

A New Perspective on Cross-Cultural Communication in China's Cultural Export through the Lens of "He-Wo Integration"—A Case Study of the Web Micro-Drama *"Escape from the British Museum"*

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Keywords: Otherness Perspective; Self-Narrative; Web Micro-Drama; Cross-Cultural Communication

Abstract: Starting from the new discourse of cross-cultural communication in web micro-dramas, the concept of "He-Wo Integration" reveals three key aspects from a third-party perspective: thematic expression, dialogic interaction, and social media engagement. "He-Wo Integration" suggests that the cross-cultural narrative of web micro-dramas can be shaped through creative and communicative practices in the digital audiovisual domain, constructing a new documentary discourse system. This approach not only fosters audience resonance but also enhances our understanding of "He-Wo Integration" and contributes to building a positive national image from a cross-cultural communication perspective. Shared emotions can bridge cultural and social divides, fostering closer connections between individuals and others, thereby promoting China's international engagement. This study offers insights into China's cross-cultural communication strategies and provides implications for enhancing the global dissemination of Chinese narratives, making them more vivid, engaging, and widely accepted. Throughout thousands of years of historical evolution, Chinese culture has developed a unique and irreplaceable depth of meaning and civilizational continuity. With the acceleration of international exchanges, cultures from various nations have been introduced to one another, often with great success. However, China's cultural dissemination has faced numerous challenges, necessitating a critical examination of these difficulties. This study investigates highly acclaimed web micro-dramas from an international perspective, employing the lens of a third-party observer that integrates "otherness" and "self." From the dimension of micro-discursive narration, it explores the questions of how to effectively tell China's story and how to foster cultural confidence.

1. The Gaze of the Other" and Cross-Cultural Communication

Originating from philosophical discourse, the concept of the "Other" refers to everything external to the self. In the process of constructing subjectivity, the self is inevitably observed by the Other, and through this dialectical reflection, individuals become aware of their own existence. Thus, the relationship between the self and the Other is reciprocal. Representation theory posits that the construction of cultural meaning systems is accomplished through various representational frameworks, which establish similarities between people, objects, and values within conceptual systems, cognitive maps, and symbolic forms, with language conferring substantive meaning. Differences in representation give rise to variations in meaning, shaping distinct cultural landscapes under the gaze of the Other. As a medium that records narratives through text, sound, and imagery, documentary filmmaking is a product of such representational systems. Given that China and foreign cultures belong to different representational frameworks, effectively articulating self-narratives under the gaze of the Other requires a shift from superficial enumeration to in-depth exploration of symbolic meanings. This process constitutes the theoretical foundation for how web-based short videos narrate Chinese stories. The perspective and gaze of the Other allow these digital narratives to facilitate a deeper understanding of the self.

The notion of the "Other" (Native) represents a distinctive viewpoint, which may vary due to international and regional differences. *Escape from the British Museum* employs a character with a

specific cultural background and, through personification, brings to life Chinese artifacts housed in the British Museum ^[1]. By adopting diverse narrative forms and expressive techniques, the drama encourages audiences to perceive Chinese traditional culture from a fresh perspective, thereby unveiling its unique charm. Encouraging external observers to examine Chinese heritage from alternative perspectives and cognitive frameworks is a crucial pathway for promoting Chinese civilization globally. Both self-representation and the perspective of the Other are indispensable; however, without self-affirmation, self-representation alone risks limiting China's international influence, rendering traditional Chinese culture less accessible and comprehensible to a broader audience.

In this regard, the strategic application of self-representation could be pivotal in advancing traditional Chinese culture onto the global stage, reinforcing China's national reputation and cultural influence. Escape from the British Museum features a thin-walled jade ewer with an intricate intertwined-branch motif—a quintessentially Chinese artifact—placed within the British Museum. This object functions not merely as a material symbol but as a transcendent emblem of time and space, forming the narrative core of the drama and inspiring audiences to explore the ancient artifacts preserved in the museum. Rooted in national cultural memory, the drama innovates across multiple dimensions, including thematic selection, narrative structure, and content production, marking a breakthrough in web micro-drama creation. By shifting the narrative from a Chinese-centric perspective to the viewpoint of the Other, the series enables Western audiences to develop a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. This approach not only positions documentary-style storytelling as an effective means of cultural export but also enhances cross-cultural communication, fostering a more profound global appreciation of Chinese heritage.

