the gap in explaining variations in the depth of cognition in that dual schema of bicultural audiences can compare cross-contexts, which monocultural audiences are not able to. Collectively, these frameworks constitute a chain of cognition formation-interpretation-depth differentiation, without subjecting one side of the theoretical application as usually applied in literature.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a phenomenological qualitative design with a pre-post cognitive contrast framework, focusing on the subjective cognitive experiences of international audiences before and after viewing Li Ziqi's ICH videos. The design prioritizes in-depth exploration of individual cognitive shifts, aligning with Creswell and Poth's (2018) emphasis on contextualized understanding of human experiences in qualitative inquiry. The research integrates pre-viewing cultural cognition pre-tests, semi-structured interviews with cognitive change tracking, and thematic coding to systematically capture and analyze cognitive reconstruction effects, drawing on the reflexive thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). The design also aligns with recent digital-heritage studies that combine surveys, semi-structured interviews, and embodied or immersive frameworks to explain how online heritage communication produces emotional and cognitive effects (Tong et al., 2023; Zhang & Xu, 2024; Ye et al., 2025).

Participant Recruitment

Fifteen participants from 10 countries were purposively sampled using a maximum variation strategy to capture diverse cultural backgrounds and cognitive responses, stratified into three groups based on cultural background: 7 from high-context cultures (China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cuba), 5 from low-context cultures (United States, United Kingdom, Russia, Brunei, United Arab Emirates), and 3 bicultural respondents (Japanese-Australian, Iranian-Malaysian, Indonesian-Canadian). Grouping was guided by Hall's (1976/2018) high-low context cultural classification and Berry's (2017) bicultural identity framework, with cultural background validation referencing Hofstede Insights (2023) cultural dimension data.

Every participant did a pre-viewing cultural cognition pre-test to record their original stereotypes about the Chinese culture and had viewed at least three of the ICH-themed videos of Li Ziqi to be familiar with the research stimuli. Recruitment was stopped once theoretical saturation was reached (Malterud et al., 2016), and no new themes of cognitive change were discovered in the last three interviews, which is a typical level of ensuring data adequacy in qualitative research (Neubauer et al., 2019). A saturation tracking log was kept to record the development of core themes across interviews to give transparent evidence of the achievement of saturation.

In order to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the participants in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Putra Malaysia (Approval No. JKEUPM-2025-374), the real names of all participants have been substituted with pseudonyms and sequentially numbered as P1 to P15. Participants are also identified by their cultural background groups (e.g., high-context, low-context, bicultural) to ensure analytical clarity, with no identifiable personal information (e.g., specific occupations, detailed geographic locations) disclosed. All interview transcripts and pre-test data were anonymized prior to analysis to comply with research ethics standards and data security guidelines.

Even though earlier researchers have already investigated the popularity of Li Ziqi videos in the world and their contribution to Chinese cultural soft power (Nye, 2004), there are still three gaps. To begin with, the majority of studies are concerned with media representation and not cognitive change of audiences. Second, there is scanty empirical qualitative evidence on the way the Chinese culture is redefined by international viewers after being exposed to ICH-themed videos. Third, not many studies consider the way in which varying cultural backgrounds (especially bicultural identities) determine the richness of cultural interpretation. To fill these gaps, This paper explores the role of Li Ziqi in videos as a means of reconstructing the cultural cognition of international audiences, where the characteristics of the participants and methods of collecting data are discussed below.

