

Research on Multimodal Pathways for the Digital Narrative of Qilu Culture from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract

Qilu culture is an important representative of the Yellow River civilization. It is not only a peak of Chinese civilization, but also a vivid witness to the long-term continuation of river civilization. Nowadays, with the continuous advancement of digitization and globalization, this paper believes that Qilu culture should assume the role of promoting mutual learning of global civilization. As far as the current cross-cultural communication practice of Qilu culture is concerned, it is necessary to sort out its current situation and try to design a multimodal digital narrative communication mode according to its characteristics. To do so, first, it can provide theoretical basis and practical operation scheme for the construction of Chinese civilization identity system and the promotion of international influence; second, it can also provide a reference sample for the effective dissemination of culture in other regions.

Keywords

Qilu Culture, cross-cultural communication, digital narrative, multimodality

1. Introduction

In 2026, China will enter the historical gateway of the first year of the “15th Five-Year Plan.” At this new historical point of departure, the Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development explicitly outlines the aim to boost the dynamism of cultural innovation and creativity throughout the entire country and encourage the vibrant growth of socialist culture and includes the creation of a cultural powerhouse among the 16 powerhouse construction goals. This strategic arrangement indicates the strategic importance of cultural development in the grand scheme of national rejuvenation and the establishment of a powerful country. To promote the great practice of building a powerful country and realize the national rejuvenation through Chinese-style modernization, it must have not only a firm material base but also a vigorous spiritual base. As a specific spiritual symbol and significant civilizational legacy of the Chinese-style modernization, cultural prosperity focuses on the promotion of the creative transformation and innovative development of China's excellent traditional culture. The Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan sets the goal of accelerating the development of China discourse and narrative system and improving the effectiveness of China discourse and narrative system as the key task to improve the influence and attractiveness of Chinese civilization. In the context of a complicated international situation, Chinese civilization has an urgent need to shift its current state of going global to becoming leading globally, and this requires Chinese culture

international communication to reach a higher level of physical presence to value-based resonance. The Outline also highlights the importance of promoting the integration of culture and technology and the digital and intelligent empowerment and information-driven transformation of cultural development. The continuous improvement of digital technologies offers fresh narrative opportunities and communication platforms to disseminate culture across cultures. The question of how Qilu culture can be expressed innovatively and disseminated internationally using multimodal digital narrative in this strategic framework is not only the task given to us by the times but a critical challenge that should be urgently resolved.

2. The Necessity of Cross-cultural Communication of Qilu Culture

At the historic juncture of 2026, which marks the inaugural year of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030), the necessity of cross-cultural communication of Qilu culture will be discussed from four dimensions: national strategic orientation, wave of technological revolution, the mission of regional cultures, and the evolving architecture of international communication.

2.1 National Strategic Orientation-the New Deployment of Cultural Power Construction

Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (hereinafter referred to as “the 15th Five-Year Plan”) explicitly calls for “establishing a recognizable identification system for Chinese civilization” [1], thereby charting a clear course for the advancement of Qilu culture in the years ahead. As an important source of Chinese civilization and the birthplace of Confucianism, Qilu culture harbors a wealth of foundational values: the ethos of “benevolence and propriety”, the ideal of “state-family” solidarity, and the strategic wisdom of military thought, all of which constitute invaluable resources for building the identification system of Chinese civilization. The era proposition that needs to be responded urgently, therefore, lies in how to translate the essence of Qilu culture into identifiable and communicable emblems of Chinese civilization. Qilu culture itself carries a very deep narrative potential, which provides a solid content foundation for telling Chinese stories and shaping a good national image. Based on this, this paper argues that this cultural advantage can play two roles: one is to promote the construction of a more recognizable narrative communication system with Chinese characteristics, so that Chinese stories can be told more smoothly and smoothly; second, with the help of this cultural system, China's international influence will expand faster, and the communication effect will really take effect, and ultimately go further and further in the context of globalization.

2.2 The Wave of Scientific and Technological revolution-Qilu Culture is Accelerating Its Deep Integration with Digital Intelligent Technology

The 15th Five-Year Plan outline clearly puts forward the next step to continue to promote the construction of digital China and improve the development level of digital intelligence. This article believes that there are actually two benefits to using digital tools to promote the global dissemination of Qilu culture. First, it can reactivate those static historical resources with immersive experience, so that the audience has a sense of immersion. Second, it can broaden the cross-border communication channels of cultural heritage and break free from the constraints of the traditional output mode. This two-way effort helps to build a deeper resonance in the hearts of overseas audiences, so that they can truly feel the unique value of Qilu culture.