2. The Integration of the Other's Perspective and Self-Narration in Identity Representation

Disseminating indigenous culture through the lens of the “Other” not only facilitates the fusion of self and Other but also fosters a higher degree of national identity recognition and cultural exchange. Escape from the British Museum, set against the fantastical backdrop of an enchanted jade ewer, focuses its narrative on the inheritance and protection of cultural artifacts, particularly Chinese relics that have been lost overseas ^[2]. This drama represents an expansion and experimental exploration within the trending genre of micro-short dramas. Under the sensory and entertainment-oriented storytelling typical of short videos, the series progresses in layers: the first two episodes depict the encounter between the personified jade ewer and Zhang Yong'an, a Chinese journalist, blending elements of traditional aesthetics, romance, and popular online tropes to enhance its appeal. The third episode deepens the narrative, shifting from surface-level storytelling to an introspective dialogue between overseas and domestic Chinese artifacts, structured around letters sent home by the returned jade ewer. This cross-temporal and cross-spatial conversation elevates the thematic depth of the work, demonstrating that even a “micro-drama” can achieve grand artistic ambition. The symbolic use of an iconic Chinese artifact not only aids Western audiences in comprehending the cultural significance of Chinese relics but also evokes a simultaneous sense of familiarity and estrangement for Chinese audiences viewing these artifacts within the British Museum. This dual perspective allows for a renewed appreciation of China's cultural treasures, facilitating a fusion between self and Other—where emotional resonance breaks down barriers, and familiar cultural symbols and historical narratives transcend mere formal communication obstacles.

Incorporating multimodal image analysis from systemic functional linguistics, the series integrates visual symbols into linguistic meaning, emphasizing interpersonal expression through representational, interactive, and compositional dimensions. The creative approach of Escape from the British Museum employs the anthropomorphization of artifacts as a central narrative device. A precedent for this method can be found in If National Treasures Could Talk, a micro-documentary series produced by the CCTV Documentary Channel in 2018 ^[3]. Featuring five-minute monologues from historical artifacts presented in a charming and relatable manner, the series gained widespread popularity on Bilibili, significantly bridging the gap between historical relics and younger audiences, sparking a cultural phenomenon. The viral success of Escape from the British Museum mirrors that

of If National Treasures Could Talk. Whether through the transformation of the Chinese thin-walled jade ewer into a human-like figure or the extensive use of monologues and narration in the third episode featuring a collective appearance of various artifacts, the series constructs an intimate and accessible storytelling style. This highly "internet-savvy" production approach represents a form of "translation" of Chinese traditional culture into the micro-short drama era. By using museums as starting points and tracing Chinese cultural heritage through historical artifacts, the series embeds a wealth of cultural imagery and symbols. The combination of artifact exhibition and explanatory narration with artifact-centered storytelling propels the plot forward. Visually, the series relies on dialogue between the on-screen host and interviewees, with wide and overhead shots depicting the broader societal landscape of contemporary China, while close-ups and eye-level or upward shots focus on individual experiences. In scenes juxtaposing ancient artifacts with modern narratives, the filmmakers employ a mix of close-ups, wide shots, high angles, and low angles to highlight the relics themselves, delivering a visually immersive "spectacle" rich in authentic historical and cultural detail.

3. "The Perspective of the Other" and "Self-View" in Emotional Identification

3.1 Emotional Identification in Short Video Narratives

The short film employs a narrative approach that integrates an implicit perspective of the "other" with the actor's monologue. The monologue of the cultural artifact influences the audience's understanding of objects by shaping the selection of elements within the narrative. Various facts that construct the story's environment are presented from their own standpoint, appearing before us through a particular lens or observation point. Escape from the British Museum differs from conventional online microfilms in its skillful combination of an implicit personal perspective with a participatory observational perspective of the "other." Through the integration of form and content, the film explores contemporary expressions of China's rich traditional culture, serving as an audiovisual practice for its creative transformation and innovative development.

In terms of form, the film adopts the "micro-short drama" format, which is characterized by individualized production. Compared to traditional film and television productions, this format stimulates greater creative vitality from grassroots creators. Its novel production methods provide audiences with a more vivid and immersive viewing experience. In terms of content, the film centers on the theme of lost cultural relics, a distinctive representation of national cultural heritage, reconstructing a "living" cultural memory within the internet environment. In recent years, film and television productions on cultural heritage have emerged in large numbers, with representative works including Masters in the Forbidden City, National Treasure, and The Marquis of Haihun. These productions primarily fall into the categories of documentaries and cultural programs, reflecting a cultural character that aligns with their themes. A profound sense of history forms the cultural foundation of such programs.