Data Collection

Pre-Viewing Cultural Cognition Pre-Test

The pre-test used a mix of closed and open-ended questions to map participants' initial cultural cognition, adapted from existing cultural perception assessment tools in cross-cultural communication research. Closed questions (e.g., "Which of the following elements do you associate with Chinese culture? [multiple choice: high-speed rail, calligraphy, e-commerce, bamboo weaving, skyscrapers] ") identified dominant stereotypes, while open questions (e.g., "When you think of Chinese culture, what specific images or concepts come to mind? ") captured nuanced initial perceptions. To ensure the validity of the pre-test instrument, three cross-cultural communication scholars reviewed the questions for clarity and cultural neutrality, with minor revisions made to ambiguous items (e.g., rephrasing "ancient traditions" to "traditional cultural practices" for greater precision). the pre-test was administered two weeks prior to the interviews to reduce recall bias and ensure temporal separation between baseline cognition and post-exposure reflection. Results showed that 9 of 15 participants predominantly low-cultural-exposure audiences like Russian P1 and Bruneian P2, only

referenced modern elements, with no mentions of traditional ICH practices, consistent with the stereotype patterns documented by Li and Kookiattikoon (2024).

Semi-Structured Interviews with Cognitive Change Tracking

Interviews took 40-60 minutes and consisted of three main modules: general video viewing experience, (2) interpretation of important ICH symbols, and (3) pre-post cultural cognition contrast.

Specific questions that were used in the contrast module included: Has watching these videos changed your perception of Chinese culture? Provided that, how exactly? and Will you seek out more information about Chinese traditional culture after watching these videos? were used so as to obtain explicit reports of cognitive changes (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

To minimize the bias of memory, 15 major video frames (e.g., handmade paper used to make couplet Spring Festival couplets, indigo-dyed fabric made into everyday clothes) were introduced as stimuli, and the participants were asked to think about certain events that caused any cognitive change (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Informing the participants about the audio-recording of all interviews and their verbatim transcription and anonymization was carried out to safeguard their privacy, which was in line with the principles of ethics described by Neubauer et al. (2019) and the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2020). In particular, they informed the participants about the term of data storage (5 years), its use (academic research only), and the ability to withdraw at any point without penalty at any time, and all the agreements were written.

The Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Putra Malaysia gave ethical approval to this study (Approval No. JKEUPM-2025-374). Informed consent All participants were given the message of the research intent and informed consent before the interviews. The identities of the participants were anonymized to guarantee confidentiality and they were told that they could take part in the study as it was voluntary and could pull out at any time without any repercussions.

Data Coding

NVivo 12 was used to conduct reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase procedure, including familiarization, initial coding, theme construction, review, definition, and reporting.:

(1) first-level nodes of "stereotype dismantling" and "curiosity activation and exploration";
(2) second-level nodes including "shift from modern-only to tradition-modern fusion," "active online information search," "interpersonal sharing of content," and "cross-cultural traditional craft comparison." Two researchers independently coded 30% of the transcripts (4 interviews) to establish initial coding consistency, then resolved discrepancies via discussion before coding the remaining data. A reflective journal was maintained to document and mitigate potential researcher bias during coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018), a critical step in ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative findings.

Validity and Reliability Control

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, three strategies were adopted:

1. Credibility was ensured via member checking with three key participants (P1, P2, P3), who verified that thematic summaries of their cognitive changes aligned with their original expressions (Neubauer et al., 2019);
2. Dependability was achieved by having two independent scholars review the coding framework and key findings (Malterud et al., 2016);
3. (3) Confirmability was maintained through detailed documentation of the audit trail (e.g., coding logs, reflective journals).

This multi-layered validation approach adheres to the quality standards for qualitative research outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), avoiding quantitative validity metrics that are incompatible with phenomenological inquiry.

Findings

Dismantling Cultural Stereotypes: From Monolithic to Diversified Perception

In the case of low-cultural-exposure viewers whose initial beliefs were strong, the ICH videos by Li induced a critical transformational change in their perceptions of the Chinese culture, from a limited view of modernity to the perception of tradition-modernity blending. This effect is consistent with the conclusion reached by Braun and Clarke (2019) that multimodal cultural content, i.e. the one that combines visual, auditory, and narrative content, can re-order audience think patterns by associating the unknown cultural content with familiar experiences and is also explained with the high-low context theory by Hall (1976/2018).

