

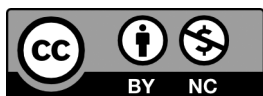
The Mediatized Transfer of Craft Presence: Presentation, Meaning, and Transmission of Craft-Based Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Short-Video Era

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Abstract: This study examines how craft-based intangible cultural heritage (ICH) knowledge is digitally reconstructed on short-video platforms through the framework of mediatized transfer of craft presence. Using virtual ethnography and multimodal discourse analysis, it analyzes representative videos and comment interactions from leading ICH creators on Douyin and Bilibili, including Li Ziqi, Peng Chuanming, and Jiang Xunqian. The study finds that short-video dissemination does not necessarily undermine the authenticity of traditional craft. Instead, it generates a new form of living transmission through three mechanisms. First, at the level of presentation, short videos translate embodied craft experience into digital images through sensory compensation, including haptic visuality and soundscape construction. Second, at the level of meaning, traditional craft is transformed from productive practice into an aesthetic and symbolic carrier of life aesthetics, labor ethics, cultural memory, and identity. Third, at the level of transmission, algorithmic distribution gathers interest-based communities, encourages participatory practice, and channels online attention back into material industries and offline transmission. The study concludes that short-video-based ICH practice offers a digital trajectory for the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture.

Keywords: Craft-based intangible cultural heritage; Short-video platforms; Mediatized transfer; Craft presence; Cultural transmission



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1 Introduction

Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Culture, how to use digital technologies to stimulate national cultural creativity

Research/Funding project: Gansu Provincial Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Key Project “Research on the Goals, Vision, Key Issues, Challenges, and Pathways for the Practice of Chinese-Style Modernization in Gansu” (2023ZD001); Research Findings from a Sub-project of the National Social Science Fund Special Commissioned Project “Visual Ethnography of Chinese Festivals”.

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Article Citation: Ren, Z. M., & Xing, Y. (2026). The Mediatized Transfer of Craft Presence: Presentation, Meaning, and Transmission of Craft-Based Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Short-Video Era. *Study on Journalism and Communication*, 6(1), 12–21.

has become an important issue in media studies. With the rise of short-video platforms, craft-based ICH is moving from rural spaces shaped by locality, kinship, and master-apprentice relations toward screen-centered digital fields, undergoing both disembedding and re-embedding.

This shift is not a simple change of communication channels, but a reconstruction of the existence, meaning production, and transmission logic of craft. Unlike oral folk literature or festive rituals, craft-based ICH depends heavily on bodily experience, procedural ethics, and workshop settings. Its core knowledge is often difficult to translate fully into language. Once it enters short-video platforms governed by visual centrality and traffic algorithms, several questions arise: How can disembodied digital media rebuild the “presence” of craft? Does spectacular presentation weaken the authenticity of craftsmanship? Can online viewing become genuine living transmission?

To address these questions, this study uses virtual ethnography and multimodal discourse analysis. It selects representative videos and comment interactions from leading ICH creators on Douyin and Bilibili, including Li Ziqi, Peng Chuanming, and Jiang Xunqian. From the perspectives of embodied cognition and media ecology, it examines the presentation, meaning translation, and transmission mechanisms of craft-based ICH in the short-video era.

2 From Master-Apprentice Settings to Screen-Based Fields: The Mediatized Reconstruction of Craft-Based ICH

Compared with other forms of ICH, craft-based heritage is more strongly marked by high-context communication and embodied practice. Its core is not a set of procedures, but tacit knowledge embedded in bodily memory, procedural discipline, and stable craft settings. The thickness of paper pulp, the timing of fermentation, and the force of hammering are difficult to encode in language; they require co-presence, repeated practice, and immediate correction. Craft-based ICH is therefore rooted in situatedness and depends on the sociological notion of the field: workshops, hearths, and rural production sites.

