

# LIFE WORLD AS A METHOD: CONCEPTUAL INNOVATION IN THE PRACTICE OF SHORT VIDEOS ON TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE CULTURE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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**Abstract:** The "cultural gap" in cross-cultural communication has long constrained the effectiveness of international communication of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) culture. The underlying cause lies in the prevailing "canon-centered" communication ideology, which transforms dynamic, lived knowledge into abstract theoretical texts, thereby excluding the dimension of life. Drawing on Husserl's lifeworld theory, this paper proposes "life-oriented communication" as a core pathway for conceptual innovation, advocating a shift from interpretive theory to the presentation of life and the cultivation of cross-cultural empathy through the activation of shared embodied human experiences. This study first traces the "life genes" of Qilu TCM culture, demonstrating that its practices—such as the integration of medicine and food, seasonal health preservation, and bodily techniques—inherently possess the potential for cross-cultural empathy. It then critiques the current "absence of life" in TCM communication, clarifying the theoretical connotation of life-oriented communication as a reconstruction of communication philosophy. Finally, taking short video practices as an empirical focus, it analyzes how medium affordances, including vertical screen immersion, daily scenarios, and personalized narratives, provide technical carriers for life-oriented communication, and how the progressive mechanism of "embodied activation → emotional projection → cultural curiosity" enables empathetic communication. The research suggests that life-oriented communication marks a paradigm shift in international communication from "cultural output" to "life sharing," offering new conceptual resources for the internationalization of TCM culture and the creative transformation of China's fine traditional culture.

**Keywords:** Life world; External communication; Traditional Chinese medicine culture; Short videos; Life-oriented communication; Concept innovation

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Under the national strategy of "promoting Chinese culture globally," high expectations have been placed on the international dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)—not only as a provider of health services, but also as a manifestation of cultural soft power. However, the actual effects of this dissemination remain suboptimal. Although acupuncture clinics have emerged worldwide and Chinese herbal medicines have entered the markets of some countries, the recognition and acceptance of TCM as a complete cultural system remain limited. The deep-seated cause of this predicament lies in the "cultural gap" prevalent in cross-cultural communication. This gap refers not merely to linguistic or lexical barriers, but to a rupture in cognitive frameworks, bodily experiences, and value systems. When Western audiences encounter concepts such as "yin-yang," "qi-blood," and "five elements," they often struggle to comprehend them due to the lack of corresponding cultural references. TCM is frequently reduced to "alternative therapy" or "empirical medicine," stripped of its philosophical connotations such as holism and the correspondence between humanity and nature. Even overseas individuals interested in TCM often remain at a superficial level of "knowing the facts but not understanding the reasons."

The crux of the problem lies in the following question: As a form of health communication, what exactly does TCM culture convey? Is it the translation and interpretation of textual classics, or the presentation and sharing of practical life experiences? The current mainstream approach to external communication relies heavily on the translation and dissemination of classics such as the *Huangdi Neijing* and the *Shanghan Lun*, converting dynamic TCM culture into abstract theoretical texts. This "textual-centrism" in communication philosophy neglects the essential attribute of TCM culture—that it "originates from and is used in life"—resulting in content that diverges from the daily life experiences of overseas audiences and fails to evoke emotional resonance or cultural identification.

A common blind spot in existing research lies in the neglect of the "essence of life" in TCM culture. Whether in translation studies, strategy research, or new media studies, "daily life" has rarely been examined as a theoretical category. Consequently, the vitality of TCM culture—rooted in the daily practices of millions of people, such as the dietary tradition of combining medicine and food, the temporal rhythms of seasonal health preservation, and the bodily techniques of massage and manipulation—has been overlooked. This "life knowledge" constitutes the most vivid form of TCM culture. When communication is divorced from life, culture becomes a suspended specimen; when communication returns to life, culture can be genuinely understood and appreciated.

## 2 DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF "LIFE-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION"

"Life-oriented communication" is not merely a colloquial term; everyday usage often conflates it with "popularization," "groundedness," or "proximity to the masses." However, this study redefines it as a theoretically grounded communication paradigm, rather than a superficial strategy of popularization, implying a fundamental reorientation in how communication activities are conceptualized.

**Working Definition:** Life-oriented communication is a communication philosophy rooted in the "lifeworld" (Lebenswelt), oriented toward "presentation," and aimed at "empathy." Its core task is not to transmit abstract theoretical knowledge, explicate cultural concepts, or indoctrinate audiences into foreign cultural discourse systems, but to showcase vivid life practices, depict how people "live," and invite audiences into perceptible, participatory, and shareable life scenarios.

**Theoretical Framework:** This definition draws on the phenomenological traditions of Husserl, Schutz, and Habermas. Husserl (1970) introduced the concept of the lifeworld in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* as the pre-scientific, intuitive, everyday experiential world [1]—the foundational domain for all scientific theories and abstract knowledge. He warned that modern science falls into crisis when it forgets its roots in the lifeworld.