The case of cognitive transformation of a Russian participant, P1, is a paradigm. During the pre-test, P1 only knew the Chinese culture by skyscrapers of Shanghai, the Forbidden City of Beijing (which she considered a tourist relic) and the advanced mobile payment systems. She clearly wrote, I always believed that China is a nation focused on technological advances rather than on the continuation of ancient customs (Pre-Test Questionnaire, February 2025), which is a stereotype that aligns with the Western media idea of framing recorded by Zhang and Wang (2021). Being a low-context audience, P1 initially used explicit media-driven narratives that are technology-based to create her understanding of China with no schema to identify implicit cues of traditional cultural understanding (Scollon and Scollon, 2013). Nonetheless, P1 changed her mind radically after watching the video when Li created handmade paper and wrote Spring Festival couplet on it (then paste on the door of a modern mountain cottage). She recorded in the interview, “When I saw the image of her handing paper in the mountains and then using that paper to make festive couplets at her house, it horrified me and made me understand that China is not only about high-tech cities but is a place where the traditions are still part of daily life and where tradition and modernity live in harmony (Interview Transcript, February 2025). P1 particularly pointed to the scene of the handmade paper of Chinese modern festivities as the turning point, as it demolished her previous belief that tradition and modernity were mutually exclusive in Chinese society, which became a cognitive barrier, according to Hall (1976/2018), that low-context audiences, which depend on binary and explicit categorization, tend to favor.

Thematic coding showed that the most common triggering scenes of stereotype dismantling were those that involved ICH in daily life. Among low-context participants who had strong initial modern-only stereotypes (n=5), 4 participants mentioned scenes such as bamboo weaving to store the household and indigo-dyeing to make daily clothes as the triggers of understanding the diversity of Chinese culture. These scenes would put abstract traditional culture into tangible everyday actions that audiences could relate and relate to, decreasing cognitive distance and allowing audiences to move beyond one-dimensional stereotypes (Scollon and Scollon, 2013). The scenes depicting Li in his daily life are superimposed on the everyday experiences of the audience members, which makes it easier to comprehend (Braun and Clarke, 2019). As an example, Liang (2022) claims a rural lifestyle is the exotic other to fulfill the desire of urban residents, and the sense of rural paper-making that P1 had transformed her image of China. Basing their representations on the theory of embodied cognition, these sensory, authentic images evoked shared bodily experiences of domestic work and seasonal ritual in the participants to establish a cross-cultural cognitive mediation, which jump-started them across the linguistic and value-based boundaries.

Activating Curiosity and Driving Active Exploration: From Passive Reception to Active Engagement

Beyond stereotype reconfiguration, the videos trigger a chain mechanism of curiosity, interpretation, and behavioral engagement, Li Ziqi's ICH videos sparked cross-cultural curiosity and prompted diverse active exploration behaviors, consistent with "practical relevance triggers exploration" theory, which posits that content tied to daily experiences is more likely to motivate further learning. This finding reinforces Whyke et al.'s (2022) conclusion that Li Ziqi's videos have transformative effects on global audiences' engagement with Chinese ICH, while adding granularity to the specific exploration behaviors triggered by such content.