Yet mobile internet has drawn craft-based ICH into a process of disembedding. The platform logic of digital ICH has become an important entry point for observing the “disembedding” and “re-embedding” of intangible cultural heritage in the digital age (Fan & Wu, 2025). Craft is extracted from traditional social relations and relocated into open, fluid, visually oriented screen fields. As Ji argues, digital technology is not only a medium for disseminating folklore, but also a driving force in producing new folkloric practices (Ji, 2025). Craft is thus transformed from productive practice into a digital text to be viewed, consumed, and reinterpreted. Embodied perception is visualized, traditional procedures are reorganized as spectacle, and internal rhythms are rewritten by algorithmic time.

2.1 Visual Substitution of Embodied Experience: From “hand-in-hand” Instruction to “Visible” Craft

The key to craft-based ICH lies in embodied knowledge, or tacit knowledge that resists full verbalization. In traditional master-apprentice settings, craft is transmitted through imitation, shared labor, and hand-in-hand correction. In short-video environments, however, the relation between person and object shifts from multisensory contact to visually dominated screen connection. Touch, smell, and bodily fatigue are weakened, and craft takes on a clearly disembodied character.

To compensate for bodily absence, short-video creators develop mechanisms of sensory compensation. This compensation first appears as a “visual translation of touch”. When touching is no longer possible, vision appropriates tactile functions, forming “haptic visibility” (Marks, 2000), where the sensuous texture of the digital image invites the viewer to “touch” the craft with their eyes. For example, when Peng Chuanming reconstructs ancient ink-making, papermaking, or rouge production, close-up shots capture falling pine soot, flowing ink, and powder adhering to skin, allowing viewers to gain a quasi-tactile experience through visual synesthesia.

Sound also helps rebuild presence. R. Murray Schafer regards sound as part of the environment, and the soundscape as all sounds within a specific space (Huang & Qin, 2024). In short videos, labor sounds once treated as background noise are brought to the foreground. In Shanbai’s videos, the sounds of bamboo cutting, weaving, and crackling charcoal are amplified through high-sensitivity recording and ASMR-style processing, becoming perceptible textures of craft. From the perspective of audiovisual psychology, dialects and natural sounds in short videos not only strengthen immersion, but also serve as core anchors of cultural identification and media of psychological healing (Fang & Wang, 2025).

Yet this “hyperreal” audiovisual enhancement is not equivalent to complete bodily experience. Don Ihde notes that technological mediation of perception always involves a dual structure of “amplification” and “reduction” (Zhang & Li, 2025). Short videos amplify the visual beauty and acoustic texture of craft, but reduce pain, fatigue, failure, and risk. Viewers acquire propositional knowledge—knowing that—rather than procedural knowledge—knowing how. The satisfaction of “seeing” may therefore create an illusion of mastery and conceal the bodily threshold and temporal cost of actual transmission.

2.2 Symbolization and Spectacularization: Visual Recoding of Traditional Procedures

When craft moves from rural life into digital screens, its ontological status shifts from productive practice to spectacular performance. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s framework, craft-based ICH shifts from ritual-rooted “cult value” to digitally tailored “exhibition value” in short videos, while the practical “use value” emphasized by Zhao loses its dominant position (Zhao, 2024). This transfer reflects the modern visual hegemony criticized by Zhou Xian: modern culture is undergoing a visual turn, in which images increasingly dominate reality, and seeing and being seen become the basis of an object’s legitimacy (Zhou, 2008).

Under traffic logic, ICH craft is forced into visual recoding. This first appears in the aesthetic reconstruction of production. In Li Ziqi’s “life cycle of an object” narratives, seasonal change and complex procedures are compressed into a few minutes. Waiting and repetition are removed, visually striking moments are retained, and soft filters, costumes, and pastoral settings are added. Labor filled with fatigue and pain is transformed into a symbol of “life aesthetics”, while craft authenticity may be replaced by a simulacrum shaped by urban imagination.

Visual recoding also appears in entertainment-oriented deconstruction. To compete for attention, some creators place ICH craft within memes, reversals, and dramatic conflicts. Nanxiang Bu Ai Chifan’s early videos, for instance, combine traditional culinary skills with exaggerated expressions, fast narration, and challenge-based scripts. Such strategies attract traffic but weaken the solemnity and ritual sense of craft. In excessive market-oriented revitalization, the spiritual value of ICH is easily alienated by commercial logic and may even face the ethical risk of cultural appropriation when transformed outside its authentic context (Geng & Xu, 2025). Viewers may remember the creator’s personal IP and visual spectacle while ignoring the historical depth, craft ethics, and cultural context behind the

technique. Different creators employ varying strategies, ranging from rigorous technical restoration to entertainment-oriented spectacle.