Schutz (1967) extended Husserl's framework to social science in *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, emphasizing the lifeworld as an intersubjective space where individuals share basic experiential structures and interpret others' actions through their "stock of knowledge at hand [2]." For cross-cultural communication, this implies that universal embodied experiences (e.g., eating, sleeping, birth, aging, joy, sorrow) serve as the primal foundation for mutual understanding, transcending cultural differences.

Habermas (1984) framed the lifeworld as a background resource for communicative action in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, arguing that communication should be interactive (rather than one-way transmission) and aimed at mutual understanding (rather than persuasion or indoctrination) [3].

This study situates "life-oriented communication" within this tradition, operationalizing the lifeworld as an analytical perspective—not merely a research object—a methodological reorientation encapsulated in the proposition: "The Lifeworld as Method."

### 3 CORE INNOVATION: FROM AN "EXPLANATORY" TO A "PRESENTATIONAL" PARADIGM IN SHORT VIDEOS

The conceptual innovation of life-oriented communication lies in a fundamental shift in communication orientation: from "explaining" to "presenting." This paradigm shift spans four dimensions, as summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1** Comparison of Traditional Explanatory and Life-Oriented Presentational Paradigms

Dimension	Traditional Explanatory Paradigm	Life-Oriented Presentational Paradigm	New Connotation
Communication Subject	Experts, authorities, spokespersons	Ordinary life practitioners (e.g., rural women making agar jelly, elders practicing qigong)	From "Who to listen to?" to "Whose life is worth observing"
Communication Content	Abstract theories (Yin-Yang, meridian systems)	Embodied life practices (cooking medicinal dishes, pediatric massage)	From "What is culture?" to "How do people live"
Communication Goal	Cognition, acceptance, and identification	Perception, experience, and participation	From "Changing cognition" to "Inviting engagement"
Communication Logic	Explanation → Understanding → Acceptance	Presentation → Perception → Resonance	From "Persuasive logic" to "Empathetic logic"

#### 3.1 Subject Transformation: From Authorities to Ordinary Practitioners

Traditional communication prioritizes authoritative subjects (e.g., TCM masters, academic experts) under the logic that credibility hinges on the communicator's status[4]. However, in cross-cultural contexts, such authority is often "invalid," as audiences lack the cultural context for social prestige [5]. Moreover, expert discourse constructs a hierarchical "teacher-student" dynamic. Life-oriented communication centers on "ordinary practitioners"—individuals immersed in TCM culture, such as mothers performing pediatric massage or home cooks preparing medicinal meals. Their lives serve as authentic cultural carriers, and their communication embodies "insider communication," presenting lived experience rather than external explanation. This aligns with Benjamin's (2008) concept of "aura," the non-reproducible authenticity of the "here and now," which counteracts the loss of aura in mechanical reproduction.

### 3.2 Content Transformation: From Theory to Embodied Practice

Traditional communication prioritizes abstract theories (e.g., Yin-Yang, syndrome differentiation), assuming that theoretical comprehension equates to cultural understanding [6]. Yet theories are culturally bounded—abstract, context-dependent, and language-specific. Life-oriented content focuses on "practices in use," such as seasonal dietary adjustments or morning qigong, which are:

Embodied: Conveyed through bodily actions without linguistic mediation.

Contextual: Embedded in specific life scenarios with temporal-spatial perceptibility.

Processual: Showcasing "how to do" rather than "what it is."

Wittgenstein's (1953) dictum that "meaning is use" supports this framework [7]: cultural meaning resides in practice. Presenting "cultures in use" bypasses the translation of abstract concepts and directly accesses the sites where meaning is generated.

### 3.3 Goal Transformation: From Cognitive Change to Emotional Resonance

Traditional goals, such as understanding TCM theories or accepting values, rely on complex cognitive processing. Life-oriented communication prioritizes "perception and resonance." Audiences need not grasp "nourishing yin" to feel the warmth of making agar jelly through the visual appeal of amber gel, rising steam, or focused movements. Scheler's (1973) phenomenology of emotions posits that "emotional perception"[8]—bodily-based experience of others' worlds—precedes conceptual cognition, laying the groundwork for subsequent identification [9].

### 3.4 Logic Transformation: From Persuasion to Invitation

Traditional communication follows a "persuasive logic," employing arguments and evidence to overcome resistance, which risks triggering cultural defensiveness [5]. Life-oriented communication adopts an "invitation logic" that is open, equal, and non-coercive: "This is how we live." Gadamer's (2004) "fusion of horizons" frames this as non-conquest [6]: understanding emerges from dialogue between perspectives. Invitation may spark curiosity, appreciation, or trial—outcomes that establish sustainable cultural contact.

## 4 SHORT VIDEO PRACTICE: AFFORDANCES AND EMPATHY MECHANISMS

Why has short-form video emerged as an ideal vehicle for life-oriented communication? This question necessitates an analysis rooted in the inherent properties of media technology. The concept of "affordance" provides a suitable theoretical framework for such an examination. Originating from Gibson's (1979) ecological psychology, affordance refers to the possibilities for action that an environment offers to an organism [10]. In communication studies, affordance is employed to analyze the potential space that media technologies create for communicative practices—media does not solely determine communication outcomes, but its specific attributes "invite" certain modes of communication while "inhibiting" others [11]. The affordances of short-form videos—such as vertical screen immersion, daily scenarios, and personalized narratives—provide an ideal technological foundation for life-oriented communication [10].

