

Can Immersive Intangible Cultural Heritage Experiences Enhance Inbound Tourists' Recognition of Chinese Culture?: From the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the deep integration of culture and tourism in the era of globalization, cross-cultural communication has moved beyond the single narrative model of mass media. Immersive and participatory on-site experience have become a core pathway for shaping cross-cultural perception. Inbound tourists are the primary audience for overseas Chinese cultural communication. Their understanding of Chinese culture is no longer confined to symbolic or surface-level impressions, but has shifted toward deeper identification—one marked by emotional resonance and shared values. Traditional communication of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) mainly relies on performances and exhibitions. However, this mode is constrained by intercultural barriers, such as cultural distance and low interactivity which hinder the overcoming of cognitive gaps rooted in Sino-foreign cultural differences. In contrast, immersive ICH experiences leverage living heritage contexts and hands-on participation, helping to break down linguistic and cultural barriers and cultivating a more holistic perceptual understanding of Chinese culture among inbound tourists.

Keywords: Immersive intangible cultural heritage experience; Inbound tourists; Chinese culture recognition; Cross-cultural communication perspective

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1. Eliminating cross-cognitive barriers and reconstructing the cognitive system of Chinese culture

1.1. Weakening language barriers and realizing cross-cultural translation of tacit cultural knowledge

Language serves as both the core carrier and the biggest obstacle in cross-cultural communication. Most intangible cultural heritage (ICH) craftsmanship and folk customs in Chinese culture contain tacit knowledge that cannot be accurately conveyed in written form. Such implicit cultural connotations cannot be effectively communicated merely through translation and explanation. Many inbound tourists have a weak foundation

in Chinese; plain written explanations and audio translations can only deliver superficial information and fail to help them comprehend the cultural logic and national wisdom behind intangible cultural heritage^[1]. Immersive experiences avoid the shortcomings of language-based communication and realize efficient cross-cultural information transmission through non-verbal methods such as hands-on practice and sensory immersion. When foreign tourists personally experience Bian embroidery and mortise-and-tenon joinery, they can perceive the rigorous aesthetics and craftsmanship spirit of traditional Chinese culture through the stitching and interlocking without the need for complicated verbal explanations.

1.2. Breaking stereotypical cultural impressions and reshaping an authentic, three-dimensional image of China

Immersive ICH experiences use living folk culture as a vehicle to bridge cognitive gaps in cross-cultural communication and dispel stereotyped impressions. Different from static cultural relic appreciation, immersive experiences focus on ordinary people's everyday cultural practices, covering diverse dimensions including traditional craftsmanship and folk rituals, and showcase the vivid and warm side of Chinese culture^[2]. Foreign tourists participating in fish lantern parades in ancient villages and learning Chinese knot weaving in ICH workshops can intuitively perceive that Chinese culture is not a dusty historical relic. Such close, immersive contact can effectively change overseas audiences' inherent impression that Chinese culture is ancient, rigid, and distant, help them recognize the inclusiveness and innovation of Chinese culture, and lay a solid cognitive foundation for deeper cultural identification.

1.3. Refining cultural perception dimensions and building hierarchical cross-cognitive logic

The formation of cultural recognition starts with superficial cognition and culminates in in-depth understanding. Traditional ICH communication offers uniform content, ignoring cognitive differences among inbound tourists of various nationalities, ages, and cultural backgrounds, resulting in uneven communication effects. Immersive experiences can build a hierarchical perception system according to tourists' receptive habits to cater to the cross-cognitive demands of diverse audiences. Young foreign tourists prefer digital and interactive experiences such as MR virtual central axis roaming and AIGC creation of ICH patterns, and digital ICH performances, which fit their aesthetic and social preferences. Middle-aged and elderly tourists favor traditional hands-on experiences, including one-on-one teaching by ICH craftsmen, and immersive participation in folk customs, which are more likely to arouse their cultural resonance^[3]. Differentiated experience forms allow all audiences to find suitable paths for cultural perception, gradually advancing from superficial visual perception to craftsmanship logic and folk significance, and finally forming systematic, structured cognition of Chinese culture, laying a solid foundation for the formation of cultural recognition.

2. Stimulating cross-cultural emotional resonance and consolidating the core of Chinese cultural recognition

2.1. Eliminating cross-cultural emotional alienation through full sensory immersion

In cross-cultural communication, physical distance and cultural differences naturally generate emotional distance, a major obstacle to cultural recognition. Distant viewing and passive information reception make tourists always regard Chinese culture from an outsider's perspective without emotional connections. In

contrast, immersive experiences construct full-sensory cultural scenes to achieve all-round immersion across sight, hearing, touch, and smell. Within immersive ICH scenarios, the rustic style of ancient buildings, melodious traditional folk music, unique texture of handicrafts, and strong atmosphere of folk activities jointly form a cultural field with distinctive oriental characteristics. Placed in such scenes, foreign tourists are no longer detached observers but deeply integrated participants. Such full-sensory immersion can quickly reduce strangeness and alienation between Chinese and foreign cultures and weaken psychological barriers brought by cultural differences. Many foreign tourists mentioned after the experience that immersive scenarios let them truly feel the refinement and warmth of Chinese culture. Such intuitive sensory experience cannot be replaced by pictures and videos, and serves as the primary prerequisite for generating emotional resonance ^[4].