However, micro-short dramas share an inherent affinity with short videos, as they are deeply rooted in a sensory-oriented mobile audiovisual space. In contrast to the weighty nature of documentaries and cultural programs, micro-short dramas establish an intertextual relationship with them. The use of new forms of online audiovisual art such as micro-short dramas for cultural heritage storytelling represents an innovative path for the full-media production of China's excellent traditional culture in the mobile audiovisual era. Unlike classic film and television works that construct objective, grand, and multidimensional representations of cultural relics, micro-short dramas adopt a "decentralized" production logic, with "emotion" as the driving force of their narratives. The widespread popularity of Escape from the British Museum highlights the thematic elevation of micro-short dramas, where the expression of national sentiment and patriotism serves as the internal motivation behind its viral success.

The presentation of "emotion" in the drama is woven throughout both the construction of audiovisual symbols and the online dissemination of emotions. In terms of emotional identification, the drama achieves both the integration of self and the other and the recognition of another country's image and culture. Compared to China's previous efforts in external cultural communication, which

often yielded limited results—sometimes even being perceived as "cultural infiltration"—this form of storytelling proves more effective. For instance, China's investment in Confucius Institutes, despite substantial expenditures in human, material, and financial resources, has faced certain criticisms. This suggests the need for diversified communication methods and channels to present a multifaceted image of China. In the new media environment, network-based micro-short dramas, presented through video, align with the contemporary video-dominated era and exhibit immense vitality and potential.

3.2 The Semiotic Representation in Short Videos

The fundamental function of a symbol is representation. Terence Hawkes posits that any independently existing entity with extensive connections, as long as it can be interpreted, functions as a symbol. Ferdinand de Saussure proposed that a sign is composed of both the "signifier" and the "signified," where the signifier refers to the material aspect of the sign, while the signified represents its conceptual content. As a key component of video texts, visual symbols provide audiences with visual cues. Their proper use ensures the accurate transmission of the creator's intended message, playing a crucial role in video narratives.

In *Escape from the British Museum*, the creators incorporate multiple cultural identity-laden symbolic objects and linguistic symbols. For instance, the Chinese thin-walled jade ewer with entwined floral patterns is referred to as a "goblet"; the Chinese journalist protagonist, "Zhang Yong'an," derives his name from the inscription "Jiaguo Yong'an" on a Northern Song Dynasty Cizhou ware pillow; the jade ewer calls the Chinese journalist "family" upon meeting him; the British stationery features calligraphy-written Chinese characters for "family letter"; and "Gui Jia Road" is a homophonic reference to "The Road Home". Additionally, the film prominently showcases Chinese cultural relics housed in the British Museum, including a Liao Dynasty tri-colored Arhat statue, a Qing Dynasty ritual crown-ear censer, a Ming Dynasty dragon-patterned ceramic brick, a Ming Dynasty sculpture of the Laughing Buddha, and a Five Dynasties wooden statue of Guanyin^[4]. These artifacts are anthropomorphized, engaging in a "dialogue across space" with cultural relics displayed in Chinese museums. The use of group imagery, stereophonic sound effects, and progressively accelerating editing enhances the film's audiovisual impact. In the comment section on Bilibili, numerous viewers left messages expressing deep emotional responses, with comments such as "I'm tearing up," indicating the film's powerful emotional resonance.

Furthermore, secondary creation and dissemination based on national sentiment have played a significant role. In a media-convergent, multi-channel distribution environment, *Escape from the British Museum* was created by self-media content creators and released across multiple platforms, leading to widespread derivative content and discussions. The film evolved from a micro-short drama into an "online trending event," linking individual emotions with historical processes and cultural memory to generate collective media memory. For example, People's Daily and CCTV articles titled *Next Stop, Gui Jia Road (The Road Home)!* were widely shared; the China Film Report program on the CCTV Movie Channel commented that "*Escape from the British Museum*, a viral online short drama, resonates deeply with reality"; and self-media bloggers created content such as cultural relic explanations, reviews, and museum visit vlogs inspired by the film^[5].