2.3 Rhythmic and Fragmented Presentation: Rewriting Craft Transmission Through Media Time-Space

If spectacularization reconstructs the visual form of craft, rhythmization and fragmentation rewrite its internal temporality. Traditional craft is rooted in the organic time of agrarian civilization, emphasizing seasonal timing, slow work, and repeated refinement. Short-video platforms follow the time of the attention economy and algorithms, pursuing instant feedback measured in seconds. When the craftsman's rhythm of "ten years to sharpen one sword" meets the platform rule of "survival within fifteen seconds", transmission is deeply reshaped.

This rewriting first appears as compression and acceleration. Ancient tea-making, lacquer drying, wine fermentation, and other long processes are often edited into highlight moments. The accelerated temporality of short videos tends to compress the painstaking process of traditional craft into instant highlights. In accelerated narration, the stubbornness of materials, the boredom of learning, and the risk of failure are smoothed over, engendering an illusion of technical accessibility. This efficiency-oriented acceleration leads to the alienation of aesthetic experience: it strips traditional craft of leisure and spiritual sedimentation and reorganizes it into a fast-food product of sensory stimulation (Chen & Yu, 2023).

Algorithmic assessment of completion rate and bounce rate further pushes craft presentation from systematic narration to fragmented spectacle. What remains on screen are often the dazzling sparks of molten iron flower performance, the crisp sound of crackled porcelain, or the surprise of a finished object, while material selection, polishing, failure, and correction are excluded. Viewers receive fragments rather than coherent knowledge. ICH transmission may thus shift from continuous life practice to rapidly consumed digital content.

Still, inheritors are not passive victims of technology. Many artisans actively use spectacular moments as "hooks" to attract attention and identify potential apprentices. The mediatized transfer of craft is therefore not a one-way technological rewriting of tradition, but a negotiation between algorithm and craft ethos, through which inheritors rebuild agency in digital fields.

3 From Everyday Practice to Value Expression: Meaning Production and Modern Translation of Traditional Craft

When traditional craft enters short-video platforms, it changes from "original" to "text", from "object" to "symbol". This is not merely a change of medium, but a practice of folklorismus: through algorithmic distribution and visual rhetoric, short-video platforms translate craft once used for livelihood into modern narratives of life aesthetics, labor ethics, and cultural memory.

Thus, viewing ICH short videos is not simple information consumption, but a spiritual "return home". These images respond to meaninglessness, identity anxiety, and the need for belonging in modern society. Traditional craft is detached from pure utility and turned into a symbol for rebuilding life meaning, summoning craftsmanship, and activating collective memory.

3.1 Aestheticized Viewing and the Construction of Life Aesthetics

In traditional folkloric life, craft was first a means of livelihood, accompanied by bodily toil, rough environments, and survival pressure. It was not naturally romantic. Short videos place craft within an aesthetic distance: pain, smell, and heaviness are filtered out, while rhythm, form, and finished objects become aesthetic objects for viewing.

Li Ziqi's visual practice exemplifies such aestheticized folklorismus. She extracts blue calico printing, Shu embroidery, and the making of the "four treasures of the study" from concrete rural locality, lineage ethics, and livelihood pressure, embedding them in a refined pastoral schema. The rise of folklore studies and intangible cultural heritage is essentially a product of the global expansion of modernity (Gao, 2020). In this sense, ICH displayed in short videos is not a full reproduction of rural reality, but an objectified reconstruction of traditional culture by modern subjects. Heavy bamboo cutting and washing are encoded as rhythmic visual movement; work in icy streams becomes intimate interaction with nature. Craft becomes a visual symbol of a "pre-industrial utopia".

