

# Research on the Symbolic Narrative of Short Video Cross-Cultural Communication

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**Abstract:** Short videos, as a new media resource, dynamically integrate language symbols and non-language symbol narratives. They feature easily understandable text or verbal narration, as well as universal expressions using symbols such as visuals, audio, space, and gestures. These videos serve as bridges for communication between Chinese culture and world cultures, providing a crucial medium for cross-cultural exchange. This paper analyzes the symbolic narratives in short video cross-cultural communication from both language and non-language perspectives. Finally, it proposes strategies for employing symbolic narratives in short videos to enhance cross-cultural communication, aiming to offer insights into using short videos to disseminate Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** Short video; Cross-cultural communication; Symbolic narrative

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## 1. Introduction

Symbols are carriers of information and knowledge dissemination, mainly divided into language symbols and non-language symbols. Language symbols express thoughts, convey emotions, and exchange knowledge through spoken and written forms, holding a fundamental position among all types of symbols. Non-language symbols include all symbols other than language symbols, such as expressions, gestures, silence, space, color, and time, which function to repeat, supplement, adjust, replace, and emphasize language symbol information. Both language and non-language symbol narratives play critical roles in short video cross-cultural communication.

## 2. Language Symbol Narrative in Short Video Cross-Cultural Communication

In cross-cultural communication through short videos, language symbols are important mediums for accurately interpreting relevant matters and enhancing mutual understanding among different cultures. Proper use of language symbol narratives is a prerequisite for cross-cultural communication in short videos, enabling people from diverse cultural backgrounds to accurately decode the cultural phenomena described in the language, leading to vivid recognition and deep understanding of cultural phenomena. However, in actual cross-cultural communication, the “incommensurability” of language symbols, thinking patterns, values, and social practices makes it difficult for language symbol narratives to accurately convey the essence of different cultures. To address this issue, short video production needs to consider cross-cultural factors, abstract the main culture using language symbols, and find corresponding elements in another culture to establish a common language space for effective cross-cultural exchange.

The British Guy Watches China: Decoding the New Era is an excellent short video work characterized by language symbol narration. It features British host Fondon visiting seven locations, including Guizhou, Chengdu, Hankou, and Hefei, and has been widely disseminated on domestic and international social platforms, achieving good cross-cultural communication effects. In the video, the producer deeply analyzes the unique symbolic information of Chinese culture and accurately translates specific Chinese terms within social and historical contexts, ensuring that the translated text reflects the unique characteristics and spirit of contemporary Chinese culture, achieving ideal language symbol narrative effects.

## 3. Non-Language Symbol Narrative in Short Video Cross-Cultural Communication

In cross-cultural communication through short videos, non-language symbol narratives can complement the deficiencies of language symbol narratives. When language symbol narratives fail to be understood by the cultural communication audience, non-language symbol narratives convey thoughts and information through multiple modes, reducing obstacles in cultural exchange and eliminating misunderstandings between different cultures. From the narrative level of cross-cultural communication, non-language symbol narratives can supplement, reinforce, adjust, and enhance language symbol narratives. In recent years, Li Ziqi’s short videos have maintained a high influence online, becoming a phenomenal short video for spreading Chinese culture and telling Chinese stories. Li Ziqi’s short videos extensively use non-language

symbols for storytelling, boosting cross-cultural communication. Below, we analyze the application of non-language symbol narratives in cross-cultural communication through Li Ziqi's short videos.

### 3.1 Silent Symbol Narrative

Silence, with common expressions across different cultural backgrounds, signifies aspects such as agreement, composure, promise, contemplation, suppression, and negation. In Chinese culture, silence can be described by the phrase "non-serenity means no ambition, non-quietness means no long-term goal," which condenses into "harmony, respect, purity, tranquility." In cross-cultural communication, silent symbols can serve as an effective communication method, allowing communicators to convey similar emotions within a specific atmosphere. Li Ziqi's videos often use beautiful background music to create a silent atmosphere, with long shots showcasing the protagonist's labor scenes without verbal narration, giving viewers time to think. Different viewers, based on their cultural backgrounds, educational levels, personal experiences, and preferences, can have various reflections on the same silent scenes, deeply attracted by the rural culture.

### 3.2 Artificial Communication Symbol Narrative

This refers to artificially created communication symbols, such as colors, headwear, and clothing, which have different cultural symbolic meanings. Li Ziqi's videos use artificial communication symbols in every aspect of life. The protagonist uses old wooden beds, sand, stones, and greenery to create a traditional "flowing water" table, builds grape racks, baskets, and fans using wood and hammer, and makes traditional cosmetics with beeswax and grass. These human-made symbols, which represent unique Chinese cultural artifacts, often lack equivalent terms in the target language, leading to potential misinterpretations if forced translations are applied. Li Ziqi's videos skillfully use artificial communication symbols to present an authentic Chinese lifestyle, enabling the world to understand the unique charm of Chinese culture.