2.3 Regional Cultural Mission-the Innovative Development of Qilu Culture

Based on the background of the creative transformation and innovative development of Qilu culture and the actual development needs, although the relevant cultural construction work has achieved outstanding development results, it still faces many new development challenges in the process of adapting to the requirements of cultural communication in the new era. First, the depth of cultural translation is limited, and it is difficult to fully convey the cultural core; Second, the adaptability of the existing communication strategy is insufficient, and it cannot fit the current public's receiving habits; thirdly, the quantitative evaluation system of communication effect is not perfect, and it is difficult to accurately measure the effectiveness of communication landing. The industry is in urgent need of breakthroughs at present. We cannot simply rely on established methods and past experience. More innovative optimization schemes are required to address the existing problems.

2.4 International Communication Pattern-new Opportunities and New Challenges for Qilu Culture Going Global

The transformation from “export of cultural form” to “implantation of cultural value” is a higher-level pursuit in the international dissemination of Qilu culture. At present, the global dissemination of Qilu culture still encounters the “cultural discount” effect. It is difficult to lead international audiences beyond a superficial understanding of Confucius merely as a symbolic figure and help them deeply grasp the profound connotation of Confucian philosophy. To overcome this challenge, multi-modal digital narratives should be adopted to foster cross-cultural empathy via diverse media including vision hearing and text. This type of empathetic interaction serves as a key driver that moves audiences from superficial cultural cognition toward meaningful cultural identity. It further turns passive consumption into active cross-cultural communication and participation.

3. The Theoretical Basis of Cross-cultural Communication of Qilu Culture

3.1 The Current Situation of Qilu Cultural Dissemination

Telling compelling stories of Qilu culture in the new era and aligning the pulse of regional culture with global resonance helps respond to national strategic calls and serves as a practical approach to meet the real needs of local development. It represents a long-term undertaking requiring sustained commitment. Nevertheless amid the growing influence of digital technology cross-cultural communication of Qilu culture still faces numerous pressing challenges that demand effective solutions.

Narrative thematic perspectives are too limited. Current communication practices are still predominantly led by government institutions and official media. As far as the narrative strategy is concerned, it still focuses on the display of achievements and positive publicity. The problem is that there is a lack of smooth coordination mechanism between the central and local governments at the vertical level, which leads to the lack of unified top-level design and effective connection of functions. There are also similar dilemmas at the horizontal level. There is a lack of systematic resource co-ordination and collaborative arrangements among cities in the region. Information dissemination is decentralized and it is difficult to form a joint force. This vertical fragmentation and horizontal dispersion are superimposed together, which constitutes a structural constraint and directly drags down the overall effect of the international dissemination of Qilu culture.

Narrative content tends to be grand and abstract. The current narrative of Qilu culture focuses on the grand theme, and the depiction of specific details is relatively weak. This disconnection between macro presentation and micro description is particularly prominent in international communication. Cultural symbols such as Fengshan Grand Ceremony at Mount Tai, the Three Confucian Sites in Qufu, and the Jixia Academy in Zibo do carry profound historical implications and are also important symbols of Chinese civilization. The problem is that these symbols are difficult for overseas audiences to find emotional clues that can touch them. Unfamiliar with China's historical context and cultural background, these grand concepts can easily become distant, abstract labels, neither touching, it is difficult to really trigger a sense of identity. More fundamentally, the content of communication mostly stays in the macro cultural interpretation and value promotion, and rarely builds a bridge that overseas audiences can perceive and touch by telling a person's story, digging the details behind an object, or having any connection with our current life. In other words, the lack of a “living” entry point, so that people really go in and feel. At the same time, the narrative method is also relatively single, lack of ups and downs, contradictions or turning the introduction of the entire text seems to spread out straight, no waves, it is difficult to form enough narrative tension. As a result, the audience often see a beginning does not continue to pursue the desire, not to mention continued attention and in-depth understanding.

Interactivity and participatory engagement in narrative approaches remain markedly insufficient. Although digital technology has indeed brought many new patterns to the spread of Qilu culture in recent years, such as VR experience, short video, and interactive websites, it seems to be lively in form. However, the problem is that most of these technologies only change the appearance, and really make interactive transformation in the narrative structure, so that the audience can participate in the attempt, the progress is actually very slow. The problem is that overseas audiences generally lack a sense of participation and interaction. This leads to an awkward situation: the information is out, but the deep connotation of culture does not follow in place. The audience read and listened, but may not really understand what Qilu culture wants to express. The reason is

that the current communication practice still stays on the old road of one-way output, treats the audience as a passive receiver, and does not fully develop a deep interactive narrative mode. There is also a serious imbalance between communication input and audience feedback, and information transmission and meaning generation are out of section. In this way, the dialogue and participation characteristics that communication activities should have are not reflected, and the role of promoting cultural integration is naturally reduced.