2.2. Generating personalized cultural memories through hands-on participation

Passively received cultural information is easily forgotten, while experiences and memories obtained through active participation are highly durable and unique, able to settle into exclusive cultural emotions. Traditional ICH communication relies on one-way display with insufficient audience participation, making it hard to form profound emotional imprints. The core advantage of immersive experiences lies in interactivity and hands-on operation, enabling tourists to build personal memories of Chinese culture through personal creation and participation. Handmade ICH works, folk rituals, and traditional craftsmanship experienced by tourists are unique cultural carriers ^[5]. These tangible, portable physical works can convert abstract cultural meanings into personal memories. When tourists take their self-made ICH works back home, every glance and sharing will evoke memories of this experience and continuously strengthen positive emotions toward Chinese culture. Such personalized immersive participation turns Chinese culture from an unfamiliar foreign culture into unique symbols embedded in personal travel experiences and emotions, upgrading cultural recognition from superficial perception to in-depth emotional identification.

2.3. Realizing cross-cultural value empathy by conforming to shared human values

Cultural differences act as barriers in cross-cultural communication, while shared human emotions and values serve as bridges for cross-cultural empathy. Although ICH carries distinctive regional and national Chinese characteristics, the values behind it, such as craftsman dedication, harmony with nature, neighborhood amity, and pursuit of a better life, are shared spiritual pursuits of all mankind. Immersive experiences naturally display these shared values through scenario-based and life-oriented presentation to achieve cross-cultural value empathy. The harmony between humans and nature and the philosophy of conforming to natural laws embodied in traditional mortise and tenon craftsmanship, as well as the peaceful, self-cultivation life attitude carried by traditional tea art, and the pursuit of reunion and optimism conveyed by folk customs can break cultural circles and arouse value resonance among foreign tourists. Immersive experiences allow tourists to perceive these shared values through personal practice rather than rigid cultural indoctrination. Such subtle influence enables tourists to sincerely recognize the spiritual core of Chinese culture and consolidate the foundation of cultural recognition ^[6].

3. Empowering long-term cross-cultural communication and solidifying achievements of Chinese cultural recognition

The enhancement of recognition of Chinese culture is not a one-time short-term effect, but a long process requiring continuous communication and reinforcement. Immersive ICH experiences can not only instantly enhance inbound tourists’ cultural cognition and emotional recognition, but also build long-term cross-cultural communication channels relying on word-of-mouth, social media, and brand promotion, converting short-term recognition from one-time experiences into stable, lasting cultural identification, and promote further overseas dissemination of Chinese culture to expand cross-cultural influence. To intuitively present the enhancing effect of immersive ICH experiences on inbound tourists’ cultural recognition, this paper compiles data on tourists’ cultural recognition and willingness to communicate under different experience modes based on domestic cultural tourism research and feedback from overseas visitors, as shown in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Inbound tourists’ cultural recognition and communication willingness under different experience modes

Experience mode	Improvement rate of cultural cognition	Rate of emotional resonance	Stability of cultural recognition	Willingness for overseas secondary communication
Traditional Static Exhibition Experience	58.2%	45.6%	42.3%	38.5%
Basic Hands-On Immersive Experience	76.5%	68.9%	65.8%	62.1%
Digital Technology Immersive Experience	89.3%	82.7%	79.4%	75.6%

Data Source: 2026 Research Report on Intangible Cultural Heritage Cultural Tourism Communication by Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China; Satisfaction Survey of Overseas Inbound Tourists on Immersive Experiences.

It can be clearly seen from the table that compared with traditional static exhibitions, immersive experiences, especially those involving digital technology immersive experiences, have significant advantages in four dimensions: cognitive improvement, emotional resonance, recognition stability, and willingness for secondary communication, fully verifying the positive enhancing effect of immersive ICH experiences on recognition of Chinese culture.

