

The Cultural Approaches to the Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Micro-dramas

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Abstract

As an emerging audiovisual form, Chinese micro-short dramas are actively expanding into international markets and participating in global cultural circulation. Stuart Hall's theory of articulation provides a theoretical framework for understanding the interaction and circulation of cultural elements embedded in micro-short dramas across different cultural contexts. From the perspectives of aesthetic commonality, emotional interaction, and cultural articulation, this study systematically examines the current practices, characteristics, and limitations of Chinese micro-short dramas in their engagement with global culture. At present, the overseas dissemination of micro-short dramas is confronted with challenges such as severe content homogenization, the superficialization of narrative meaning, and insufficient institutional and industrial support. In future development, greater emphasis should be placed on the deep integration of Chinese cultural elements into narrative structures, the introduction of multidimensional content evaluation mechanisms, and the improvement of legal frameworks and industrial chains, so as to gradually strengthen stable articulations among diverse cultural elements and explore more sustainable pathways for the international dissemination of Chinese culture.

Keywords

Micro-Drama; Overseas Dissemination; Articulation Theory; Chinese Culture.

1. Introduction

In the context of increasingly deepened global cultural exchange, enhancing the international influence of Chinese culture has become a significant issue in cultural development. In recent years, micro-short dramas have experienced rapid growth. As of March 2025, overseas revenue from Chinese short dramas increased by 164% year-on-year, with total annual revenue projected to exceed USD 4.5 billion. A global distribution pattern has gradually emerged, centered in North America and extending to Europe, Japan and South Korea, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia^[1]. Chinese micro-short dramas have thus gained considerable influence and dissemination capacity in the global market, providing a new media channel for the international communication of Chinese culture. Current academic research on the international expansion of online micro-short dramas mainly focuses on three aspects. First, studies examine the challenges encountered in the overseas dissemination of micro-short dramas and propose corresponding development strategies^[2]. Second, some research investigates the communication mechanisms of overseas micro-short drama platforms, such as analyses of the production model of the ReelShort platform^[3]. Third, a number of studies explore specific applications of micro-short dramas, including narrative strategies^[4], audience feedback^[5], regional industrial models in particular overseas markets^[6], and the international dissemination of specific cultural subgenres^[7]. Overall, although existing scholarship addresses themes such as cross-cultural communication, the application of AIGC technologies, and practical pathways for global dissemination, most studies tend to focus on a single platform or a single analytical dimension. Relatively few scholars have examined the overseas

dissemination of micro-short dramas from a cultural-theoretical perspective, and there remains a lack of systematic theoretical interpretation regarding the interaction among different cultural elements in the process of transnational communication. To address this gap, this paper introduces Stuart Hall's theory of articulation in order to provide an expanded analytical perspective on the global dissemination pathways of micro-short dramas from the standpoint of cultural semiotics.

Articulation theory emphasizes that culture is not a static or closed system but a dynamic process in which different elements are connected and reconfigured through historical and social practices. Cultural linkages are formed through temporary and strategic combinations generated by the dynamic "articulation" of practices and discourses within specific historical contexts, thereby producing unity through difference and enabling the co-construction of meaning within cultural plurality ^[8]. However, in the process of international expansion, the cultural articulation practices of Chinese micro-short dramas still encounter multiple obstacles. These include difficulties in aligning narrative content with the cultural values and expectations of overseas audiences, challenges to the legitimacy of their dissemination, and relatively low rates of economic return. Such issues not only constrain the sustainable development of the industry but also, to some extent, weaken the international image of Chinese culture. Therefore, how to sustain innovative momentum amid industrial expansion and achieve effective articulation between Chinese culture and global cultures within cross-cultural contexts has become a central issue for the contemporary micro-short drama industry.

2. The Articulation Practices of Micro-Short Dramas with Global Culture

The international expansion of micro-short dramas is not merely a process of content export, but rather a complex communicative practice involving the reproduction of cultural meanings and the reconstruction of contextual frameworks. In the face of cultural barriers, it is necessary to maintain cultural distinctiveness while exploring ways to integrate cross-contextual narrative strategies with expressions of universal emotions, thereby achieving genuine "emotional resonance"^[9]. To a certain extent, the successful overseas dissemination of Chinese micro-short dramas reflects an aesthetic articulation between Chinese popular culture and global popular culture.