To further contextualize the exploration behaviors, it is critical to note that the three patterns identified (online search, interpersonal sharing, cross-cultural comparison) were not mutually exclusive—2 participants (including P4) engaged in all three, while 3 others combined two behaviors. This overlap suggests that practical ICH content does not trigger a single type of exploration but rather a "chain reaction" of engagement, as observed in P4's experience: sharing the video with her grandmother (interpersonal sharing) led to discussions about craft similarities (cross-cultural comparison), which in turn motivated her to research modern adaptations of bamboo weaving (online search). This chain reaction supports the idea that practical, daily-life cultural content acts as a cognitive trigger rather than a one-time stimulus. Bruneian participant P2's post-viewing information-seeking behavior exemplifies this effect. As a low-context audience member, P2's initial engagement with the video focused on the explicit technical details of traditional papermaking, a preference aligned with the individualist, utilitarian orientation of his cultural background (Hofstede Insights, 2023). He shared, "I'd never seen paper made by hand before—I was curious how she got the pulp so uniform, and how she avoided tearing the thin sheets while drying them. Right after the interview, I searched for 'Chinese ancient papermaking techniques' online and read articles about its historical origins and regional variations" (Interview Transcript, March 2025). P2 also recommended the video to his university classmates who studied traditional handicrafts, initiating discussions about parallels between Chinese papermaking and Bruneian woven mat techniques—a form of cross-cultural comparison highlighted by Li and Kookiattikoon (2024) as a key indicator of deepened cultural engagement beyond passive viewing.

Indonesian participant P4's interpersonal sharing and cross-cultural reflection further illustrate active exploration, rooted in the collectivist cultural values of her high-context background (Hofstede, 2011). She recounted, "After watching Li Ziqi's bamboo weaving video, I showed it to my grandmother, who's a skilled rattan weaver in our village. We spent an hour talking about the similarities in weaving techniques and the patience required—even though the materials are different, the craftsmanship spirit is the same. Later, I looked up how Chinese bamboo weaving is being inherited by young people and was surprised to see many designers combining it with modern furniture styles" (Interview Transcript, April 2025). P4's behavior aligns with Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimension theory, which notes that high-context, collectivist audiences tend to interpret cultural content through the lens of intergenerational and community connections, translating individual viewing experiences into collective cultural dialogue.

Differentiated Cognitive Depth: Monocultural vs. Bicultural Audiences

Bicultural and monocultural audiences exhibited distinct levels of cognitive depth in their post-viewing understanding of Chinese culture, a pattern that aligns with the core tenets of bicultural identity theory—specifically, that individuals with dual cultural schemas possess inherent cross-cultural understanding advantages (Berry, 2017). This finding also addresses the research gap in prior cross-cultural communication studies by providing empirical evidence for cultural schema activation in media consumption. Li (2022) notes that Li Ziqi's videos facilitate global audiences' active construction of cultural meaning, with bicultural viewers particularly adept at drawing parallels between traditional Chinese practices (e.g., food production, craftmaking) and their own heritage—aligning with the current study's observation.

This aligns with the current study's observation: bicultural respondents leveraged their dual cultural frameworks to develop a more holistic, contextualized view of China's tradition-modernity dynamic, while monocultural audiences' cognitive shifts remained focused on correcting initial stereotypes and satisfying basic curiosity-driven exploration.

To reinforce the contrast between audience groups, additional evidence from two other participants is instructive:

Monocultural Participant (Low Context)

A U.S.-based monocultural participant, P5, corrected her "modern-only" stereotype but maintained a binary understanding: "China has old crafts too, not just skyscrapers, but they feel separate from modern life—maybe just for tourists?" This reflects the limited contextualization common among monocultural low-context audiences (Hall, 1976/2018).

Bicultural Participant

A Singaporean-Malay participant, P6, echoed P3's cross-contextual analysis, noting, "Li Ziqi's videos show how heritage can be 'useful' in modern life—my family's batik-making could learn from that. We often see batik as 'traditional' but not as something that fits with current fashion." P6's ability to link Chinese ICH to his own cultural practices highlights the unique mediating role of bicultural schemas (Berry, 2017).