The drama has sparked collective social attention on overseas-displaced cultural relics and cultural heritage themes, leading to fervent discussions about national historical memory. The audience's emotional connection is largely driven by the actors' performances, which convey emotions and invite self-projection. "Empathy, at its core, is the resonance one experiences after recognizing and understanding another's emotions." In *Escape from the British Museum*, each moment of emotional resonance—such as when the jade ewer clings tightly to the protagonist upon hearing him speak Chinese and exclaims, "Family, I'm lost"—elicits an outpouring of emotional responses from viewers, evident in comments like "I'm crying" or "I have a low tear threshold." This emotional reaction stems from the audience's innate sense of loss regarding displaced cultural relics and an ingrained patriotic sentiment cultivated since childhood.

Even if one has never explicitly declared their patriotism, the symbolic "signified" presented

through short videos evokes a sense of emotional identification. Viewers deeply empathize with the fate of relics stranded in Britain, not only feeling anger and helplessness over historical invasions by foreign powers but also developing a growing emotional reliance and attachment to their homeland. This cultural confidence is thus activated, allowing audiences to viscerally perceive the contrast between China's past weakness and its present strength. It reinforces a sense of cultural self-assurance, especially among those living abroad. Exploring the information conveyed through network-based short videos from the perspective of self-other integration can help us understand how such videos shape national image through discursive invitations, how they integrate social relationships within a shared space, and how they project a particular national identity to the world. This contributes to reconstructing social values and shaping the meaning of media discourse, providing valuable insights into the narrative strategies of China's external cultural communication.

4. New Pathways for Cross-Cultural Communication in the "Short Video+" Era from the Perspective of the Other

4.1 Diversification of Communication Subjects

With the widespread popularity of online short videos, the diversity of communication subjects has significantly increased. Short video creators have become crucial disseminators of local culture, while professionals from various fields have also joined the platform, enriching cross-cultural communication. The rapid development of short video technology, characterized by its fast dissemination and real-time information-sharing capabilities, allows every user to participate instantly, breaking geographical boundaries and facilitating transregional cultural exchange ^[6]. As online short videos continue to evolve, user demographics are no longer constrained by age or location, further diversifying the communication subjects and maximizing the effectiveness of cross-cultural transmission. The viral spread of the micro-drama Escape from the British Museum across the internet exemplifies how such productions have transcended the confines of video platforms. Originally intended for in-platform audiences, micro-dramas have now drawn widespread public attention, demonstrating a shift in audiovisual consumption preferences in the digital era. This shift reflects viewers' pursuit of integrated, interactive, and immersive watching experiences. In cross-cultural communication, the selection and reception of content by audiovisual users are no longer restricted by geographical or subject-based limitations, enabling Chinese culture to reach a global stage.

4.2 Diversification of Communication Forms

Escape from the British Museum breaks the constraints of traditional media by leveraging the diverse expressive forms of short videos, thereby enhancing audience engagement and emotional resonance. The short video series gained traction on digital platforms, aided by coverage from authoritative media outlets such as CCTV News and People's Daily. These reports attracted the attention of traditional media audiences to this cross-cultural storytelling initiative, demonstrating the growing synergy between traditional and digital media. Although Escape from the British Museum was primarily disseminated through online platforms, its success was also reinforced by traditional media. With the increasing development of cross-cultural communication, more content creators—including influencers and experts—have actively participated in cultural exchange. For instance, viral videos on Douyin (Chinese TikTok) showcase individuals dressed in Hanfu experiencing British Museum exhibitions or walking through the streets of Tokyo, making traditional Chinese attire a trending topic. The widespread popularity of Escape from the British Museum not only granted it immense exposure but also opened new creative possibilities. Meanwhile, traditional media, such as newspapers and television, further amplified its reach, attracting a broader audience. Therefore, in order to better spread history and culture, new media creators should make full use of the unique advantages of network short video and combine the characteristics of traditional media to realize the effective integration of multiple communication channels to promote the rapid, healthy and cross-cultural communication of short video.