2.1. Aesthetic Convergence: Classic Narrative Tropes and Similar Media Environments as Catalysts for Emotional Resonance

2.1.1. Thematic Content: Employing Classic Power-Fantasy Narrative Tropes to Attract Audiences

The successful global dissemination of Chinese micro-short dramas largely relies on their aesthetic convergence in symbolic expression and emotional encoding. By employing narrative tropes commonly found in power-fantasy fiction, these productions draw upon storytelling patterns that are widely recognizable to global audiences. As a result, viewers from different cultural backgrounds are able to experience similar perceptions of narrative conflict, character relationships, and emotional development. Even in the presence of cultural differences, such narrative structures can still stimulate aesthetic identification and emotional resonance among audiences. As of 15 January 2024, ReelShort, a platform operated by COL Digital Publishing Group, had released 31 short dramas. Using benchmarks of over 30 million views and more than 500,000 user favorites, six productions can be classified as blockbuster-level titles. As shown in Table 1, the most popular works predominantly adopt classic narrative themes such as romance, revenge, and domineering CEO storylines, while also incorporating elements familiar to Western audiences, including werewolves and vampires ^[10]. Taking the blockbuster short drama *The Double Life of My Billionaire Husband* on ReelShort as an example, each

episode is approximately 1 minute and 30 seconds in length, with a total of 60 episodes. Within the first twelve episodes, the narrative rapidly advances the romantic relationship between the male and female protagonists through a high density of conflicts and plot reversals. The storyline incorporates a range of classic power-fantasy elements, including the “villainous female rival,” “contract marriage,” “heroic rescue,” and “inheritance disputes.” Since gaining popularity overseas in the second half of 2023, the series has accumulated more than 400 million views on ReelShort. The success of this and other short dramas centered on the “domineering CEO” trope has significantly elevated the brand visibility of ReelShort, an overseas short-drama application operated by COL Digital Publishing Group, while also accelerating the strategic expansion of leading Chinese short-drama producers into global markets.

Table 1. Summary of ReelShort's Best-Selling Short Dramas

No.	Title	Views (Million)	Favorites (10,000)	Genre	Content Elements
1	The Double Life of My Billionaire Husband	273.6	8900	Romance	Contract Marriage, Heroic Rescue, Inheritance Dispute
2	Fated to My Forbidden Alpha	118.2	3000	Romance	ABO Fiction, Billionaire Romance, Werewolf
3	Married at First Sight	63.2	1300	Romance	Contract Marriage
4	Never Divorce a Secret Billionaire Heiress	45.4	1100	Romance	Revenge, Chasing the Wife Back, Identity Reversal
5	Big Bad Husband, Please Wake Up!	37	722.1	Romance	Contract Marriage
6	I Got Married Without You	33.2	799	Romance	Reunion After Separation

Overall, Chinese micro-short dramas that have successfully entered overseas markets display clear patterns of genre-based storytelling in their content design. Common narrative motifs include the “Mary Sue”-style sweet romance, the dominant male protagonist typical of billionaire romance narratives, popular plotlines involving hidden wealthy heirs reclaiming family fortunes, as well as elements such as time travel, palace intrigue, martial-arts drama, and tragic romance. By adopting classic power-fantasy narrative conventions with distinct Chinese characteristics and presenting them through concise and easily accessible storytelling structures, these productions are able to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. Such narrative strategies generate emotional resonance among overseas audiences through a sense of narrative gratification, thereby effectively enhancing audience attention and engagement.

2.1.2. Media Market Selection: Establishing Resonance through Similar Media Environments

In terms of cross-cultural communication strategies, Chinese micro-short dramas, as cultural content products, achieve effective outreach to diverse cultural audiences through localized adjustments in narrative motifs, payment models, and cultural elements. This adaptive approach demonstrates a strong capacity for cross-cultural compatibility and facilitates global audiences’ understanding and recognition of Chinese cultural expressions.

