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Visual Innovation and Communication Strategies for AIGC Short Videos on Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract:
In Xinhua's Rhapsody of Tianjin's Intangible Cultural Heritage, cultural figures leave the display case and enter urban and social settings. Taking this video as its principal case, this article examines how AI-generated content (AIGC) reshapes the visual presentation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The discussion draws on a literature review, publicly available scenes, and published communication data. Research on Celebrating Chinese New Year with Intangible Cultural Heritage provides a complementary perspective on festival storytelling. Attention is given to the features that identify a cultural form, continuity between shots, and explanations conveyed through text and sound. The case analysis suggests that everyday settings can give animated heritage figures a meaningful context. Yet the craft's distinctive qualities can be obscured by the transformation. The proposed design responses begin with cultural source checking and extend to the choice of style and the timing of explanations. Essential information belongs alongside the relevant image; fuller accounts can be offered in supplementary material. The recommendations address creative practice. Audience effects remain to be tested.

Keywords:
AI-generated content; intangible cultural heritage short videos; visual expression; cultural communication; design strategies

Introduction

Short videos bring traditional crafts and folk activities into everyday viewing. With artificial intelligence tools, creators can animate artifacts and decorative motifs that were previously shown as static images. They can also place them in settings that conventional filming would struggle to realize. A report by Xu Xiaofeng for Yangtse Evening Post / Ziniu News summarizes the 2025 Douyin Intangible Cultural Heritage Data Report [1]. Over the year covered by that report, the number of AI-related ICH videos on Douyin rose by 1,625%, and the number of creators rose by 1,155%. These figures describe a substantial expansion in production. The category "AI-related" needs some care: it includes videos made with AI involvement, rather than only works produced entirely with generative AI.

As production grows, the way these videos represent heritage deserves closer scrutiny. The same cultural

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element may appear in documentary footage or be reinterpreted through generated imagery. Combining the two calls for an understanding of the source material as well as the viewing experience. This study examines the selection of symbols, the arrangement of shots, and the explanations offered to viewers. Its main material consists of publicly available scenes from Rhapsody of Tianjin's Intangible Cultural Heritage. Research on Celebrating Chinese New Year with Intangible Cultural Heritage provides an additional reference. The aim is to consider how visual invention can support cultural interpretation. The production figures above establish the context; they are not evidence of improved audience understanding.

1 Visual Expression in AIGC Short Videos on Intangible Cultural Heritage

1.1 Translating Cultural Symbols into Visual Form

Choosing what to depict is the first decision in presenting ICH visually. Viewers can see a motif, an artifact, or an item of clothing. Its relationship to a material, a technique, or a local way of life may be less apparent. Li et al. discuss the translation of cultural material into design in their study of AIGC multimodal narratives and digital creative products for ICH [2]. For short-video production, this discussion raises a practical question: which features identify the heritage element? Those features provide a starting point for deciding how it can appear on screen.

Paper-cutting and clay figurines make the issue concrete. In paper-cutting, the contours and the spaces cut out of the sheet help define the image. Clay figurines rely more on modeled form and handmade texture. AIGC allows changes in background, scale, and lighting without necessarily losing these features. Difficulties arise when the transformation obscures the craft itself. A paper-cut design rendered as a bulky sculpture may lose its relationship to the sheet. A clay figurine recast as a generic character in historical dress may lose its material character. However elaborate the result, something valuable has been lost if the craft can no longer be recognized. Adaptation for the screen needs to retain that connection.

1.2 Animating Static Imagery through Shot Sequences

Animation turns static imagery into narrative action. Motifs and artifacts previously encountered in photographs or display cases can become characters in a short narrative. Their actions still need to make sense in relation to the object's form and the scene. Continuity matters here. A character's position, direction of movement, and relationship to other figures must remain intelligible from shot to shot. Without these connections, an animated sequence may amount to a collection of visually striking fragments.