3.1. Activating secondary social communication and expanding cross-cultural communication reach

In the new media era, individual social communication is an important channel for cross-cultural communication, whose authenticity and appeal far surpass official one-way communication. During immersive ICH experiences, inbound tourists will spontaneously shoot footage of their experiences, record cultural scenes, and share personal insights, realizing secondary communication of Chinese culture via overseas social platforms. Sharing based on real personal experience is less formal than official content and easier to be accepted by overseas audiences. Many foreign tourists’ videos of ICH handcrafting and immersive check-in posts receive massive likes and reposts on TikTok, Instagram, and other platforms, allowing Chinese culture to reach more potential overseas audiences beyond geographical restrictions ^[7]. Meanwhile, such social communication in turn strengthens tourists’ own cultural recognition. In the process of sharing, receiving likes and cultural discussions, tourists will sort out and perceive the charm of Chinese culture again, achieving secondary consolidation of ~~228~~ recognition formed in a single experience and forming a

virtuous cycle of “experience–recognition–communication–renewed recognition.”

3.2. Building ICH communication IP and establishing a long-term cultural communication system

Scattered single experiences cannot exert sustainable communication influence, while systematic, branded immersive ICH experiences can create exclusive communication IP for Chinese culture and sustain long-term cross-cultural communication. In recent years, branded projects such as “Immersive ICH Workshops,” “Chinese Folk Custom Immersive Experience Seasons,” and “Learning ICH in China” launched across China have gradually formed mature cross-cultural communication models. Relying on standardized, distinctive immersive experience content, such brands can continuously attract inbound tourists and gradually shape a vivid, high-quality, and inclusive brand image of Chinese culture ^[8]. Different from fragmented cultural dissemination, branded immersive experiences can form stable cultural dissemination models, enabling inbound tourists across different groups and time periods to access high-quality cultural experiences and continuously accumulate and solidify their recognition of Chinese culture. In addition, mature ICH IP can raise the overseas visibility and influence of Chinese culture, making immersive ICH experiences a core attraction for inbound tourism and continuously facilitating cross-cultural communication of Chinese culture ^[9].

3.3. Accumulating cultural communication experience and optimizing cultivation paths of cross-cultural recognition

The continuous implementation and iteration of immersive ICH experiences can directly improve inbound tourists’ cultural recognition and in turn accumulate high-quality cross-cultural communication experience to continuously optimize paths for overseas dissemination of Chinese culture. Previous overseas communication of Chinese culture often fell into the trap of “talking to oneself,” with communication content disconnected from overseas audiences’ receptive habits and cognitive demands, resulting in low communication efficiency. Immersive experiences can accurately identify pain points and demands in cross-cultural communication through real feedback from visitors, and continuously optimize experience scenarios, communication content and interactive forms ^[10]. For foreign tourists who struggle to understand ICH cultural meanings, complex craft procedures can be simplified, story-based explanations strengthened and immersive scene atmosphere optimized. For cultural differences among tourists of various nationalities, differentiated experience content can be customized to meet diverse cross-cultural communication demands. Such audience-centered, experience-driven communication optimization model can continuously improve the accuracy and adaptability of Chinese cultural overseas communication, make the cultivation of cultural recognition more efficient and lasting, and provide replicable and promotable practical pathways for global dissemination of Chinese culture.

4. Conclusion

In the context of global cultural-tourism integration and cross-cultural international communication, immersive ICH cultural experiences have overcome traditional ICH performances and exhibitions. Leveraging unique strengths such as non-verbal perception, hands-on participation and situational immersion, they have become an effective approach to fostering inbound tourists’ identification with Chinese culture. On the one hand, such experiences can mitigate language barriers and dispel cultural stereotypes among overseas

audiences, helping inbound tourists build a progressive, multi-dimensional cognitive system for Chinese culture. On the other hand, through sensory immersion, hands-on practice and exploration of universal human values, they drive tourists from superficial understanding to emotional resonance, enabling in-depth cultural and emotional identification. Building on this, via subsequent social media sharing, the creation of ICH cultural IPs and iterative optimization of communication practices, immersive experiences further convert tourists' short-term experiential feelings into stable and lasting cultural identification. Meanwhile, they generate overseas secondary communication effects and expand the reach of cross-cultural communication for Chinese culture.

Admittedly, enhancing inbound tourists' cultural identification through immersive ICH experiences cannot be achieved unconditionally. In practice, full account must be taken of cognitive differences among tourists from diverse countries, age groups and cultural backgrounds. It is necessary to prevent an over-reliance on technology from eroding the inherent cultural core of ICH, and strike a proper balance between skill-based hands-on practice, scenario construction and the interpretation of cultural connotations. In future international cultural communication practices, we should remain oriented toward the real needs of overseas audiences, further refine immersive experience content, appropriately integrate traditional craftsmanship with digital technologies, and tell compelling Chinese stories behind intangible cultural heritage. We should give full play to the unique value of the living inheritance of ICH, advance cognition through experience and foster identification via empathy, so as to provide practical references for promoting Chinese culture on the global stage.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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