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Communication Strategies of Chinese Micro-Drama in Europe and the US: The Change of Symbolic Perception into Value Identification

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Abstract. Due to their brevity, condensed storyline and emotional story, Chinese micro-short dramas have become one of the most significant forms of Chinese cultural products in the world, especially during the high-paced era of globalization of digital media and the constantly growing flow of cultural resources across borders. When compared to other areas of the same cultural background including Southeast Asia, Chinese micro-short dramas are more culturally diverse than Europe and the United States. The ways to dismantle the idea of cultural discount and turn it into a value recognition process have turned into a burning issue. This particular research has chosen popular micro-dramas with a large number of viewers on the ReelShort platform in European and American markets and to examine the strategies to translate cultural symbols and narrative strategies adaptation of micro-short dramas to give certain practical strategic advice on how to help Chinese micro-short dramas enhance their representation in their markets in Europe and the United States and develop a lasting cultural exchange and value delivery. It has been concluded that the implementation of Chinese micro-drams in the European and American markets will not depend on the one-way cultural outflow, but on the recreation of themes, characters, and emotional structures locally, whereby the culturally universal essence of Chinese culture may get into the mindset of European and American audiences through perceptible symbols.

Keywords: Chinese micro-short dramas, European and American markets, Symbol perception, Value identification

1. Introduction

China has always been interested in the development of cultural soft power since the dawn of the new era. President Xi Jinping has said that we should try even harder to spread the culture of China across the world through the culture channel of values transmission, opinion expression, and education of people with even more outstanding cultural pieces that would represent the Chinese character, the Chinese spirit, and the Chinese wisdom. Guided by the national macro strategy for cultural power, Chinese micro-short dramas have become an important vehicle for Chinese culture to go global because of its brevity, intensity of the plots, and high emotional intensity. In the report

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on Internet Development 2025 and the information given by DateEye, in March 2025, there were 237 Chinese micro-short drama applications launched in foreign markets, and the amount of downloads and application revenue increased rapidly. By November 2025, the total revenue share of ReelShort and DramaBox in the North American market had exceeded 60 percent, which definitely is the foremost challenge facing the overseas expansion of Chinese micro short dramas.

The information shows the truth that the European and American markets are developing but there are many contradictions in the cultural sphere: Rooted in the Chinese cultural context, Chinese micro-short dramas feature narrative logic, emotional cores and value expressions centered on family reunion, ethical rituals and collectivism. By contrast, Western societies are shaped by individualism, which places greater emphasis on personal freedom, independence and egalitarian values. Due to this difference in values, they land Chinese micro-short dramas in the dilemma of cultural discount in cross-cultural communication. Barriers including plot tropes inaccessible to Western audiences, cognitive gaps stemming from value disparities, and biased interpretations of cultural symbols all undermine the communication effectiveness of micro-short drama content. Therefore, exploring shared values between Eastern and Western cultures and constructing narrative symbols understandable and empathetic to European and American audiences has become the key for Chinese micro-short dramas to resolve this dilemma.

2. Development models of Chinese micro-dramas in the European and American markets

The development history of Chinese micro-short dramas going global can be divided into three stages, which demonstrate a shift from one-way cultural export to two-way integration.

At the first stage, several companies tried to adapt the mature Chinese micro-short dramas to several other languages and sell them in the foreign markets. It is an inexpensive strategy to translate and the volume rises fast and it can penetrate many countries and regions easily. Nevertheless, since the work remains the framework of the East Asian narrative logic and characters, it is heavily discounted in the multicultural markets of Europe and the US. Due to unfamiliar aesthetic tendencies and narrative modes, European and American audiences struggle to understand such works, resulting in limited overseas communication effects.

The industry started implementing a localized collaborative production model in 2023 yet this localization entailed the employment of a local crew, local scenes, and audio and visual language that is likely to be comprehended by the audience to address cultural barriers. There is a possibility of effectively minimizing the existence of poor interpretation as a result of cultural barriers by changing the narrative perspective and letting the local person assume the role of the storyteller in order to improve the effectiveness and the degree of acceptability of the information dissemination [1]. Audience psychological defense level towards familiar faces and language will be reduced and thus they will be more receptive to the story.