How much freedom the creator has depends on the purpose of the video. A clay figurine stepping out of a display case invites an imaginative treatment. Anthropomorphism and exaggerated movement fit that premise. A sequence showing modeling, firing, dyeing, or weaving carries a different responsibility. These processes have particular steps and involve changes in materials; their depiction needs to follow actual craft practice. Both kinds of sequence have a place in short videos. Deciding whether the work introduces cultural imagery or explains how something is made helps set the limits of generation.

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1.3 Coordinating Images with Explanatory Information

An arresting image does not explain itself. A viewer unfamiliar with a heritage element may recognize only a broad association with traditional culture. A name, a place of origin, or a brief account of its use can make the reference more precise. Text and sound can supply this information when it becomes relevant to the image. There is no need to explain everything at once. One shot may raise a concrete question that a short caption answers; later scenes can add detail.

Red, lanterns, and theatrical stages readily suggest festivity. They say less about which regional custom is being shown. If the scene already feels celebratory, a subtitle can usefully name the heritage element instead of restating the mood. The purpose of an activity can be explained in voice-over while music and effects accompany the performance or character movement. What matters is how these contributions fit the image and one another. Their use in local everyday settings is considered in the cases that follow.

2 Cultural Imagery and Situated Storytelling in Publicly Available Cases

2.1 Connecting Cultural Imagery with Local Spaces

Xinhua released the AIGC creative micro-video Rhapsody of Tianjin's Intangible Cultural Heritage on April 15, 2026. It features Niren Zhang clay figurines, Yangliuqing New Year paintings, paper-cutting, and quyi. The latter term refers to a group of traditional Chinese storytelling and vocal performance genres. The publication page credits the AIGC creators and the organization that provided technical support. The video places cultural imagery in exhibition spaces, city streets, and everyday settings. These shifts offer material for examining how a static figure becomes a character in an animated narrative. The screenshots reproduced here come from the publicly available video on that page. Their original on-screen labels have been retained.

The change of setting in Figure 1 gives the narrative a clear starting point. In the left-hand image, a female figure stands inside a display case. The base, glass, and label identify her as an exhibit. In the right-hand image, she has entered a street scene and interacts with an urban installation. The relationship between viewer and object changes with this move. A figure first presented for inspection becomes a character whose actions can be followed.



(a) A figure in a display case (b) Character interaction in an urban setting

Figure 1. Cultural imagery and local settings in Rhapsody of Tianjin's Intangible Cultural Heritage

Source: Screenshots from Xinhua's publicly available video, at approximately 00:12 and 01:24. Original on-screen labels retained.

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As the figure enters the city, regional information also unfolds. Clothing and modeling suggest a cultural association. Architecture, streetscapes, and textual labels locate the scene more precisely. Together, these cues make the setting part of the cultural expression. A purely decorative background would leave the figure looking as though it could appear anywhere. Traces of local everyday life give the choice of cultural forms a clearer purpose and help convey the visual character of the region.

Placing a heritage figure on a contemporary city street is part of the video's fictional premise. The scene brings the two together without documenting a historical event or folk activity. Its AI-generation labels and accompanying description help establish how the imagery is to be read. An account of the cultural source serves another purpose: it identifies the material from which the adaptation was made. Interpretation of this case thus rests on knowing both the cultural reference and the nature of the intervention.

2.2 Connecting Character Actions with Everyday Situations

Figure 2 places a stage performance beside a teahouse conversation. In the left-hand image, lighting and the movement of the costume situate the figure within a performance. The composition centers on the performer. On the right, seated figures gather around tables and chairs, giving their interaction an everyday setting. The shift is from an individual performance to an exchange among characters. In each image, the surroundings help explain what the figures are doing.



(a) A stage performance (b) Conversation in a teahouse

Figure 2. Characters and everyday situations in Rhapsody of Tianjin's Intangible Cultural Heritage

Source: Screenshots from Xinhua's publicly available video, at approximately 01:48 and 02:04. Original on-screen labels retained.