The primary overseas markets for Chinese micro-short dramas include the United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia, regions that share certain similarities in their

media environments. Audiences in these markets commonly access content through mobile-based short-video or short-drama platforms, and they exhibit comparable viewing habits characterized by fragmented consumption and episodic binge-watching. In addition, payment models are largely based on in-app purchases, subscription memberships, and advertising incentives, supported by relatively mature digital payment infrastructures. Audience preferences also tend to favor fast-paced narratives with frequent plot twists and concentrated emotional climaxes, making classic tropes such as the “domineering CEO,” “contract marriage,” and “revenge romance” particularly resonant. Among these markets, Southeast Asia and Japan–South Korea share a higher degree of cultural proximity with China. As a result, micro-short dramas can often establish symbolic identification with audiences in these regions without extensive localization, enabling rapid dissemination while reducing production and operational costs. In contrast, although cultural differences are relatively greater in North American markets such as the United States and Canada, audiences there possess well-developed consumption habits for short-form video content and are familiar with concise, high-intensity narrative formats. This familiarity allows micro-short dramas to transcend cultural barriers and construct a shared cultural expression through dynamically connected symbolic systems and discursive practices. In the first half of 2025, in-app purchase revenue from short dramas in North America, Japan–South Korea, and Southeast Asia accounted for 72% of global total revenue, with Southeast Asia recording the highest growth rate ^[11]. These figures indicate that a strong alignment between media environments and narrative content can significantly enhance the effectiveness of international dissemination.

2.2. Emotional Interaction: Technology-Enabled Engagement to Meet Diverse Audience Needs

Compared with the linear dissemination model of traditional long-form television dramas, micro-short dramas rely on online media platforms for their production, distribution, consumption, audience interaction, and derivative creation. This platform-based mode of dissemination exhibits stronger interactivity, flexibility, and participatory characteristics, enabling micro-short dramas to more effectively accommodate the diverse aesthetic preferences of heterogeneous audiences.

2.2.1. Multi-Stakeholder Interaction Driving the Content Creation of Micro-Short Dramas

With the continuous iteration of platform functionalities, interactions among screenwriters, producers, platforms, and audiences have become increasingly close. During the viewing process on the ReelShort platform, audiences participate through activities such as liking, bookmarking, commenting, and sharing, thereby facilitating secondary dissemination and expanding the communicative reach of the works.

In addition, the ReelShort platform has established a quantifiable content incentive mechanism through a subscription model that combines “watch advertisements to earn coins for unlocking episodes” with “purchasing coin packages to unlock the full series.” Within this system, interactive user behaviors—such as completion rates, paid purchases, and viewing feedback—are converted into measurable “coin revenue,” which directly influences both a production’s visibility on the platform and the revenue-sharing proportion allocated to its creators. Driven by platform traffic mechanisms, producers and screenwriters are often inclined to develop genre-oriented content that aligns closely with prevailing market preferences and possesses stronger topical appeal, thereby improving traffic performance and financial returns. As a result, a highly interdependent operational chain has emerged among platforms, creators, and audiences, in which economic interests are tightly coupled. This dynamic enables fan-based consumption to feed back into content development, forming an economic articulation between Chinese micro-short dramas and global popular culture ^[12]. However, while a market feedback–

oriented creative model helps clarify content production directions, it also carries identifiable risks. Excessive accommodation to mass entertainment preferences may lead to narrative homogenization and the solidification of genre conventions, resulting in a relative scarcity of micro-short drama productions that demonstrate substantive cultural expression and innovative value rooted in Chinese culture.

2.2.2. Technological Upgrading and the Optimization of Micro-Short Drama Production Models

With the advancement of platform technologies, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence are increasingly integrated into the production process of micro-short dramas. By enhancing localization capabilities and improving content production efficiency, these technologies further optimize audience viewing experiences and dissemination outcomes. ReelShort, for instance, utilizes its self-developed large language model, “Zhongwen Xiaoyao,” for script generation. This system can automatically generate visual references based on textual scripts to assist in script design, and it can also incorporate technologies such as AI face-swapping and speech synthesis to provide localized visual and auditory experiences for overseas audiences, thereby improving both the efficiency and scalability of content production. Similarly, DramaBox, a platform operated by Dianzhong Technology, employs artificial intelligence to systematically optimize both content production and user experience. The platform has established a dedicated “Animation” section for AI-generated animated micro-short dramas and has developed a production model characterized by “completed short dramas + foreign-language dubbing + multilingual subtitles.” At the same time, it employs intelligent big-data algorithms to provide personalized content recommendations based on users’ behavioral preferences ^[13]. Meanwhile, Jiuzhou Culture has introduced the AI micro-short drama large model Moss, which has been iterated to version 3.0. This model integrates functions including subtitle translation, voice dubbing, and animation production, and supports more than ten major international languages, significantly expanding the technological boundaries of micro-short drama production ^[14]. In addition, the world’s first AI short-drama platform, Reel.AI, backed by Baidu, launched the micro-short drama *Lost Before I Found You*, which ranked fifth on DataEye’s overseas micro-short drama weekly popularity chart in August 2025. This achievement indicates the emerging competitiveness of AI-generated content within the global micro-short drama market.