This invented pastoral imagination attracts young audiences because it responds to the psychological lack of urban modernity. Under acceleration and algorithmic rationality, individuals are often trapped in fragmented and alienated labor, unable to perceive the integrity of work or ownership of results. ICH short videos, by contrast, present a complete labor circuit from raw material to finished object. Li Ziqi-style imagery constructs a "modern Peach Blossom Spring", precisely touching modern subjects' longing for retreat and companionship under modern anxiety and providing atomized urban individuals with an imagined space for spiritual settlement (Liu & Mou, 2022).

The life aesthetics of short videos is therefore not a return to premodern life, but a contemporary myth written with traditional craft as material. It removes the burden of survival while preserving aesthetic form, making ancient craft a vessel for slow life, poetic dwelling, and spiritual healing.

3.2 Labor Ethics and the Affective Summoning of Craftsmanship

If aestheticized viewing responds to sensory pleasure, labor ethics provides value anchoring. Under industrial production, commodities become standardized, and the emotional relation between producer and user is cut off. ICH short videos restore warmth to objects by depicting handmade processes, allowing viewers to perceive the relation between body, material, and thing.

Peng Chuanming's videos are powerful because they restore a pre-industrial relation of mastery and reverence between human and object. Whether waiting for tung oil to oxidize in ancient ink-making or pounding bark in Xuan paper production, his videos present whole labor. This narration bridges the spiritual gap between worker and product in the industrial age and allows viewers to reimagine creative subjectivity. As Cai argues, ICH craft transforms abstract "objects" into vibrant "events of action" through the deep integration of body and environment, awakening viewers' intuitive perception of the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature (Cai, 2023).

ICH short videos also reinterpret craft ethics through visual rhetoric. They strip away older elements tied to religious taboo, while strengthening the metaphor of craft as cultivation. Slowness, concentration, waiting, restraint, and repeated refinement become spiritual postures against accelerated society. In the videos of Peng Chuanming, Li Ziqi, and others, labor is no longer merely production for exchange value, but a process of completing craft, coordinating human and nature, and cultivating the self.

In this way, craft-based short videos exceed entertainment and become cultural texts with moral appeal. They

reactivate values such as reverence for heaven and cherishing things, honest labor, and the investigation of things. When young viewers articulate sentiments such as “respect for craftsmanship” or “this is true Chinese manufacturing”, they are making a value judgment about good labor and cultural rootedness.

3.3 Cultural Memory and the Symbolic Re-Narration of Community

If life aesthetics addresses individual settlement, cultural memory addresses collective cohesion. Maurice Halbwachs proposed the concept of “collective memory”, arguing that memory is not merely psychological but socially constructed (Halbwachs, 2002). In traditional rural society, the memory of ICH craft was attached to families, villages, festivals, and specific places. In the mediatized age, short-video platforms become new sites of memory, allowing local and closed craft memories to be transmitted and reorganized across regions.

Jiang Xunqian’s reconstruction of molten iron flower performance shows how local knowledge becomes national memory. Originally, this practice belonged to seasonal customs in places such as Queshan in Henan and parts of Shanxi. In short-video imagery, however, the spectacular “fiery trees and silver flowers” produced by striking 1,600-degree molten iron are recoded as a symbol of the vitality of Chinese civilization. Through synecdoche, a local craft fragment becomes a visual representation of the whole civilization, and local memory is reorganized into shareable national memory.

This reconstruction also forms an affective community. When users comment “moved to tears”, “bloodline awakened”, or “the ancestors’ aesthetics are astonishing”, they are participating in a digital ritual. Research shows that such images construct a specific symbolic field, guide viewers into a ritual space filled with recollection, and complete the reconstruction of collective cultural memory through multisensory resonance (Wang & Shen, 2023). This ritual no longer depends on kinship or offline gathering, but on aesthetic empathy and identification with shared heritage. “Bloodline awakening” is not biological, but a reaffirmation of cultural identity through viewing.

Such visual narration also expands cross-cultural communication. China belongs to a high-context culture, whose deep cultural meanings are often difficult for foreign audiences to decode directly (Guo, 2025). ICH short videos adopt low-context visual translation, turning abstract philosophy into perceptible scenes and craft processes. Even if overseas audiences cannot fully understand “following the Dao of nature” or the logic of mortise-and-tenon structures, they can still perceive Chinese craft’s pursuit of nature, order, and ingenuity through object-centered narration.

