

Research on the Narrative Strategies and Communication Effects of Jiang Xunqian's Intangible Cultural Heritage Short Videos

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Abstract

This study focuses on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) short video creator Jiang Xunqian, analyzing her narrative strategies and communication effects. The research finds that Jiang inherits and adapts the hero's journey narrative model, enhancing the appeal of her works by omitting or merging certain stages and unevenly distributing time allocation. Additionally, she employs multi-dimensional narratives based on relationships such as master-apprentice, team, and audience. Using the "cognitive-affective-behavioral" framework to evaluate communication effects, the study reveals that her videos evoke strong emotional resonance but lack cognitive depth, while behavioral engagement is constrained by the inherent nature of ICH. Finally, the research proposes optimization pathways, including subverting conventional narratives and facilitating the transition from emotional engagement to action, providing insights for ICH short video dissemination.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage short videos; Jiang Xunqian; Narrative strategies; Hero's journey; Communication effects

1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith, that communities, groups, and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. In recent years, short videos have become a crucial medium for its dissemination. According to Douyin's 2025 ICH Data Report, the platform recorded over 200 million new videos related to national-level ICH, marking a 31% year-on-year increase. Leveraging immediacy, low cost, and high dissemination potential, short videos have emerged as a vital vehicle for ICH transmission.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, academic research on ICH short videos has explored multiple dimensions, primarily focusing on communication strategies and effects, international dissemination, technological empowerment, and social functions.

Regarding communication strategies and effects, several scholars have examined the dissemination outcomes and optimization strategies of ICH short videos using platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou as case studies. Zhang Shan (2025) analyzed cross-platform integration and community operation strategies, emphasizing that the organic combination of personalized expression and cultural depth enhances communication effectiveness^[1]. Ji Linxuan et al. (2020) highlighted that the "ICH + e-commerce" model in a commercialized environment not only promotes industrial development but also serves as an effective means of safeguarding ICH^[2].

In the realm of international dissemination, Li Ziqi has emerged as a representative case. Yu Qi (2022) studied Li Ziqi's Oriental ICH Heritage series on YouTube, finding that constructing a cross-cultural "common semantic field" is key to successful global communication^[3].

On technological innovation, Chen Chen and Gao Qingzhan (2020) explored how digital technologies have revolutionized ICH documentation^[4]. Concerning the social functions of ICH dissemination, Luan Yimei and Zhang Xing (2020) investigated the case of the "Dong Ethnic Seven Fairies," proposing a "ICH poverty alleviation + diversified communication" model^[5]. Zhao Chongkai and Shao Lu (2020) introduced an industrial approach integrating "ICH + wedding services + e-commerce"^[6].

However, existing research on ICH short videos remains limited, predominantly focusing on macro-level ecosystems while neglecting micro-level practices of individual creators. Even when focusing on microscopic individuals, most studies concentrate on top influencers like Li Ziqi, leaving a gap in research on creators such as Jiang Xunqian, whose experiential and challenge-based ICH content has garnered over 30 million followers. As the second most influential ICH creator after Li Ziqi, Jiang has been the subject of only five publicly available studies, indicating a significant research void.

3. Narrative Strategy Analysis of Jiang Xunqian's Intangible Cultural Heritage Short Videos

3.1 Inheritance and Adaptive Modification Based on the "Hero's Journey" Narrative Model

3.1.1 Vogler's "Hero's Journey" Model

Vogler refined the "Hero's Journey" model based on Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* [7]. Anthropological studies suggest that individuals experience successive "rites of passage" during their development [8]. The "Hero's Journey" posits that various heroic narratives essentially follow similar "rites of passage," which can be summarized into three stages: "Call - Trials - Return," comprising twelve specific steps: "Ordinary World-Call to Adventure-Refusal of the Call-Meeting with the Mentor-Crossing the First Threshold-Tests, Allies, Enemies-Approach to the Inmost Cave-Ordeal-Reward-The Road Back-Resurrection-Return with the Elixir"

Jiang Xunqian's intangible cultural heritage short videos fundamentally align with these twelve steps of the "Hero's Journey," while selectively omitting and consolidating certain stages to create a distinctive narrative rhythm. The following analysis examines her works *Xiangxi corpse driving*, *Iron Flower Crafting*, and *Shadow Puppetry* as case studies.