Technological advancement has injected new momentum into the diversified production of micro-short dramas. It not only streamlines the production process and expands the potential for cost reduction and efficiency gains, but also enhances audience engagement through more interactive and immersive experiences, thereby strengthening the overall competitiveness and market appeal of platform-based micro-short drama ecosystems.

2.3. Cultural Articulation: The “Chinese IP + Localized Production” Model Facilitating Deeper Cultural Linkages

Culture constitutes a dynamic and dialectical field of intersection in which diverse cultural elements form temporary linkages and recombinations within specific contexts. As a cross-cultural cultural product, micro-short dramas continuously connect with and reconstruct diverse cultural systems through the re-encoding of cultural symbols during the process of dissemination, thereby embodying the practical application of Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation and demonstrating distinctive cross-cultural appeal. Content that has undergone localized adaptation is more readily disseminated and diffused across different cultural spheres, effectively reducing the phenomenon of cultural discount and alleviating comprehension barriers caused by contextual differences, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of international communication.

2.3.1. The Selection of Cultural IP as the Foundation for Cultural Linkage

The selection of Chinese cultural IP constitutes a crucial stage in the international dissemination of micro-short dramas. At present, the sources of micro-short drama scripts mainly include original screenplays, as well as adaptations from novel IP, comic IP, and game IP. According to statistics released by Ocean Engine, between 2019 and 2021, approximately 70% of micro-short drama IP sources originated from online literature [15]. In 2024 alone, the number of newly authorized adaptations of Chinese online literature reached around 30,000, providing an abundant pool of copyright resources for micro-short drama production. A representative example is the highly popular micro-short drama *Back to the 80s*, released in 2024, which was adapted from the online novel *The Beautiful Stepmother of the 1980s: Marrying a Factory Director and Raising His Children*. The drama portrays traditional Chinese family values, the historical background of China's reform and opening-up period in the 1980s, and a strong sense of rural cultural atmosphere, presenting overseas audiences with distinctive elements of Chinese culture. The narrative depiction of familial affection within a reconstituted family, along with the protagonist's pursuit of a better life and romantic fulfillment, aligns with universal value frameworks centered on justice and emotional aspiration. These narrative elements have effectively generated emotional resonance among international audiences, allowing them to experience the cultural depth embedded within Chinese storytelling traditions. The successful adaptation and performance of this production not only made it widely popular in China but also enabled it to enter the international market through the DramaBox platform, where it became one of the most successful overseas "super short dramas" of 2024. The series has accumulated more than 180,000 user favorites on DramaBox, with total views exceeding 1.13 billion and related topic discussions surpassing 1.5 billion. Audience comments from countries such as Spain and Indonesia on DramaBox's official YouTube channel frequently request localized subtitles, demonstrating the active engagement and positive reception of overseas viewers.

2.3.2. Localization as the Key to Achieving Cultural Articulation

The localized production of micro-short dramas constitutes a crucial guarantee for their successful international dissemination. In the process of micro-short drama creation, production teams typically adapt IP-based scripts through localization strategies, or commission local screenwriters to reinterpret selected Chinese cultural IP prototypes. While retaining the core narrative motifs of the original works, these adaptations integrate elements familiar to local audiences-such as language expressions, social contexts, and everyday life scenarios-thereby enhancing cultural accessibility and facilitating cross-cultural communication.