Therefore, the meaning translation of traditional craft in short videos is not mere aesthetic consumption, but a composite reconstruction of life aesthetics, labor ethics, and cultural memory. It offers modern individuals an imagined space for spiritual settlement and gives Chinese civilization a digital form of subjectivity.

4 From Viewing to Participation: New Communities of Transmission on Digital Platforms

After clarifying presentation and meaning, the question turns to transmission. Traditionally, craft transmission depended on familiar communities, bodily discipline, and entry mechanisms based on kinship, locality, and master-apprentice relations. This maintained lineage purity but limited social diffusion and intergenerational continuity.

Short-video platforms break this closed structure. Digital technology functions as a mechanism for reconfiguring

social relations and catalyzing collective action. Within Henry Jenkins's framework of "participatory culture", short-video platforms reorganize atomized "folk" subjects in virtual fields through media rituals, algorithmic aggregation, and virtual-real pathways, constructing a new community of transmission based on interest rather than bloodline. Viewers become "prosumers" and "cloud apprentices". Young people display a clear "prosumer" character in online cultural practice, and such deep involvement significantly enhances their identification with and confidence in national culture (Gao, 2025). ICH transmission thus moves from a one-way digital mirror to interactive living practice.

4.1 Media Ritual and Identity Confirmation: The Possibility of Online Apprenticeship

In traditional ICH transmission, apprentice status depends on initiation, long-term labor, and bodily discipline. Short videos provide ordinary viewers with a quasi-apprentice identity and reshape teaching and learning in digital fields.

This media ritual first appears in Victor Turner's sense of "liminality", producing a substitute experience of presence (Turner, 2006). Experience-based creators such as Jiang Xunqian do not merely show finished objects; they present the full process of seeking instruction, failing, being injured, practicing, and acquiring skill. Traditional apprenticeship is transformed into a visible process, allowing viewers to experience craft through the creator's body. This cloud apprentice experience arises because short videos produce a "fusion of public and private situations": the private "backstage space" of master-apprentice transmission, such as failed attempts and repeated practice, is brought to the public "front stage" (Men & Wei, 2025). The creator's body becomes a medium through which viewers understand craft difficulty, and viewing shifts from observation to embodied empathy.

Bullet comments and comment sections form digital interaction ritual chains. When users collectively post "respect for craftsmanship", "bloodline awakened", or "the wisdom of our ancestors", dispersed individuals are integrated into a shared emotional field and confirm their identity as guardians of cultural heritage. Likes, reposts, and comments become symbolic acts of participation.

This participation also extends into bodily practice. Through tutorials, imitation challenges, e-commerce links, and "homework submission", short-video platforms lower the threshold for trying craft. Users buy materials, reproduce techniques, and upload their results. Although often playful and experimental, these practices re-embed ICH into everyday life. From ritual theory, this technology-enabled "imitation and repetition" is a core manifestation of the formalization of ritual behavior (Geng & Pi, 2023). The loop of imitation, display, and feedback turns viewers into actors and builds a broad social-psychological foundation for transmission.

4.2 Algorithmic Distribution and Interest-Based Communities

In traditional folklore studies, "the folk" usually refers to a stable community based on region, bloodline, and tradition. In mobile modern society, however, village hollowing and loosened lineage ties weaken this foundation. short-video platforms use algorithmic distribution to break physical proximity and push transmission subjects from geographically based folk communities toward interest-based folk communities.

As Sun Jiuxia points out, with increased mobility and deeper mediatization, folkloric subjects have broken through the stable boundaries of geographical communities and become mobile practice groups composed of multiple actors; interest-based aggregation has fundamentally changed the scale and composition of "the folk" (Sun, 2025). Algorithms can push niche crafts at the cultural long tail toward potential audiences. Crafts once endangered by limited local

audiences can now find dispersed micro-publics and form sticky digital tribes. This confirms Cai Qi's judgment on "community reconstruction": interest-based aggregation is essentially the reconstruction of community by atomized individuals, combining the cohesion of traditional communities with the freedom of modern communities (Cai, 2014).