Iranian Malaysian bicultural respondent P3 demonstrated sophisticated cross-contextual analysis in her interview, moving beyond surface-level observations to connect Li Ziqi's videos to broader global debates about cultural heritage preservation. She noted, "Li uses traditional methods to make food and crafts, but she also uses modern tools—cameras to record, phones to stay connected. This shows China isn't choosing between tradition and modernity; it's finding a balance. In Iran and Malaysia, we grapple with the same challenge of preserving heritage while advancing modernity—my community struggles to keep traditional carpet weaving alive, and this video gave me new ideas about how to integrate old crafts with contemporary life" (Interview Transcript, April 2025). P3 added that she had begun researching Chinese ICH-cultural and creative industry collaborations (e.g., traditional dyeing techniques in modern fashion) to inform discussions about her own community's traditional handicraft inheritance. This level of proactive, cross-cultural application of insights is rarely observed among monocultural participants, as it requires the ability to toggle between two cultural frameworks (Scollon & Scollon, 2013).

In contrast, monocultural audiences' cognitive depth was more circumscribed. While Russian participant P1 successfully discarded her "modern-only" stereotype of China, her understanding of Chinese culture remained limited to the specific ICH practices shown in the videos (e.g., handmade paper, bamboo weaving), with no connection to broader patterns of cultural continuity or adaptation. Bruneian participant P2's exploration, though active, was confined to technical details of papermaking, with no reflection on how such practices contribute to Chinese cultural identity—a focus consistent with low-context audiences' preference for explicit, tangible information (Hall, 1976/2018).

This disparity stems from bicultural audiences' unique cognitive resource: dual cultural schemas enable them to interpret Li Ziqi's videos not only as "Chinese cultural content" but also as a case study for understanding universal tensions between heritage and modernity (Berry, 2017). As P3's case illustrates, this allows bicultural viewers to move from "understanding China" to "using insights about China to reflect on their own cultures"—a cognitive leap that monocultural audiences, lacking dual frameworks, cannot easily achieve.

Conclusion

Core Findings

This qualitative study, through pre-post cognitive contrast and in-depth interviews with international audiences, confirms that Li Ziqi's ICH videos exert three interconnected cognitive reconstruction effects:

Stereotype Dismantling

For low-cultural-exposure audiences (e.g., P1), the videos shatter one-dimensional "modern-only" perceptions of Chinese culture by embedding ICH in relatable daily scenarios, fostering recognition of tradition-modernity fusion. This extends Zhang and Wang's (2021) research on Li Ziqi's videos as soft power tools by identifying "ICH-in-daily-life" scenes as the key mechanism for stereotype correction.

Curiosity Activation and Active Exploration

The videos trigger diverse exploration behaviors (e.g., P2's online research, P4's family sharing), transforming passive viewing into active cultural engagement. This validates existing research on cultural engagement (Li, 2022; Whyke et al., 2022), as practical, daily linked content emerges as the primary driver of cross-cultural exploration.

Differentiated Cognitive Depth

Bicultural audiences (e.g., P3) demonstrate more nuanced, cross-contextual understanding compared to monocultural viewers, as dual cultural schemas enable them to connect Chinese ICH to broader heritage-modernity debates. This supplements Li and Kookiattikoon's (2024) findings on bicultural audiences' interpretive role by highlighting their unique capacity for cognitive depth.

A critical unifying thread across the three effects is the role of "cultural familiarity through ordinariness": Li Ziqi's videos do not rely on exoticized depictions of ICH (e.g., framing crafts as "ancient relics") but instead position them as part of everyday life (e.g., weaving baskets for storage, making cakes for festivals). This ordinariness reduces the "cultural distance" that often inhibits cross-cultural understanding (Scollon & Scollon, 2013), making it easier for low-exposure audiences to correct stereotypes, for all audiences to engage in exploration, and for bicultural audiences to draw cross-contextual connections. Consistent with recent scholarship (Liang, 2022; Whyke et al., 2022), these findings confirm that Li Ziqi's ICH videos break the "modern-only" image for low-exposure audiences and spur diverse cross-cultural exploration. Bicultural viewers showed even deeper cross-contextual insights, underscoring the power of quotidian cultural portrayal: presenting heritage in everyday contexts reduces cultural distance (Liang, 2022). This study extends existing soft-power scholarship by detailing actual cognitive shifts—rather than merely measuring general audience attitudes—providing qualitative evidence of how digital heritage videos reshape cross-cultural cognition, thereby contributing to emerging debates on digital-era soft power and mediated national image construction (Sun, 2020).