3.2 Theoretical Foundation

The 15th Five-Year Plan has drawn a clear policy direction and implementation path for the transformation of cultural communication mode. The digital narrative theory proposed by Marie-Laure Ryan integrates the perspective of possible world theory and media research, and provides theoretical support and logical basis for us to create immersive experience scenes in cultural communication [2]. Relying on digital technology, digital narrative is not only a practical way of cultural practice, but also carries forward-looking cultural innovation ideas and imagination [3]. It can be said that this transformation concept makes the role of digital technology no longer limited to the tool level, but rises to a strategic means in narrative construction. Its function is not limited to the communication channels of propaganda films, but to promote the overall reconstruction of the narrative mechanism with the help of digital technology. Taking Qilu culture as an example, in this way, the original abstract and obscure concepts can be transformed into specific stories containing plots and characters, which is easier to understand and perceive. This transformation helps overseas audiences to perceive and understand Qilu culture more smoothly, and also opens up new narrative space for international communication. With the help of digital technology, we can build an immersive virtual cultural space. In this space, the audience can not only feel the cultural atmosphere, but also participate in two-way interaction, forming a real sense of the dialogue scene. The two sides of cross-cultural communication thus obtain equal opportunities to communicate, gradually eliminate cultural barriers, and achieve deeper mutual understanding. Relying on immersive experience, this model can also effectively stimulate the emotional resonance of overseas audiences, help Qilu culture gain a broader cross-cultural identity, and enhance the actual communication effect.

4. The Optimization Path of Qilu Culture Digital Narrative

Qilu is located in the core area of the Yellow River civilization. It is the birthplace of Confucianism and the hometown of Confucius. The historical and cultural resources are extremely rich. However, as far as the current external communication is concerned, the region still lacks a narrative perspective that can truly adapt to the needs of overseas audiences [4]. *The Report on Chinese Overseas Network Communication in 2025* [5] systematically sorts out and analyzes the overseas network communication performance of 31 provinces and 338 prefecture-level cities in China. The relevant data show that Shandong Province ranks ninth nationally, which represents a certain decline compared with its fifth-place ranking in 2024. Among cities within Shandong, Qingdao ranks the highest (12th nationwide), followed by Jinan (19th), Yantai (40th), with all other cities in Shandong ranking outside the top 50. These data reveal two concurrent trends: first, national-level cultural “going global” policies continue to release institutional dividends, with both the agency and resource investment of cities in overseas communication showing an upward tendency; second, despite Shandong Province being endowed with the deep historical resource base of Qilu culture, its overseas online communication power had slipped to 9th place at the provincial level by 2025. At present, there is a significant asymmetry between the profound historical accumulation of Qilu culture and its actual spread in the international public opinion field. This gap reminds us that during the strategic window period when the policy environment continues to improve and the construction of national cultural soft power is comprehensively promoted, how to effectively transform static cultural stock resources into dynamic digital communication kinetic energy with global radiation is still a key proposition that needs to be broken through. In other words, the stock advantage of cultural heritage has not yet been transformed into the incremental efficiency in international communication. This transformation process is the core bottleneck of the current Qilu culture going out. Facing this realistic challenge, the international communication of Qilu culture can be systematically explored and developed from the following multimodal dimensions, in order to gradually bridge the gap between cultural thickness and communication validity.