With the deepening of the overseas market for micro-short dramas, a more profound model of cultural co-creation is gradually taking shape. That is, the Chinese party offers script concepts and the narrative flow, but they integrate cultural features and values of other countries into it, so that it could preserve the best qualities of the micro-short drama including lightness and strong storyline and be customized according to cultural context of the target market, hence making it possible to move between audience reception and audience resonance. The model was successful because in June 2023, Fated to My Forbidden was published on Reelshort and featured the classic Chinese tropes of a tycoon falling in love with a poor girl with a gentle heart. The series contributed to the story acceptability to the Western audience by reinterpreting the Chinese concept of the tycoon and office romance to the Western concept of the werewolf Lord and interracial love and finally reached

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unmatched success. This platform has also gained popularity in the European and American markets because of the quality and creative model of localization.

3. The cross-cultural narrative mechanism under symbol perception

3.1. Cultural context and cross-narrative adaptation strategies

Communication effect relies on the sensitivity of the communication information to the target context. Communication content has to be compatible with cultural cognition, social situation, and emotional requirements of the target audience. In the global dissemination of Chinese micro-short dramas, while retaining their strengths of intense plots and lightweight forms, creators integrate local Western elements into theme selection, character building and emotional frameworks to adapt to Western cultural contexts and reduce cultural barriers.

When discussing genres, two of the most important ones are the genre of rebirth and comeback and sweet romance. In rebirth and counterattack storylines, the narrative that heroines fight against injustice through their own efforts provides audiences with a powerful outlet for emotional catharsis; The sweet romantic kind of plot, which features gentle emotional characteristics, will allow users to fill their emotional vacancy. The two genres focus on the ideas of justice and emotional fulfillment, which can be explained by the global feelings of different cultures. Meanwhile, it has cultural symbols familiar to the European population such as Found

The character setting may be regarded as the localization of identity. The Western Christian culture has its own vampires, werewolves, witches, etc. that have been individualized in the West and are anti-culture. In order to achieve it, ReelShort has disrupted the inertia of Chinese aesthetics, borrowed the idea of popular culture at home, and smoothly introduced Chinese stories into Western culture and consequently lowered the cultural discount that is more appropriate to the taste and art of the local audience [2]. The Alpha King and His Virgin Bride is one of the movies in the list that features a werewolf as the male lead who is familiar to both the European and Chinese audience, reliving the old Chinese legend of love affair between gods and mortals in the form of a werewolf story in the framework of Western culture, and decreasing the level of acceptance among the viewers in the West [3].

The emotional structure would require the transfer of the Chinese collective-orientated model to the Western individual-orientated model due to the dissimilarities between the Chinese and Western cultures. The micro-short plays in the Chinese context reflect general Confucian values which include family wholeness and collectivism,while in the Western society places greater importance on the expression of the individual spirit. Take Bound by Honor as an example, On the eve of the Coming-of-age Day, the place where the female protagonist wants to live alone is derived on the European cultural tradition that children start living alone after achieving adulthood; Similarly, in many cases, friends come together within the plot of the Euro-American micro-short play, this type of party culture is a phenomenon in Europe, but not in China, as the latter values communication with other peers more than that with family members. Also, social culture can affect emotional expression. A taboo on the topic of intimate relations exists in the introverted and reticent society of China that the issue of intimate relations cannot be discussed publicly. However, in Europe and the US, feelings and emotions are expressed in a more open and inclusive way. Therefore, it is likely to discover more self-assured tales and plotlines in the European and American micro-short plays.Meanwhile, it has cultural symbols familiar to the European population such as Found A Homeless Billionaire Husband For Chrisimas and Money, Guns And A Merry Chrisimas and they are both on the list with Christmas-themed goods, which makes the cultural essence of the family

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reunion during the traditional Chinese holiday to become the Christmas story that is readily accessible to the European population and therefore completes the cross-contextual translation of cultural imagery [4].

3.2. Symbolic translation and reconstruction of elements of Chinese culture

The phenomenon of cultural communication is a process of encoding and decoding the symbols. The key to successful cross-cultural communication is to create a cross-contextual adjustment of both the signifier and the signified, i.e., to preserve the signified (meaning) of the core values of the Chinese culture and replace the signifier (the symbolic carrier) with the signifier that will be comprehensible to the target market. The translation of the Chinese micro-short play into European and American markets should not be regarded as an addition of elements but rather as a reconstruction and re-semanticization of Chinese cultural elements via the interplay between the de-localization and re-contextualization processes.