### 3.3 Temporal Symbol Narrative

Time has different concepts in various fields, mainly categorized into physical time, biological time, and cultural time. Physical time refers to time obtained through precise scientific research and calculations in disciplines like astronomy. Biological time pertains to the time measured in the natural sciences based on biological rhythms. Cultural time relates to people's attitudes towards time and its usage within different cultural backgrounds. These three types of time can serve as symbolic narratives in cross-cultural communication, conveying different cultural information. Li Ziqi's videos combine these three time symbols for storytelling, achieving good cross-cultural communication effects. The videos depict physical time with scenes like sunrise symbolizing the start of a day and moonrise symbolizing nightfall; biological time with flowers like peach blossoms representing spring and lotuses representing summer; and cultural time with the 24 solar terms of Chinese traditional culture, showcasing different farming activities throughout the year.

### 3.4 Auxiliary Language Symbol Narrative

Auxiliary language symbols are not spoken words but sounds made by people, such as laughter, screams, and exclamations. Additionally, the tone, volume, stress, pause, and pitch of sounds are important auxiliary language symbols. In cross-cultural communication through short videos, auxiliary language symbol narratives can enhance the transmission and understanding of cultural information, evoking emotional resonance from the audience. Li Ziqi's videos often feature laughter and expressions of admiration and surprise between Li Ziqi and her grandmother. These auxiliary language symbols enrich the narrative atmosphere, conveying the protagonist's emotional changes and allowing viewers from different cultural backgrounds to accurately feel the protagonist's love for culinary culture.

### 3.5 Spatial Symbol Narrative

From a communication perspective, space refers to the fixed spatial layout of buildings and residences and the physical distance involved in interpersonal interactions. Spatial symbols are carriers of different cultural phenomena, and when combined with human behavior, they have unique cultural symbolic meanings. Li Ziqi's videos are shot in a rural courtyard in Pingwu County, Mianyang, Sichuan, creating a natural intimacy and tranquility away from urban hustle and bustle. The protagonist showcases the wise, diligent, and spiritual image of an Oriental woman, focusing on creating a private space that allows viewers to experience the environment immersively, as if the protagonist is working beside them. The use of spatial symbol narratives in short video production helps guide viewers from different cultural backgrounds to appreciate Chinese rural scenes and experience vivid Chinese culture within the protagonist's private space.

## 4. Strategies for Symbolic Narratives in Cross-Cultural Communication of Short Videos

### 4.1 Anchoring Commonalities in Symbolic Narratives

The core of symbolic narratives in short videos lies in the precise use of symbols and the innovative narrative techniques. It is essential to enhance the anchoring of commonalities in symbolic narratives, leveraging language symbols to amplify the cultural and intellectual depth of the discourse, thereby imbuing short videos with stronger persuasive power and cultural appeal. This requires a deep interpretation of the unique language symbols inherent in Chinese culture during the short video production process, alongside the flexible adoption of various

translation strategies tailored to China's context. The goal is to construct a shared meaning space between different cultures, aiding cross-cultural and cross-regional audiences in accurately comprehending cultural information.

#### 4.2 Integrating Resources in Symbolic Narratives

Cross-cultural communication of short videos necessitates the integration of multimodal resources such as language, video, music, and images, ensuring these resources complement each other to collectively construct the meaning of the short video. It is particularly important to merge static and dynamic symbols to overcome cultural transmission barriers, providing a more intuitive and vivid interpretation of the cultural essence of China, thereby bridging the psychological gap between video creators and their audience. Additionally, video producers should meticulously refine visual resources such as shots, scenes, and images to enhance quality, and select music with aesthetic and cultural dissemination value that aligns with the video's theme.

#### 4.3 Aggregating Forms in Symbolic Narratives

Cross-cultural communication of short videos should blend language and non-language symbols. Language symbols need to resonate with the audience's culture to spark interest and mitigate resistance. Non-language symbols, such as silence, auxiliary language, spatial and temporal elements, and artificial symbols, help create a cultural atmosphere and overcome language barriers. These elements complement each other, with non-language symbols supplementing and enhancing the language narratives, thereby deepening the audience's understanding and experience of Chinese culture.

#### 4.4 Reconstructing Models in Symbolic Narratives

With the advancement of emerging media technologies, the cross-cultural communication of short videos requires a reconstruction of communication models. It is crucial to root these efforts in the cultural soil of the nation and ethnicity, uncovering culturally distinctive information, and actively promoting the spirit and values of Chinese culture internationally. Simultaneously, establishing a two-way interactive mechanism is essential, utilizing new media technologies for "soft communication" and bilateral exchanges, encouraging audiences to actively participate in cultural dissemination. This approach facilitates dialogue and exchange across different cultural backgrounds, achieving the goals of cultural recognition, value integration, and shared meanings in cross-cultural communication.

### 5. Conclusion

Applying symbolic narrative strategies to tell Chinese stories in cross-cultural communication through short videos can provide a good platform for disseminating Chinese culture. By integrating language and non-language symbol narratives in short video production and consolidating multimodal symbol resources, the depth and breadth of cross-cultural symbol communication can be enhanced. This transforms diverse Chinese cultures into vivid symbolic information, building a cultural communication space between communicators and receivers, thus achieving optimal cross-cultural communication effects.

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