4.1 Explore Cultural Symbols Adapted to Cross-cultural Communication Scenarios

Cultural symbols are a kind of symbolic carriers formed through language images or material forms. Such carriers can be widely recognized by members of specific cultural groups and carry multi-level symbolic meanings and cultural connotations [6]. Cultural symbols are not fixed or static objects. Their refining process itself is dynamic and continually evolving. Digital media has become deeply embedded in the daily lives of the public under the new background. It relies on personalized or immersive experience formats to present cultural symbols. This approach provides feasible ideas for transforming abstract cultural concepts into intuitive and perceptible experiences. Such a communication method can guide overseas audiences to actively produce their own cultural interpretations rather than passively receive one-way cultural content. In this way, it can effectively eliminate language differences and communication barriers formed at the cognitive level. The recently popular overseas social platform game *Black Myth Wukong* serves as a highly representative practical case. It is not just a beautiful picture, music with a sense, but the visual, auditory, text, player operation, as well as the linkage between different media narrative, all together, forming a set of three-dimensional and complete expression. Through the synergy of these multimodal means, it has successfully built a cultural “possible world” that can be immersed in it—a virtual but immersive space for global players to not just “watch” the game, but really “walk in” the game. In this world, we play while chatting, while experiencing while discussing, naturally there is a foundation and platform for communication and interaction. Moreover, cities such as Taiyuan, which feature cultural symbols embedded in the game, have become popular tourist destinations for players from different countries of the world [7]. In this process of cross-cultural communication, the cultural symbol of Jinci Temple has evolved into a spiritually resonant touchstone with global appeal, in turn enhancing the city’s international visibility.

4.2 Build Global Issues with Qilu's Multi-modal Narrative Content

Global issues such as social peace and stability remain a major focus of international attention. Local narrative restructuring of these global issues can be carried out through diversified means such as comprehensive short film collections, traveler self-made video blogs, real-time data visualization, and oral interviews with local residents. This strategy can demonstrate the actual conditions of cities in Shandong Province in responding to relevant issues at multiple levels. It transforms abstract global reality anxiety into concrete expressions with sensory experience and places them within the corresponding geographical and humanistic contexts. At the same time, this method can rely on contemporary digital media discourse to intuitively present the core ethical connotations of Confucianism, including benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness.

4.3 Relying on Multi-modal Narrative to Build Multi-dimensional Resonance in the External Communication of Qilu Culture

There is a prominent practical dilemma in the international communication process of Qilu culture. The selection of existing narrative themes is relatively limited. Under the traditional communication framework, most communication subjects are concentrated on mainstream platforms such as government agencies and official media. The voices of the people, individual perspectives, and the power of enterprises are not involved enough, and the entire communication pattern appears to be a bit “heavy”. The problem with this model is that for overseas audiences, this expression is too far from their lives and lacks an emotional entrance that resonates. The Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan calls for “stimulating the vitality of cultural innovation and creativity across the nation, and fostering the flourishing development of socialist culture” [1]. Activating cultural vitality entails a shift in narrative agency from a handful of authoritative institutions toward a more diversified, grassroots resonance. An emerging, more balanced relationship between state-led efforts and individual civilian participation is gradually taking shape. A notable example is China Daily’s *China Storyteller Partnerships*, which engages foreign online influencers as cultural intermediaries. Through their embodied experiences and active participation in Chinese society, these influencers generate first-person narratives that facilitate a softer, more organic transmission of Chinese stories [8]. In fact, the spread of culture is not only by “speaking”, but more importantly, by “doing” and “feeling”. Those who really participate in cultural activities and experience them in person often put abstract cultural concepts into practice more than simple publicity. In this way, between the official grand narrative and the more down-to-earth expression of the folk, the original sense of distance will be naturally eliminated, no longer making people feel that culture is high and unreachable.

Therefore, at this stage, how to fully activate this folk digital narrative vitality has become a very critical breakthrough to enhance the national cultural communication ability [9]. Accordingly, the international dissemination of Qilu culture calls for greater civilian participation to realize a co-creation of Qilu stories.

5. Conclusion

Taking Qilu culture as a case in point, this study proceeds from a critical diagnosis of prevailing communicative challenges toward the construction of a digital narrative framework, thereby advancing a systematic argument that moves from problem identification to strategic pathway design. The core is to turn the static Qilu culture that has been stuck in books and sites into a living scene that can be seen, understood and felt in front of overseas audiences. At the same time, the pattern of communication has to change-to create a pluralistic ecology in which the government, the people, the enterprises and the individuals can participate in the voice. Everyone tells their own stories and shows their own characteristics. Only in this way can Qilu culture truly show its vitality and vitality on the stage of global dialogue. On a larger level, this exploration is not only a concrete supplement and enrichment of the identification system of Chinese civilization, but also a positive response to the proposition of “how regional culture really survives and spreads in the digital age”. It can be said that these explorations and practices of Qilu culture in international communication can provide a regional sample with local characteristics, reference and replication for the shaping and dissemination of the entire Chinese cultural identity system on a global scale, and contribute to Shandong's own wisdom and experience. Ultimately, the goal is to cultivate the global audience that not only comprehends Qilu culture but also actively participates in, narrates, and empathizes with it, transforming Qilu culture from a regional heritage into a window through which the world may gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the real China.unity gain a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of the real China.

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