Another form of localization involves collaborating with overseas production teams and local actors, or partnering with local television networks and mainstream platforms to accelerate production capacity and market expansion. ReelShort, for instance, works with domestic copyright holders to acquire original story frameworks. On the basis of a comprehensive understanding of overseas audience preferences and cultural contexts, the platform systematically analyzes narrative structures, key plot highlights, and dramatic turning points, after which overseas screenwriters undertake secondary adaptations that align with local aesthetic tastes and cultural conventions, ultimately producing short dramas with distinct localized characteristics. Similarly, the Japanese short drama *Bread King*, produced by ShortMax, was filmed and produced in collaboration with a leading Japanese television network, featuring Japanese actors and adopting a distribution strategy specifically tailored to the Japanese market. This approach achieved a high degree of alignment between localized content production and targeted market promotion. Such joint production models, combining domestic and international creative teams, contribute to the creation of works that retain elements of

Chinese cultural identity while also resonating with the aesthetic preferences and cultural habits of overseas audiences. In this way, Chinese culture can transcend contextual differences and cognitive barriers, thereby achieving more effective international communication.

3. Challenges in the Overseas Development of Micro-Short Dramas

From the perspective of Stuart Hall's theory of articulation, cultural communication requires the continuous negotiation and reconfiguration of cultural elements through social practice, thereby forming a temporarily stabilized structure that generates new systems of meaning. Although Chinese micro-short dramas have already achieved a certain degree of industrial scale in overseas markets, their practices of cultural articulation remain evidently incomplete. Structural discontinuities are still apparent across aesthetic, emotional, and cultural dimensions in the process of international dissemination.

3.1. Imbalance in Creative Standards: Genre Dependence Leading to Severe Homogenization

At present, the overseas dissemination of Chinese micro-short dramas remains highly dependent on established genre frameworks characterized by rapid pacing, sensational plots, and highly gratifying narratives, revealing a noticeable degree of creative inertia. Influenced both by perceived audience preferences in overseas markets and by the desire to minimize production risks, many exported micro-short dramas concentrate on a limited range of themes, such as romantic fantasy, wealthy family conflicts, underdog success narratives, and the "domineering CEO" trope. These works frequently replicate the power-fantasy narrative structures prevalent in domestic online literature, leading to increasingly formulaic storytelling and significant narrative homogenization. Although such content may, in the short term, generate superficial audience identification through familiar narrative patterns and high-intensity dramatic stimuli, the connections among cultural elements often remain at the level of symbolic assemblage and motif accumulation. They rarely develop into deeper processes of cultural integration capable of generating new meanings. In this sense, genre-based storytelling has not produced a stable aesthetic coherence through processes of cultural negotiation; instead, repetition has substituted for creativity, resulting in loose and temporary articulations among different cultural elements. Overreliance on a single narrative structure not only weakens the artistic innovativeness of these productions but also contributes to the gradual emergence of aesthetic fatigue among overseas audiences, making it difficult to cultivate sustained cultural identification.

In addition, some micro-short dramas released for overseas markets exhibit issues such as excessive violence and vulgarized content. Such a narrow range of content supply makes it difficult to effectively articulate with the broader cultural interests and value expectations of international audiences. Instead, it may expose Chinese cultural products to the risk of gaining attention through controversy or negative publicity, which is detrimental to the construction of a positive national cultural image in the global communication landscape. The imbalance in creative standards prevents micro-short dramas from evolving from merely being "watchable" to becoming "memorable," thereby limiting their deeper potential as vehicles for cultural communication.

3.2. Dilution of Narrative Meaning: Emotional Superficiality under Excessive Market Orientation

Micro-short dramas rely heavily on platform-based interactive mechanisms, where data indicators such as completion rates and paid conversion rates increasingly shape the direction of content production. Under the dual pressures of algorithmic recommendation systems and market feedback, creators often gravitate toward established genre conventions that have

already demonstrated strong audience appeal. This tendency encourages the continuous amplification of dramatic conflict and emotional stimulation, resulting in emotional expressions that are increasingly simplified, superficial, and flattened, while deeper emotional construction is frequently overlooked. A representative example can be found in the ReelShort hit series *The Double Life of My Billionaire Husband*. At key narrative climaxes, the platform prompts viewers with a “paid unlock” notification. Typically, only the first few episodes are available for free, while subsequent episodes require approximately 59–66 virtual coins to unlock. In order to stimulate users’ willingness to pay, screenwriters often place intense conflicts or cliffhangers at the end of each episode to encourage continued viewing and purchasing. Meanwhile, recommendation algorithms further amplify the visibility of such highly stimulating content, incentivizing producers to emphasize emotionally charged scenes in order to attract likes, comments, and engagement from viewers.