3.1.2 Inheritance

The "Call to Adventure" in Jiang Xunqian's videos consistently stems from either the inherent scarcity or mystical allure of intangible cultural heritage. In *Xiangxi corpse driving*, the adventure is triggered by questioning the authenticity of this esoteric practice, while *Iron Flower Crafting* builds its narrative around the urgent mission to preserve a nearly lost art form. Similarly, *Shadow Puppetry* frames its journey as an attempt to revive ancient cinematic techniques. Each approach not only fits naturally within the context of intangible cultural heritage preservation but also provides compelling motivation for the protagonist's actions.

The subsequent "Trials" phase follows a carefully structured progression, beginning with physical challenges like demonstrating stamina, strength and cutting technique. The narrative then advances to psychological hurdles such as the breakthrough of fear of death, the head-on confrontation with flames and the practice of patience. The challenges culminate in deeper cultural-cognitive tests that involve redefining traditional perspectives on life and death, grasping the true significance of cultural transmission, or mastering complex traditional color theories. This deliberate escalation in difficulty serves to make the eventual "Reward" more meaningful and earned.

Finally, the "Return" segment in each video elevates the narrative beyond mere skill acquisition. *Xiangxi corpse driving* connects the ancient practice to modern societal progress, while *Iron Flower Crafting* transforms into a powerful statement about cultural dissemination. *Shadow Puppetry* achieves thematic resonance by striking a thoughtful balance between honoring tradition and embracing contemporary expression, completing the hero's journey with cultural significance.

3.1.3 Adaptive Modifications

First, the "Ordinary World" and "Refusal of the Call" stages are omitted. The case studies demonstrate no background exposition, instead commencing directly with either a compelling question or clear objective - "Does Xiangxi corpse driving truly exist?" or "I want to restore the world's oldest form of cinema." This approach mirrors traditional storytelling techniques like the dramatic opening hooks in Chinese pingshuor the arresting first lines in xiangsheng, both emphasizing the crucial importance of an extraordinary beginning. Similarly, these videos adhere to the short video format's fundamental principle of immediate engagement. Furthermore, none of the cases include any hesitation from the protagonist, moving directly into the exploration phase. This narrative choice reinforces Jiang Xunqian's image as an active cultural inheritor while aligning with younger audiences' preference for decisive, action-oriented protagonists.

Second, repetitive stages are consolidated. The "Road Back," "Resurrection," and "Return with the Elixir" phases are merged into a single segment that simultaneously showcases achievements and elevates thematic significance. It creates a more powerful and cohesive climax by preventing narrative fragmentation, ensures the audience's emotional investment is continuous.

Third, disproportionate time allocation favors the "Tests, Allies, Enemies" stage, which occupies nearly one-third of Xiangxi corpse driving and approximately one-quarter of Shadow Puppetry. By presenting the authenticity of the learning process through details, it enhances the audience's sense of identification and immersion.