A change of scene works only if the character remains recognizable. Clothing, proportions, and material appearance need sufficient continuity for viewers to connect successive shots. With performance-based ICH, movements and props also require checking against the conventions of the genre. Action carries cultural information as well as advancing the story. Fluid animation is therefore only part of the task; the imagery and the situation must also be appropriate.

Familiar festival experiences offer another way into ICH storytelling. Ye et al. examine Celebrating Chinese New Year with Intangible Cultural Heritage in relation to nianwei, the distinctive festive atmosphere of Chinese New Year in contemporary life [3]. Their discussion provides a useful reference for this analysis. Shared festival experiences can give creators a starting point for explaining how customs relate to life today. That sense of celebration gains a regional context when the custom is identified and the role of the artifact or

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activity is explained.

Table 1 relates the visual choices in these cases to the information they convey. The recurring concern is whether a recognizable heritage element acquires context through its setting and actions. There is no fixed balance between these choices. A motif, a performance, and an everyday custom each call for a different emphasis, according to what the video seeks to explain.

Table 1. Case evidence for visual choices in ICH short videos

Visual choice	Treatment	Evidence from the cases	Information conveyed
Identifiable symbols	Keep the characteristic form and identify it by name	Display-case figures in the Tianjin video	What the subject is
Local setting	Use spaces associated with the heritage element	Tianjin landmarks shown in the video	Where the scene belongs
Character interaction	Let interaction carry the narrative	The Tianjin video's stage and teahouse sequences	What is happening in the scene
Festival connection	Relate heritage to contemporary festival experiences	Research on Spring Festival ICH communication [3]	Provide an entry point through everyday experience

Source: Design synthesis based on the publicly available video and the study cited in [3].

2.3 Visual Transformation and Cultural Understanding

The scenes extend the settings in which ICH imagery can act. Cultural explanation remains necessary if viewers are to make sense of the transformations. Rapid transitions and continuous morphing emphasize movement. A name or an account of an object's function needs time to be read. Without that time, a memorable fantasy may leave the heritage element unidentified. Pauses for recognition and brief explanations can be built into the sequence between more elaborate shots. This tension between visual pace and the time needed to understand information leads to the communication strategies discussed below.

Realistic imagery adds another reason for explaining what is shown. Lao et al. found that young viewers use images, sound, narrative, and intuition when assessing the authenticity of AI-generated videos [4]. Their study addresses deepfakes, so its findings cannot simply be transferred to Chinese ICH communication. It does, however, draw attention to consistency across the information a video provides. In an ICH video, a convincing character or material surface conveys an appearance. It does not establish that the cultural content is accurate. Clear information about the heritage element's origins, sources on craft practice, and the use of AI gives viewers a basis for interpretation and verification.

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3 Communication Design Strategies for AIGC Short Videos on Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.1 Grounding Generated Content in Cultural Sources

Before generating images, designers need to establish what the cultural element is and why it belongs in the video. A concise account of its name, region, typical forms, and main functions provides a practical reference. It can also record why particular features have been selected. Museums, cultural institutions, and reliable records of heritage transmission are preferable sources for reference images. The source of each image needs to be recorded. A photograph of an object, a historical image, and a later adaptation support different claims. Keeping those distinctions visible reduces the risk of mistaking a recent interpretation for a traditional form. It also makes the eventual adaptation easier to explain.

The source material then needs to inform the instructions for generation. For paper-cutting, an instruction might specify the cut-out structure and the relationships between forms within the sheet. For a clay figurine, modeling, material appearance, and principal colors may be more relevant. Such details say more about the subject than "Chinese style" or "classical beauty." Reviewing the generated result requires a similar order of attention. Artifact structures, motif arrangements, and the relationships between costume components deserve inspection before background decoration is refined. Where a shot depicts a production step or a performance movement, it needs to be checked against reliable sources. Actual footage may be necessary to explain a key stage accurately.