The production model shaped by platform-driven interaction mechanisms tends to render short-drama content highly emotionalized and increasingly extreme. Narratives frequently revolve around familiar tropes such as domineering CEOs, revenge plots, and tragic romance. Storylines repeatedly feature scenarios in which a submissive heroine retaliates after suffering injustice, a seemingly ordinary male protagonist is suddenly revealed as a wealthy tycoon, or illicit romantic entanglements emerge among close acquaintances. These narrative devices deliberately intensify dramatic conflicts in order to stimulate audience emotions. Character construction likewise often follows stereotypical patterns, including the obedient heroine, the antagonistic mother-in-law, the passive or ineffectual male protagonist, and the ruthless business magnate. Such archetypal portrayals typically lack psychological depth, complex motivations, or meaningful cultural connotations. Under the continuous influence of emotional stimulation and algorithmic recommendation, audiences are encouraged to focus primarily on sensory impact and dramatic tension. As a result, these works struggle to leave lasting impressions or enduring memories among viewers, and the emotional connection between the text and its audience is correspondingly weakened.

An excessively data- and traffic-oriented production mechanism, in which market indicators dominate creative decisions, tends to flatten and simplify the emotional expression of micro-short dramas. Under such conditions, it becomes difficult for these works to establish deeper connections with the cultural contexts of overseas audiences. The weakening of emotional articulation confines micro-short dramas largely to the level of “emotional consumption,” rather than enabling the cross-cultural reconstruction of cultural elements and meanings.

3.3. Fractures in Cultural Articulation: Insufficient Legitimacy and Structural Support

Insufficient institutional and industrial support has weakened the stability of cultural linkages, thereby constraining the overseas expansion of micro-short dramas. On the one hand, under the prevailing trend of “fast-paced, sensational, and highly gratifying” storytelling, certain productions have raised concerns regarding copyright infringement, which undermines the legal foundations of cultural dissemination. Instances have emerged in which works are reproduced, adapted, or even directly copied without authorization from the original creators. In some cases, production teams have re-edited entire television series into new micro-short drama narratives through secondary editing. For example, in June 2025, the ReelShort production *The Seamstress Is The Duchess* was accused of plagiarizing the domestic short drama *The Vegetable Vendor Is Actually the Empress’s Sister-in-Law*, originally produced by the Chinese short-drama platform Tinghuadao. The dialogue and plot structures of the two works were reported to be highly similar, with the primary modification being the replacement of actors with foreign performers. Such practices not only infringe upon intellectual property rights but also incentivize content production driven by profit-seeking and unfair competitive

practices. On the other hand, from the perspective of overall industrial development, the overseas micro-short drama sector has yet to establish a mature and stable production and distribution system. Its current level of commercialization and industrialization remains insufficient to sustain long-term cultural dissemination. At present, revenue models in overseas markets remain relatively limited, relying primarily on basic mechanisms such as advertisement-based unlocking, per-episode payments, and subscription services. In contrast to the domestic market, diversified monetization strategies-including customized content production, e-commerce integration, and IP derivative development-have not yet been widely developed. Meanwhile, intense competition among streaming platforms, fragmented distribution channels, and lengthy conversion paths for application downloads have contributed to relatively high operational costs and compressed profit margins. At the production level, overseas micro-short drama projects are further constrained by shortages of local professional talent, relatively low levels of industrial division of labor, and stricter labor regulations, all of which hinder the establishment of highly standardized production processes. Consequently, it remains difficult to replicate the high-efficiency production model characteristic of China's domestic micro-short drama industry. Moreover, due to their strong entertainment orientation and relatively lightweight narrative structures, micro-short dramas often struggle to cultivate stable fan communities. Their revenue is therefore typically concentrated in the initial release period, with limited capacity for subsequent IP development and long-tail monetization.

Cultural articulation requires the joint operation of institutional frameworks, power structures, and practical actors. When cultural production lacks clear legal regulations and effective mechanisms of industrial coordination, the connections among different cultural elements can only take the form of temporary and strategic linkages. Under such conditions, it becomes difficult to achieve creative transformation and innovative development, and these linkages are unlikely to evolve into stable and sustainable cultural structures. The current weaknesses in institutional arrangements and industrial support within the overseas expansion of micro-short dramas constitute a key reason why deeper cultural articulation remains difficult to realize.