Table 1 Comparison of the Plot of Xiangxi corpse driving and the model of the Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey consists of twelve stages		The plot of <i>Xiangxi corpse driving</i>	Duration
The First Act	1. Ordinary World	\	\
	2. Call to Adventure	Raising the question of whether there was really corpse driving in Xiangxi, she wanted to explore the truth.	00:10
	3. Refusal of the Call	\	\
	4. Meeting with the Mentor	The local undertaker set up three tests for Jiang Xunqian to guide her in getting started.	1:08
The Second Act	5. Crossing the First Threshold	Jiang Xunqian overcame her psychological fear and began the first test alone.	1:10
	6. Tests, Allise, Enemies	Jiang Xunqian, in order to pass the strength test, practiced her strength by cutting grass and carrying firewood with her old lady, and also learned stories from the villagers of Dazi Village.	7:07
	7. Approach to the Inmost Cave	The third level was a test of the concept of life and death. The teacher led Jiang Xunqian into the corpse hiding cave to observe the treatment of corpses with herbs.	1:46
The Third Act	8. Ordeal	The teacher asked about the ultimate challenge of the view on life and death, bringing the test to a climax and triggering a strong emotional response in Jiang Xunqian.	2:07
	9. Reward	Jiang Xunqian successfully "broke through three levels" and passed the test. Work with local corpse handlers to remove corpses.	3:22
	10. The Road Back	The current development of transportation in Xiangxi Prefecture and the changes it has brought about.	3:21
	11. Resurrection		
	12. Return with the Elixir		

Table2 Comparison of the Plot of Iron Flower Crafting and the Model of the Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey consists of twelve stages		The plot of <i>Iron Flower Crafting</i>	Duration
The First Act	1. Ordinary World	\	\
	2. Call to Adventure	The iron flower is on the verge of being lost, and she eagered to learn.	00:20
	3. Refusal of the Call	\	\
	4. Meeting with the Mentor	Jiang Xunqian found her mentor Yang Jianjun to learn how to make iron flowers.	0:26

The Second Act	5. Crossing the First Threshold	Under guidance, Jiang Xunqian began her initial attempts.	0:18
	6. Tests, Allise, Enemies	Jiang Xunqian repeatedly failed in the willow stick hitting practice, but made a breakthrough under the guidance of her teacher.	0:30
	7. Approach to the Inmost Cave	With in-depth practice, Jiang Xunqian successively carried out "sand-beating" and "water-beating" exercises, achieving an improvement in her skills.	1:20
	8. Ordeal	Jiang Xunqian was preparing for her first iron flower performance, feeling extremely frightened and in a state of mental struggle.	0:45
The Third Act	9. Reward	Jiang Xunqian successfully completed the iron flower making and received recognition from her teacher.	2:00
	10. The Road Back	Invite fans to watch the iron flower show offline and take photos with them as souvenirs.	3:48
	11. Resurrection		
	12. Return with the Elixir		

Table3 Comparison of the Plot of Shadow Puppetry and the Model of the Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey consists of twelve stages		The plot of Shadow Puppetry	Duration
The First Act	1. Ordinary World	\	\
	2. Call to Adventure	Having never seen shadow puppetry with my own eyes, she developed the idea of restoring the world's oldest film.	0:22
	3. Refusal of the Call	\	\
	4. Meeting with the Mentor	Contact Teacher Wang Haiyan to systematically learn the making of shadow puppets.	0:35
The Second Act	5. Crossing the First Threshold	Jiang Xunqian officially began the carving of shadow puppets and got off to a smooth start.	0:20
	6. Tests, Allise, Enemies	Jiang Xunqian faced the test of her knife skills and patience due to the complexity of the carving. Later, her partner joined him to learn together.	2:57
	7. Approach to the Inmost Cave	I delved deeply into the essential step of shadow puppet making - applying color, and my skills gradually became proficient	1:42
	8. Ordeal	The most difficult part of learning - shadow puppetry performance.	0:38
The Third Act	9. Reward	Jiang Xunqian successfully completed the shadow play <i>Three Battles against the White-Boned Demon</i> .	3:13
	10. The Road Back	Thoughts on the development of today's fast-paced era and the inheritance of tradition.	0:33
	11. Resurrection		
	12. Return with the Elixir		

3.2 Diverse Narratives Based on Different Character Relationships

3.2.1 Inheritance Narrative Through Master-Apprentice Relationships

The master-apprentice inheritance narrative constitutes the primary genre in Jiang Xunqian's intangible cultural heritage works. For instance, in the iron flower crafting story, the master initially dissuades her before ultimately imparting his complete knowledge. Through progressive training stages—striking stones, sand, and water—Jiang eventually becomes the first female inheritor of Queshan iron flower crafting, fully demonstrating the master-apprentice transmission lineage. The sugar melon production narrative focuses on inheritance challenges. The camera captures the master's calloused hands, his intense concentration during sugar boiling, and the desolate state of his market stall—visual elements that simultaneously reveal the difficulties of cultural transmission and call for public attention to vanishing folk crafts.