4.3 Innovation in Communication Content

In recent years, high-quality television programs focusing on China's rich cultural heritage have emerged in abundance. Examples include *The Chinese Opera Gala* and *New Arrival at the Forbidden City*, produced by CCTV, as well as Henan TV's festival-themed and seasonal programs, all of which represent audiovisual explorations of Chinese artistic traditions. The development of online audiovisual arts has fostered a new aesthetic space, blending innovation with cultural preservation. Within this creative space, Chinese traditional culture enriches the cultural value of digital audiovisual content, while Chinese aesthetics enhance the artistic depth of online audiovisual works. Escape from the British Museum employs a widely accepted mobile audiovisual format to present cultural relics that traditionally appeared only in documentaries and cultural programs, thereby sparking public interest in Chinese cultural heritage. For example, the delicate jade ewer with entwined floral patterns featured in the series is an intangible cultural heritage craft from Suzhou, Jiangsu, showcasing the exquisite artistry and lineage of traditional craftsmanship. Similarly, the Northern Song Dynasty Cizhou kiln ceramic pillow, inscribed with the phrase "Peace for the Nation and Home," reflects the deep-rooted sense of patriotism within Chinese culture [7]. The meticulous production of Escape from the British Museum enhances its appeal among short videos through careful editing of sound, color, and imagery, making it stand out in an oversaturated market. Cross-cultural content creators today must pay close attention to the coordination of colors, tones, and other audiovisual elements to optimize the viewer's experience.

Currently, "micro-dramas" are not only a distinct form of online drama but also a mass-market industrial product, pursued by video platforms and film production companies as a lucrative emerging sector. In recent years, the themes and production of micro-dramas have been increasingly driven by commercial logic, prioritizing "traffic" and its monetization. This is evident in embedded advertising, livestream e-commerce, and product placements within these productions. However, the widespread success of Escape from the British Museum indicates a shift in audience expectations. Viewers are growing weary of repetitive and formulaic micro-drama content and are instead calling for cultural productions imbued with contemporary, national, and Chinese values.

4.4 Positive Cultural Influence of Communication

Although Escape from the British Museum consists of only three episodes, each lasting only a few minutes, it manages to spread traditional Chinese culture across the world with its unique and original style, sparking a new wave of Chinese cultural influence. The performance of "Going Home" by the small jade pot in the film allows countless urban dwellers to rediscover themselves, rekindle their sense of identity with national culture, and open a window to an authentic and healing experience, restoring their sense of belonging. Escape from the British Museum provides a new perspective on the recognition of the Chinese national cultural community [8]. Like a bridge, it connects China with the world, opening a new channel for communication. This documentary presents China's rich cultural relics and heritage to a global audience in a vivid and profound manner, allowing viewers not only to appreciate the beauty of artifacts but also to deeply experience the vastness and depth of Chinese civilization. This journey is both visually engaging and thought-provoking. Each artifact and every historical trace narrates the glory and vicissitudes of the Chinese nation. Through the stories of these cultural relics, we catch a glimpse of the wisdom and talent of the ancients, as well as their pursuit and yearning for a better life.

5. Conclusion

Escape from the British Museum functions more like a storyteller, guiding us into long-sealed historical memories and allowing us to experience the unique charm of Chinese culture through the fusion of past and present. It not only enhances our recognition and pride in our own culture but also enables us to witness the exchanges and collisions between China and the world, fostering an understanding of cultural diversity and inclusivity. At the same time, this documentary serves as a heartfelt call for the preservation of cultural heritage. With the intensification of globalization, the

protection and inheritance of cultural heritage have become increasingly important. Through its delicate cinematography and emotional narration, Escape from the British Museum awakens public awareness of the value and preservation of cultural heritage, encouraging more individuals to recognize their responsibilities in this endeavor.

Overall, Escape from the British Museum is a documentary of significant artistic value and humanistic concern. Utilizing the cross-cultural dissemination of cultural relics as its medium, it conveys the positive energy of Chinese civilization, fostering a deeper global appreciation of China's rich cultural heritage. Currently, there remains a relative lack of diversity in the selection of narrative subjects in China's national-themed documentaries. For example, instances where cross-context audiences directly engage in dialogue between the "self" and the "other" through media platforms are relatively rare, the available media platforms for cross-context audiences are limited, and audience participation in discourse is often superficial, lacking in-depth symbolic meaning. The author believes that future research should explore more profound narrative strategies, establishing a consciousness of self-other integration from the perspectives of content presentation, discourse interaction, and communication spaces. This documentary not only expands channels for cross-cultural dialogue but also reinforces the significance of Chinese culture on the international stage, inspiring greater creativity and injecting new vitality into the inheritance and development of Chinese civilization.

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