By highlighting "ordinariness" as a key explanatory mechanism, this research offers a more precise understanding of how digital ICH content shapes cross-cultural cognition, with strategic implications for digital media communication (Cao, 2025; Li, 2022).

Theoretical Contributions

Integrated Theoretical Framework

By synthesizing Hall's (1976/2018) high-low context theory, Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions, and Berry's (2017) bicultural theory, the study constructs a "cognition formation-interpretation-depth" chain that explains cross-cultural cognitive differences more comprehensively than fragmented theoretical applications in prior research.

Expanded Understanding Of ICH Communication Mechanisms

The identification of "embodied sensory cues" (e.g., visual depictions of weaving, seasonal food preparation) as a bridge for cross-cultural understanding extends Braun and Clarke's

(2019) multimodal storytelling research by linking sensory content to specific cognitive outcomes (e.g., stereotype dismantling, curiosity activation).

Practical Recommendations for Cross-Cultural Chinese Cultural Dissemination

Prioritize “ICH-In-Daily-Life” Content

To maximize stereotype dismantling, creators should frame ICH not as “ancient relics” but as living practices tied to daily needs (e.g., bamboo weaving for storage, papermaking for festivals)—content that reduces cognitive distance for international audiences.

Tailor Strategies To Audience Type

For monocultural audiences, focus on basic curiosity activation (e.g., highlighting technical details of crafts); for bicultural audiences, design content that encourages cross-cultural reflection (e.g., comparing ICH inheritance in China and other countries) to leverage their intermediary potential.

Facilitate Sustained Exploration

Platforms hosting ICH videos should include links to curated resources (e.g., ICH museum websites, craft inheritance stories) to support audiences’ post-viewing exploration, transforming temporary curiosity into long-term cultural engagement.

Avoid Exoticization Of ICH

Content creators should resist framing ICH as “exotic” or “unusual” (e.g., using captions like “mysterious ancient crafts”). Instead, emphasize ordinariness—for example, pairing footage of bamboo weaving with voiceovers like “This basket will hold vegetables from Li Ziqi’s garden” to align with the “cultural familiarity through ordinariness” mechanism.

Incorporate Bicultural Voices In Content Design

Since bicultural audiences excel at cross-contextual interpretation, involving them in content development (e.g., consulting bicultural advisors on how to frame ICH for diverse audiences) can enhance the videos’ ability to resonate across groups.

Limitations and Future Research

As much as this study has contributed, it has a number of limitations that also indicate areas of future research. To begin with, the qualitative sample size ($n = 15$) that is relatively large and allows reaching theoretical saturation limits the possibility to generalize the results to a wider cultural, regional, and demographic context. The sample could be expanded to more diverse groups, especially to the parts of the world that are underrepresented, like Africa and Latin America, to create a more detailed interpretation of cross-cultural differences in cognitive reactions. Second, the research only records short-term, post viewing cognitive changes and not the stability of these changes in the long term. The longitudinal research designs which involve follow up interviews in the long run would be useful in determining whether reconstructed cultural perceptions would maintain or decline with time. Third, the narrowness

of the research on the Li Ziqi videos does not allow the researcher to compare how various modes of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) representation, like documentary-based versus narrative-driven videos, can influence the audience cognition. Future research may take a comparative approach to determine the most effective content format to use in cross-cultural understanding. Lastly, since the participants were all interacting with the videos through YouTube, the results can be confounded by platform-specific affordances, such as algorithmic recommendation systems and demographics of the audience. A more detailed analysis of platform ecology mediating cultural perception and engagement can be achieved by including several platforms, including Tik Tok or Bilibili.

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