4. Strategies for Enhancing the Overseas Communication Capacity of Micro-Short Dramas

From the perspective of Stuart Hall's theory of articulation, cultural communication requires the continuous negotiation and reconfiguration of cultural elements through social practice, thereby forming a temporarily stabilized structure that generates new systems of meaning. Although Chinese mi

4.1. Reconstructing Aesthetic Paradigms: Promoting Expressive Innovation through the In-Depth Construction of Cultural Elements

In the process of international dissemination, micro-short dramas should retain the advantages of their expressive form while guiding Chinese cultural elements to participate more deeply in the construction of narrative structures. A representative example is *Escape from the British Museum*, released by Bilibili (hereinafter referred to as Bilibili) in 2023, which attracted widespread attention through its successful exploration of this communicative approach. Centered on the theme of "cultural repatriation," the series garnered more than 300 million views on the Douyin platform, while each episode on Bilibili accumulated approximately 8 million views^[16]. In addition, a video interview with the creative team published on the official Bilibili account of *People's Daily* received over 700,000 views within a single day. Overseas mainstream media outlets, including *The Independent* and *Global Times*, also published articles discussing the issue and calling for the British Museum to return Chinese cultural relics free of

charge, thereby generating significant international attention. The production adopts a distinctive and relatively niche narrative perspective, embedding traditional Chinese concepts of national sentiment and cultural belonging within a heroic narrative structure familiar to Western audiences. In doing so, it stimulates global audiences to reflect on issues such as cultural ownership and the protection of cultural heritage. The work not only demonstrates China's growing cultural self-awareness but also facilitates international audiences' understanding and recognition of related values. By activating the global expressive potential of Chinese cultural symbols, the series provides a new practical paradigm for micro-short dramas to participate in global cultural competition.

By contrast, the mere accumulation of Chinese cultural elements-such as the superficial inclusion of traditional etiquette, Chinese-style costumes, or architectural settings-often fails to generate deep cultural identification among overseas audiences. To achieve innovative aesthetic expression, Chinese cultural symbols should be integrated into the structural logic of narrative design, becoming part of the causal relationships within the plot as well as the motivations and decision-making processes of the characters. In this way, cultural elements function not merely as decorative symbols but as intrinsic forces that propel the narrative forward. Through localized adaptation and linguistic translation, Chinese cultural elements can be transformed into narrative motifs that are both comprehensible and emotionally resonant for global audiences.

When cultural symbols are effectively articulated with audiences' existing cognitive experiences through innovative storytelling, cross-cultural communication moves beyond one-way cultural export or the simple display of symbolic markers. Instead, it becomes a dynamic process in which meanings continuously circulate and are reinterpreted. Such an approach can enhance both the stability and the depth of cultural articulation. In future micro-short drama production, the systematic development of cultural symbolic resources-including famous historical sites, historical figures, local legends, ethnic customs, and intangible cultural heritage-can provide a rich foundation for narrative creation. By transforming the cultural connotations embedded in these elements into narrative expressions aligned with universal values, micro-short dramas can further unlock their potential and expand their influence in global cultural communication.

4.2. Deepening the Value of Works: Promoting Content Quality through a Multi-Dimensional Evaluation Mechanism

In response to the widespread tendency toward superficial emotional expression in overseas micro-short dramas under an excessively market-oriented environment, it is necessary to introduce structural adjustments at the level of platform evaluation and distribution mechanisms. At present, most overseas micro-short drama platforms primarily rely on quantitative indicators-such as view counts, completion rates, and paid conversion rates-to rank and recommend content. This evaluation logic, centered on the principle of "data supremacy," has, to some extent, reinforced creators' reliance on narrative strategies characterized by frequent plot reversals and intense emotional stimulation. Consequently, such mechanisms compress the space for works to achieve value enhancement and deeper meaning construction, thereby constraining the high-quality and refined development of micro-short drama production.

While retaining the functions of user feedback and market regulation, platforms should gradually establish a more multidimensional system for content evaluation. Elements such as narrative coherence, the evolution of character relationships, the logical consistency of emotional development, and the value implications embedded in the work should be incorporated into the overall assessment framework. In addition, by extending the algorithmic evaluation period of a work's lifecycle, platforms can moderately reduce the weight assigned to

single-episode paid metrics and other purely quantitative indicators within recommendation systems, thereby encouraging creators to shift their focus from pursuing short-term “traffic formulas” toward cultivating deeper narrative and cultural value. At the same time, platforms may employ non-algorithmic distribution methods-such as thematic curation and editorial recommendations-to provide relatively stable exposure opportunities for works with narrative depth and cultural potential. Such measures can help prevent content production from being entirely governed by short-term performance data, thereby creating institutional conditions conducive to the emergence of higher-quality micro-short drama productions.