This master-apprentice narrative framework transforms traditional mentorship into modern skill-acquisition storytelling through cinematography, lowering comprehension barriers for contemporary audiences. Furthermore, the intergenerational interaction establishes a dialogue between tradition and modernity, effectively activating viewers' collective cultural memory.

3.2.2 Collaborative Narrative Based on Team Relationships

Large-scale intangible cultural heritage creation projects predominantly rely on teamwork, as exemplified by the ice dragon sculpture project. The team collectively harvested and transported ice blocks, then meticulously shaped them using ice saws and chisels to complete the largest monolithic natural ice sculpture of a dragon in history. Similarly, the flying apsaras-themed production centered on team coordination - members worked overnight to recreate celestial costumes, ensured safety during wire harness rehearsals, while the camera crew spent an entire day transporting equipment to Huangshan Mountain's summit, awaiting optimal wind conditions for perfect shots.

This collaborative narrative of large-scale projects enhances content credibility through authentic documentation of collective efforts. It transforms intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship from mere individual heroism into a demonstration of collective wisdom. By revealing both the technical challenges and human coordination involved, it fosters deeper emotional resonance among audiences witnessing these endeavors.

3.2.3 Interactive Narrative Based on Audience Relationships

A minority of Jiang Xunqian's works employ audience interaction narratives, primarily serving two purposes. First, they aim to demonstrate complete creative transparency and address skepticism. Facing doubts to her ice sculpture works, Jiang responded to staging allegations by live-streaming the entire carving process while fielding viewer questions. Similarly, when challenged about using "hand doubles" for her chrysanthemum tofu creation, she filmed an uncut single-take video documenting her proficient knife skills.

Others are designed to showcase skills on the spot and give back to fans. Notable examples include performing iron flower crafting for fans at Laole Mountain in Zhumadian and presenting Yingge dance at Zhenhai Tower in Chaozhou - both events generating enthusiastic audience responses.

This interactive narrative framework achieves three communication effects. Live streams and long takes establish viewer trust through procedural transparency; Offline performances convert virtual engagement into tangible connections while encouraging organic dissemination by attendees; The "question-response-co-creation" interaction loop transforms passive viewers into active participants and witnesses, significantly enhancing both credibility and emotional impact in intangible cultural heritage dissemination.

4. Evaluation of ICH Short Video Communication Effects Based on the Cognition-Emotion-Action Framework

4.1 Conceptual Definition of the Cognition-Emotion-Action Framework

In ICH communication research, the Cognition-Emotion-Action Framework serves as a multidimensional approach to analyze audience responses. Cognition refers to the ICH knowledge acquired by audiences, including historical background, craftsmanship techniques, and cultural significance. Emotion denotes the emotional experiences evoked in

viewers, such as admiration or cultural pride. Action encompasses audiences' subsequent practical inclinations, including sharing, experiential participation, learning attempts, or purchase intentions.

To compare audience reactions across different ICH categories, this study selects three representative works by Jiang Xunqian: *Iron Flower Crafting* (visually spectacular traditional performance art), *Shadow Puppetry* (traditional theater integrating multiple art forms), and *Homemade Sweet Potato Noodles* (culinary technique with strong daily life relevance). For each video, 200 primary comments from Xiaohongshu were sampled. After eliminating invalid data through cleaning procedures, the analysis yields the following results:

Table4: Distribution of the Proportion of "cognition - emotion - action" in the comments of three types of Intangible Cultural heritage videos

	Cognition (%)	Emotion (%)	Action (%)
<i>Iron Flower Crafting</i>	16.00	70.00	14.00
<i>Shadow Puppetry</i>	17.50	66.00	16.50
<i>Homemde Sweet Potato Noodles</i>	15.50	58.00	26.50