The arrangement of shots also needs this scrutiny. Moving a figure between regions, periods, or uses can change its meaning, even if the figure itself looks consistent. When the connection is imagined, the video needs to make that premise clear. Rhapsody of Tianjin's Intangible Cultural Heritage uses generated storytelling to connect traditional imagery with urban life. The changes of setting belong to its artistic adaptation. Source checking can account for this by examining the links between scenes as well as the objects within them. A figure's appearance alone cannot establish whether its new context is appropriate.

3.2 Developing Visual Styles from Heritage Characteristics

For paper-cutting, the cut edge and the relationship between solid paper and empty space may carry more character than a generic surface effect. Clay figurines offer volume, color, and traces of hand modeling to work with. Traditional Chinese opera brings costume and movement into relation with the stage. These differences provide grounds for selecting a visual treatment. Much of a craft's appeal lies in such details. If the same ink-wash filter or realistic texture is applied across subjects, those details may recede. Style selection can instead begin with the material and technique, allowing the qualities of the particular heritage element to guide generation.

Across a series, a consistent subtitle position or typographic treatment can make the presentation easier to follow. End credits can use the same arrangement as well. This leaves room for the heritage elements to differ in color, form, and material appearance. The common layout gives the series continuity without requiring every subject to receive the same treatment. A recurring figure or artifact can serve a similar purpose within a sequence, remaining identifiable as the surrounding style changes.

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3.3 Organizing Explanatory Information around the Shots

When an artifact first appears, a short caption can identify it and locate its region of origin. An explanation of the feature visible at that moment can follow. Placing information beside the image it concerns reduces the amount that has to be explained elsewhere in the sequence. Longer historical accounts are better accommodated in the accompanying description or end material. Viewers can then attend to the scene while retaining access to a fuller account. The immediate task is to give them enough information to identify the subject and understand its role in the shot.

A caption loses much of its usefulness if it covers the very detail it describes. Placement therefore matters alongside type size and contrast against the background. Reading also takes time, which needs to be allowed for in the edit. The spoken track can explain an object's function or a relationship between activities while the text supplies other relevant information. There is little benefit in duplicating the caption word for word. Music and effects can accompany the scene as long as the narration remains audible. Notices identifying AI generation or adaptation belong in this arrangement too, where they can be seen and understood. Table 2 brings these production decisions together with the communication problems they address.

Table 2. Design responses to communication problems in ICH short videos

Communication problem	How it appears in a video	Design response
Heritage element difficult to identify	Decoration dominates the features that identify the craft	Check the form against sources from the relevant region
Similar treatment across subjects	The same surface effects recur in otherwise different works	Base the treatment on the craft's materials and techniques
Missing cultural explanation	Effects receive attention while the element's name and use remain unexplained	Explain the relevant image and indicate where more detail is available
Confusion between reality and imagination	Generated scenes are taken as factual records	Disclose AI generation and the scope of adaptation

Source: Compiled from the literature review and case analysis in this study.

The recommendations work in combination. Source checking establishes the cultural reference; style choices bring particular features into view. Explanatory information then helps viewers interpret the relationships depicted. Refining one area cannot be assumed to compensate for an omission elsewhere. A beautifully rendered object, for instance, can still leave its identity unclear. Assessment therefore needs to consider imagery, narrative, and explanation together. The aim is engaging creative work whose cultural content can be identified and understood.

Conclusion

AIGC allows ICH imagery to move and enter reconstructed settings. Its design value depends on what these transformations communicate about the heritage itself. In Rhapsody of Tianjin's Intangible Cultural Heritage, traditional figures enter the city, stage, and teahouse. Research on Celebrating Chinese New Year

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with Intangible Cultural Heritage offers a related perspective on festival experience as narrative material. The analysis suggests that everyday situations can give cultural imagery context, but its distinctive features need to remain recognizable. Relevant explanations help connect the scene with the heritage it presents. These recommendations derive from a literature review and publicly available case analysis. They concern creative methods and do not demonstrate effects on cultural identification or sharing behavior. Testing different design approaches with specific audiences remains a task for future research.

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