Through adjustments to platform mechanisms, micro-short dramas can gradually accumulate a more durable and stable foundation of emotional identification in the process of cross-cultural dissemination. This transformation may enable their communicative logic to shift from a short-term stimulation model driven by immediate feedback toward a value-oriented model centered on sustained resonance.

4.3. Dimensional Evaluation Mechanism

The coordinated development of institutional frameworks and industrial structures constitutes a prerequisite for effective cultural articulation. By regulating the allocation of resources and exercising macro-level governance over production and dissemination processes, institutional mechanisms can provide the necessary legitimacy for the articulation of cultural elements, thereby preventing cultural linkages from being undermined by purely profit-driven logic.

At the policy level, the National Radio and Television Administration of China has in recent years issued a series of policy documents, including Opinions on Promoting the Prosperous Development of Short Drama Creation and the “Micro-Short Drama+” Action Plan to Empower Diverse Industries. These initiatives aim to encourage the production of high-quality micro-short dramas and to facilitate the international dissemination of outstanding works. Building upon this policy framework, it is necessary to further establish systematic regulatory mechanisms that reasonably coordinate the distribution of interests and the delineation of responsibilities among creators, distribution platforms, and audiences. By improving supporting policies related to the overseas expansion of micro-short dramas and integrating advantageous resources from a global perspective, the industry can be guided toward a healthier competitive environment. Such institutional support would strengthen the capacity of Chinese cultural content to achieve sustained international dissemination. For instance, the establishment of dedicated funding programs or thematic incentive schemes for export-oriented micro-short dramas, combined with traffic support or financial rewards for compliant and high-quality productions, could enhance creators’ willingness to produce premium content and improve the efficiency of global communication. At the legal level, it is equally essential to establish and refine a comprehensive legal protection framework. Clearly defining the boundaries of creative rights and standardizing market operational rules can effectively prevent improper practices such as plagiarism and unauthorized rewriting from disrupting the articulation of cultural elements. Strengthening legal safeguards not only ensures the originality and legitimacy of micro-short drama content but also constitutes a key condition for the sustainable international development of the industry. While protecting the lawful rights and interests of creators, such legal frameworks also provide a stable institutional foundation for the continuous circulation and transmission of cultural elements across diverse social and cultural contexts.

At the same time, the international expansion of micro-short dramas urgently requires the establishment of a more comprehensive industrial chain and the improvement of the level of industrialization in overseas production and distribution. By strengthening the supporting industrial infrastructure and enhancing the standardization and systematization of resource allocation, the industry can gradually develop more stable mechanisms for content creation,

distribution, and commercialization. With the support of well-developed institutional frameworks and a mature industrial chain, the micro-short drama sector is better positioned to achieve a dynamic articulation between cultural value and economic returns, thereby laying a solid foundation for its sustainable global development.

5. Conclusion

With the continuous expansion of overseas markets, the international dissemination of Chinese micro-short dramas has gradually moved beyond the initial stage in which attention was largely driven by novelty in themes and high production efficiency. It has now entered a new phase that requires confronting deeper structural challenges associated with cross-cultural communication. When content production becomes excessively constrained by market-oriented imperatives, the potential of micro-short dramas in terms of aesthetic expression, emotional construction, and cultural meaning is significantly compressed, thereby weakening their long-term communicative impact and the accumulation of cultural value in cross-cultural contexts.

This study, grounded in Stuart Hall's theory of articulation, argues that the current development of micro-short dramas should place greater emphasis on reconstructing cultural meanings across diverse cultural contexts and fostering relatively stable and sustainable forms of deeper cultural identification. Achieving this objective requires the coordinated efforts of multiple actors-including creators, platforms, and governmental institutions-to systematically improve content production practices, evaluation and distribution mechanisms, as well as institutional and industrial support structures. Through such efforts, micro-short dramas can retain their advantages of lightweight and rapid dissemination while further expanding the depth and richness of cultural expression, thereby providing a sustainable practical pathway for the international communication of Chinese culture.

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