The above data is from Xiaohongshu users' *Iron Flower Crafting*, *Shadow Puppetry*, *Homemade Sweet Potato Noodles* (as of August 12, 2025). During the sampling process, first of all, a crawler software was used to collect 400 first-level comments from each of the three Xiaohongshu works respectively. Subsequently, eliminate the invalid comments that are meaningless, irrelevant to the content, or fail to reflect any of the dimensions of "cognition - emotion - action". Then, based on the remaining number of each work review group after screening, calculate the sampling intervals respectively. Finally, through the isometric sampling method, 200 comments were selected from each group to form the final research sample.

4.1.1 Analysis of Variance Causes

Iron Flower Crafting generates intense sensory stimulation through visual spectacle, eliciting immediate emotional responses like awe and admiration, resulting in the highest affective proportion. *Shadow Puppetry* conveys cultural significance through light and shadow, where emotional resonance depends on narrative tension and artistic subtlety, yielding moderately weaker intensity. *Homemade Sweet Potato Noodles* demonstrates quotidian culinary techniques with strong life relevance but diminished emotional impact, showing the lowest affective proportion.

Behavioral intention correlates with ICH's participatory accessibility. Sweet potato noodles features simple techniques and practical outputs, prompting active behavioral tendencies like attempting reproduction or purchasing. Shadow puppetry involves higher technical thresholds, limiting behaviors primarily to indirect support like performance attendance. Iron flower crafting, as a high-risk collective art, presents the weakest behavioral intention due to minimal public participation feasibility.

All three video types demonstrate comparable yet relatively low cognitive proportions.

4.2 Evaluation of Communication Effects

4.2.1 Insufficient Cognitive Depth

The overall low proportion of cognitive responses indicates that the videos inadequately present in-depth information about the ICH's historical background and technical details. This may result in audiences remaining at a superficial level of understanding, failing to trigger deeper reflection. For instance, Jiang Xunqian's work *Homemade Sweet Potato Noodles*, despite its exquisite visuals and clear process, fails to systematically introduce the evolution of sweet potato noodles in different regional cultures or their value as a traditional food in contemporary dietary structures. This leads the audience to view it more as a handicraft experience rather than a deep encounter with cultural heritage.

Alternatively, the strong emotional appeal might dominate viewers' attention, leaving limited cognitive space for absorbing substantive knowledge, thereby weakening the reception of informational content. For instance, Jiang Xunqian's work *Iron Flower* successfully attracted a large audience with its spectacular visual impact and passionate emotional rendering. However, the key information behind it, such as the historical origin of metallurgical techniques, the scientific mechanism of temperature control, and the practical difficulties in cultivating inheritors, was not fully

unfolded, resulting in the communication effect being more focused on emotional resonance rather than knowledge transmission.

4.2.2 Significant Emotional Resonance Achieved

All three video types elicited emotional responses exceeding 50%, demonstrating Jiang Xunqian's success in activating audiences' emotional connection to ICH. Particularly, *Iron Flower Crafting* effectively binds ICH with positive emotions like "awe" and "pride" through visual spectacle, reinforcing cultural identity and national pride among viewers.

4.2.3 Action Influenced by Content Attributes

Homemade Sweet Potato Noodles showed relatively high behavioral engagement, proving that lifestyle-oriented ICH more effectively translates emotional resonance into practical participation, thus building an audience foundation for living heritage transmission. However, the lower action percentages for *Iron Flower Crafting* and *Shadow Puppetry* reveal participation barriers for high-threshold ICH, where communication effects predominantly remain at the emotional level without effectively converting into concrete ICH engagement or conservation actions.

5. Optimization Pathways

5.1 Anti-Formulaic Narrative Strategies

While the Hero's Journey model has proven effective in engaging audiences, its prolonged and formulaic application risks diminishing narrative novelty. To address this, three key optimization approaches can be implemented.