Within these communities, ICH knowledge production also changes. The binary relation between transmitter and receiver is replaced by decentralized collaboration. In the comment sections of Peng Chuanming, Shanbai, and Nanxiang Bu Ai Chifan, users supplement material knowledge, verify historical origins, propose improvements, and circulate content through imitation and secondary creation. The comment section becomes an open folk classroom, where users are viewers, contributors, interpreters, and co-creators.

This distributed participation helps overcome knowledge closure and weak innovation in traditional transmission. Craft is no longer a static museum specimen, but gains adaptability through discussion, trial, reproduction, and modification. "The folk" shifts from an ascribed identity based on birthplace to an achieved identity based on interest, action, and affective identification. Algorithms and interest-based communities thus build a mobile field of transmission, enabling ICH to move from static remains to living practice.

4.3 The Return of Mediatized Practice to Reality

The value of ICH short videos cannot stop at online viewing; it must return to offline transmission and real development. As Zhang and Lu observe, digital and intelligent technologies, with their real-time, interactive, and scalable capacities, provide strong momentum for the "creative transformation and innovative development" of traditional culture, enabling it to break temporal and spatial limits and integrate historical depth with contemporary meaning in popular forms (Zhang & Lu, 2024). The key question is whether online traffic can become real transmission power and industrial support.

First, Short videos convert attention into material value. Traditional ICH products often suffer from closed channels and outdated design. Through "ICH + e-commerce", livestream selling, and reverse customization, platforms connect viewing with purchasing and return ICH products to modern circulation. Li Ziqi-style visual communication not only exports pastoral aesthetics, but also promotes related local products and handicraft consumption to some extent. More importantly, market feedback gives inheritors income and recognition, helping solve the problem that "craft cannot support a livelihood". As Mu Yanbin argues, "the integration of ideals and reality" is a distinctive feature of the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture (Mu & Song, 2023). Only when craft becomes a sustainable livelihood can transmission gain internal momentum.

Second, short videos push visual consumption back toward bodily practice. The tourism boom, offline experiences, and apprenticeship interest triggered by Jiang Xunqian's molten iron flower videos in Queshan show that digital media may become an entrance to real participation rather than mere virtual immersion. When Generation Z enters ICH sites and participates in renewal with internet thinking and modern aesthetics, ICH gains new subjects. Some Chinese scholars argue that online folklore is not a departure from tradition; rather, while preserving the cultural core of folklore, it reconstructs digital expression and realizes the formal regeneration and evolution of folkloric phenomena in modernity (Cao, 2023).

Of course, reality return does not solve all problems. Traffic can bring visibility, sales, and short-term enthusiasm, but it cannot automatically produce the long training, bodily discipline, and temporal sedimentation required by craft transmission. Whether young participants can resist the impatience of accelerated society and enter the deep practice

of “ten years to sharpen one sword” remains uncertain. short-video platforms have opened a chain from media ritual to interest-based community and real industry, but the shift from traffic monetization to cultural cultivation remains the central challenge of modern ICH transmission.

5 Conclusion

The short-video dissemination of craft-based ICH marks the transition of Chinese traditional culture from rescue-oriented preservation to digital survival. In the mediatized transfer of craft presence, ICH reconstructs itself through audiovisual presentation, meaning translation, and community reorganization, moving from embodied experience to digital symbol and from closed transmission to public participation.

This process does not simply dissolve authenticity. Under mediatized conditions, short videos rebuild craft presence through sensory compensation and lower the threshold for understanding high-context craft; transform traditional craft into a carrier of life aesthetics, labor ethics, and cultural memory through aesthetic display and ritual narration; and push viewers toward participation through algorithmic distribution and interest-based communities, while channeling online traffic back to material industries and offline transmission.

ICH transmission in the short-video era has therefore exceeded simple technological empowerment. It has become a digital model for the creative transformation and innovative development of China’s fine traditional culture, offering a practical Chinese approach for stimulating cultural creativity and enhancing the communicative power of Chinese civilization.

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