How does "lifelike presentation" evoke empathy among overseas audiences? In the practice of short video dissemination of TCM culture, the emotional resonance mechanism operates through a "four-step progressive model," as outlined below.

Step 1: Sensory Attraction—Perceiving the Aesthetics of Daily Life

The starting point of empathy is often not rational cognition but emotional resonance [9]. Lifelike short videos initially extend an "invitation" to overseas audiences through sensory channels such as visual and auditory elements. For example, when an overseas viewer encounters a video of donkey-hide gelatin cake being brewed, what captivates them may be the visual appeal of the amber-colored gelatin simmering in the pot, the warm atmosphere created by rising steam, the gentle sound of a wooden spoon stirring, or the glossy translucence of the final product. These sensory elements can be appreciated without prior cultural knowledge—they directly touch universal human aesthetic sensibilities. The cross-cultural resonance of Li Ziqi's videos lies in this "sensorial universality [10]." As Scheler's concept of "emotional perception" suggests, emotional experiences often begin with bodily resonance [8]. The sensory appeal of short videos serves as a mediated form of this "bodily touch."

Step 2: Bodily Resonance—Activating Shared Experiences

Following sensory attraction comes deeper bodily resonance. As audiences continue watching lifelike short videos, their bodily memories are activated, fostering a sense of "feeling what others feel [12]." For instance, an overseas mother watching a pediatric TCM massage video may recall her own anxiety when her child had a fever and the tenderness of soothing their forehead. A white-collar worker abroad viewing a Ba Duan Jin exercise video might feel the stiffness in their own sedentary shoulders and experience an urge to stretch. Someone watching a video of dumpling-making during the Winter Solstice may reminisce about winter traditions in their hometown or the warmth of family gatherings around a meal. Bodily resonance relies not on understanding TCM theories but on universal human bodily experiences and emotional memories [8].

Step 3: Emotional Projection—From "Them" to "Us"

Bodily resonance evolves further into emotional projection. At this stage, viewers no longer merely "observe" the life

depicted in the video but begin to relate the scenarios to their own lives, fostering emotional identification [12]. A hallmark of this shift is the "me too" phenomenon in comment sections, where overseas viewers share similar experiences: "My grandmother did this too," "We also drink hot soup in winter," or "My mother used to massage my back like that." Such exchanges indicate that viewers have connected the video's content to their own lived experiences, transitioning from a "them" perspective to a "we" perspective. Deeper emotional projection manifests as "concern" and "attachment," such as inquiries about the health of elderly individuals in videos or expressions of interest in the creators' daily lives. Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" emphasizes that understanding involves the meeting and blending of different perspectives [6]; emotional projection represents the affective dimension of this fusion.

Step 4: Emergence of Identification—From "Watching" to "Trying"

The ultimate aim of empathy is the emergence of identification. This identification may not entail full acceptance of TCM principles but often manifests as behavioral experimentation—viewers begin to incorporate what they have seen into their own lives. Some overseas viewers share their attempts at brewing ginger and jujube tea, others ask where to purchase donkey-hide gelatin, and some upload videos of themselves practicing Ba Duan Jin. These attempts may be tentative or deviate from "authentic" practices [13], but they signify the beginning of cultural identification—audiences are no longer passive observers but active participants in the lifestyle promoted by the culture. Notably, this identification is "decentralized"; it results not from authoritative persuasion but from an invitation into a way of life. Viewers are not convinced that "TCM is correct" but are drawn to the idea that "this way of living seems appealing." This spontaneity lies at the heart of life-oriented communication—shifting culture from being "known" to being "practiced." The shift from persuasion to invitation underscores the sustainability of the latter approach, attracting participation by showcasing the beauty of daily life.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This four-step progressive model in TCM short videos facilitates a progressive emotional resonance mechanism—from sensory attraction to bodily resonance, emotional projection, and finally, the emergence of identification—achieving a transformation from "seeing" to "identifying." Each step relies on the universality of "lifeworld" experiences: shared sensory perceptions, bodily experiences, emotions, and needs. It is these commonalities that make cross-cultural empathy possible.

Finally, external communication should maintain critical technological reflection, considering both the empowering and alienating potentials of intelligent dissemination. While smart technologies significantly enhance life-oriented communication, critical vigilance is essential. Technology may introduce risks of "alienation"—when algorithms overly optimize content, "traffic logic" may supersede "life logic"; when multilingual technologies oversimplify, cultural nuances may be lost; when virtual scenes become hyper-realistic, they may distance audiences from authentic lived experiences [14]. Genuine life-oriented communication should strike a balance between technological empowerment and lifeworld authenticity—leveraging technology to broaden reach, reduce barriers, and enhance experiences while preserving the integrity and realism of daily life. Technology should not become a barrier separating life from communication but a bridge connecting lived experiences across cultures.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

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