First, the narrative perspective should move beyond the single-learner viewpoint by incorporating inheritors' developmental histories and showcasing the multifaceted contemporary applications of ICH techniques, thereby creating richer, multi-dimensional storytelling.

Second, the fundamental "Call-Trials-Return" structure can be enhanced through introducing cross-disciplinary interactions between ICH and other fields, as well as incorporating moments where practitioners discover cognitive blind spots during skill transmission - elements that effectively break linear narrative predictability.

Third, narratives should develop culture-specific conflicts tailored to different ICH categories: craft-focused stories might emphasize the tension between preservation and innovation, while folklore narratives could highlight collisions between traditional and modern values, ensuring that challenge sequences transcend mere technical training to address deeper cultural dialogues.

5.2 Increase knowledge-based narratives

To address the issue of a relatively low proportion of cognitive responses in intangible cultural heritage videos, the key lies in skillfully integrating more profound cultural and technical information while maintaining the appeal and influence of the works. For instance, knowledge nodes can be naturally embedded in the video narrative. At key steps, the scientific principles and historical context behind them can be explained with popular metaphors or short animations. For example, when demonstrating iron flower making, dynamic subtitles can be used to prompt the temperature of the molten iron and its physical properties, or background explanations about the wisdom of traditional food preservation can be interspersed during the process of making sweet potato noodles. In addition, a brief interview with the inheritor or an expert in the relevant field can be inserted in the middle, allowing them to directly explain the most difficult or core point, thereby enhancing authority and credibility. The ultimate goal is to enhance information density without spoiling the viewing experience, triggering the audience to move from emotional resonance to cognitive participation, thereby deepening their understanding of intangible cultural heritage.

5.3 Transforming Emotional Engagement into Heritage Preservation Actions

The dissemination of ICH short videos should not remain limited to emotional arousal but must facilitate the transition from emotional connection to concrete action.

In video production, creators must guard against excessive emotional dramatization. Reducing grandiose tragic narratives while incorporating specific data to demonstrate ICH's value, combined with tangible scenarios showcasing ICH's

relevance to daily life, can provide rational balance to emotional content. This approach allows audiences to intuitively grasp ICH's practical significance, develop deeper understanding, and ultimately feel motivated to participate.

Different ICH categories require tailored communication strategies. For high-threshold ICH like Jiang Xunqian's iron flower crafting - which involves significant technical difficulty and safety risks making direct public participation impractical in the short term - the focus should be on awareness-building and fostering appreciation to cultivate future participation willingness. Effective methods include organizing hybrid online-offline performances with complimentary tickets for select followers, serving both as fan appreciation and organic outreach through attendee sharing.

Youth engagement represents critical future preservation potential. Developing educational materials incorporating the creator's iron flower content for classroom use has proven effective, with many students reporting deepened interest after school screenings revealed both the artform's spectacular visuals and cultural depth. Partnerships with schools can encourage student creations, such as essays, artwork, or short videos, with outstanding works featured on the creator's platform, transforming passive reception into active youth-led dissemination.

For easily accessible ICH like homemade sweet potato noodles, establishing practical conversion platforms proves effective. Collaborating with e-commerce platforms to offer material kits with detailed instructional videos helps convert audience interest into actual practice, while encouraging participants to share results creates secondary dissemination that expands ICH influence and enables living transmission.

6. Conclusion

The research demonstrates that Jiang Xunqian's ICH short videos have developed a distinctive narrative model through modifications of the Hero's Journey framework and construction of multidimensional character relationships. Evaluation of communication effects reveals outstanding achievements in emotional resonance, while simultaneously identifying limitations including insufficient cognitive depth and constraints in behavioral conversion imposed by inherent ICH characteristics. Optimization requires implementing anti-formulaic narrative strategies and facilitating the transformation from emotional engagement to concrete actions. These findings provide practical references for ICH short video dissemination while offering conceptual pathways for content creators exploring ICH communication strategies.

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