Firstly, ascertain the general values of Chinese culture. Micro-short plays are built on the universality of the theme of the content themes, use the most important emotional goals of human nature as an instrument, and seek to influence the audience [5].The core values in Chinese culture with universal human emotional resonance, such as punishing evil and promoting good and valuing loyalty and friendship, serve as the foundation of cultural transcoding. Such universal values are relayed through the plot settings including the rebirth and counter-attack, the revenge of the traitor. On Mommy Don't Cry, Daddy is Sorry, the feminine character has been revived and she goes after the girl who has taken her identity as a secondary character. It is also an expression of the Chinese culture which implies that the concept of punishing evil and promoting good is the main source of fulfillment of the emotional desires of the Westerners to punch the bad guys in the plot setting of disclosing the evil intentions of the female secondary character. Depiction of family and romantic relations in the film is also used as an emotionally binding element in intercultural communication.

Finally, the revival of special cultural spirit in Chinese culture should be performed in relation to the Western context. Social values of the traditional Chinese culture and social values of the western culture are different in relation to the value of family ethics and filial piety. If transplanted directly, they would have been culturally discounted. Thus, they are reorganized into personal responsibility and family affection that may be comprehended and appreciated by Western spectators on European and American micro-short dramas. Bound by Honor heroines consent to a contractual marriage as a safeguarding strategy to protect her younger sister. This is not a cultural necessity of the Chinese setting wherein the elder sister acts like a mother, rather an autonomous choice of the heroine whose motivation is love towards her sister. In the story of The Alpha King and His Virgin Bride, it is not a moral obligation that does not foster filial piety, but a deliberate choice that is informed by family love, and is meant to bring out the shared sense of family love.

4. Conclusion

The current research has taken Chinese micro-short dramas entering European and American markets as research object and based on communication context theory, symbolic communication theory, empathy communication theory and other theories. After sorting out the communication status quo and cross-cultural narrative mechanism of Chinese micro-short dramas, this research concludes that the reason why Chinese micro-short dramas have achieved success in European and American markets lies in their breakthroughs beyond traditional cultural export and produce cultural goods that can be embraced by Europeans and Americans depending on the their social setting and

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cultural history, such as werewolf themes in line with their cultural conventions. Emotional empathy and emotional contagion emerge when addressing the emotions of the European and American audience with universal human emotions including love, justice, family warmth, etc. which eventually reduces the barriers to cross-cultural communication.

In theory, however, it has been revealed that negotiation is a dynamism that takes place at the theoretical level instead of the idea of the fixed isolated viewpoint of the old high and low context models of cross-cultural communication to attain localization which builds up the generalization and development of the cross-cultural communication theory in the contemporary world; Practically speaking, this work gives operational path guidance that helps develop the overseas expansion of Chinese culture related narrative localization strategy, symbolic translation strategy, value resonance construction approach, etc., which may be considered to be a source of experience in industry development.

Even though this paper has systematically examined the ways of communication of micro-short film in the European and American markets, there are still a number of factors that constraints: The first constraint is that the case analysis was mainly based on popular dramas of the ReelShort platform, so other platforms (i.e., DramaBox) and non-hit dramas were not paid enough attention to; the second constraint is that communication was not evaluated explicitly. The current study has not included the particular examination of how the consumers in Europe and the USA responded to it. The research can also continue in these areas: First, increase the range of the research to cover more platforms and a larger set of micro-short drama cases to enable comparison of the dissemination patterns of various genres of works; Secondly, it is necessary to integrate audience empirical research to learn more about the very nature of the decoding process, the state of value recognition, and the change of demands among audiences in Europe and the United States.

The Chinese micro-short dramas have gained the status of a popular phenomenon around the world due to their speed and simplicity and are used to spread Chinese culture. The subsequent evolution of micro-short plays as a worldwide phenomenon will likely make them even more embedded in the traits of Chinese culture and the activities of the local culture, and constantly produce a better quality of cultural materials, and reflect the beauty of Chinese culture in value resonance, and subsequently introduce diversity of world cultures.

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