

# The Transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage under the Background of the Belt and Road Initiative: A Case Study of the XiangYunSha Activity Strategies

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**Abstract:** With the implementation of the 20th initiative to jointly build the “the Belt and Road”, which has become a widely acclaimed international public product and platform for international cooperation policies, countries along the route continue to strengthen their collaboration. The report emphasizes the need to inherit China's outstanding traditional culture, continuously enhance the country's cultural soft power and influence. In the realm of cultural exchange and dissemination, China has also introduced a series of relevant policies. The Belt and Road Cultural Development Action Plan (2016-2021) by the Ministry of Culture explicitly states the goal of promoting the internationalization of Chinese culture. While strengthening cultural exchanges with other countries, intangible cultural heritage, representing the most primitive aspects of Chinese culture and serving as a standard for the nation's history, often goes unnoticed despite being the most deserving of preservation and promotion. This article uses the example of the iconic product, XiangYunSha, to illustrate how it has ventured beyond national borders. By analyzing the current state of dissemination, the article seeks suitable avenues for the international promotion of this cultural heritage, in line with the development of the homeland.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, The Belt and Road, XiangYunSha

## 1. Introduction

“The Belt and Road” Initiative, as a significant development strategy in China, is a cooperative path towards common development and shared prosperity. In October 2023, during the Belt and Road Initiative International Cooperation Summit, it was announced to support the high-quality construction of the "Belt and Road" through eight specific actions, with a particular emphasis on endorsing cultural and people-to-people exchanges as one of them. This declaration has provided a better opportunity for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, fostering increased interaction and cooperation. The Belt and Road Initiative aims to achieve mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, promoting global collaboration and connectivity for shared development.

## 2. Dissemination Policy Environment under the Belt and Road Initiative

As a nationally recognized geographical indication product in China, XiangYunSha can be considered a heterogeneous culture relative to mainstream cultural products in the international target market. The international dissemination of XiangYunSha culture implies the exportation of cultural innovation elements to the international target market. As a fashionable consumer product, the cultural essence embedded in XiangYunSha needs to be disseminated through international fashion and advertising systems. Therefore, obtaining recognition and support from opinion leaders and gatekeepers in the fashion culture realm plays a crucial role in the international dissemination of XiangYunSha culture<sup>[1]</sup>. Conducting a comprehensive study on the status of XiangYunSha, both domestically and internationally, can provide a more scientific and objective approach to addressing the challenges in the dissemination of XiangYunSha.

### ***2.1. Internal policy support with distinct local characteristics***

China has consistently placed high importance on the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Various policies have been continuously introduced to strengthen and pass down the legacy of intangible cultural heritage. In the spirit of the Opinions on Implementing the Project for Inheriting and Developing Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council, it is emphasized to "intensify publicity and education efforts." Utilizing various media such as newspapers, books, radio, television, and the internet, integrating multimedia resources, coordinating efforts from propaganda, culture, cultural relics, and other sectors, innovating expressive methods, and highlighting the charm of Chinese culture are essential. The implementation of the Chinese Culture New Media Communication Project is also emphasized [2].

In a document issued by the State Council Office on March 26, 2005, regarding the protection of intangible cultural heritage in China, it is explicitly stated that various methods such as text, audio, video, and digital multimedia should be used for the comprehensive and authentic recording of intangible cultural heritage. Archives and databases should be established.

The country is adapting to technological advancements by incorporating new media technologies and activities to continuously strengthen the dissemination and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, aiming to record and preserve traditional culture. Digital technology has become an essential factor in the development of the present era.

According to relevant surveys, activities related to this intangible cultural heritage in China are gradually entering people's lives. For instance, in October 2019, XiangYunSha made an appearance at the "Silk Road International Fashion Week". In October 2020, the "2020 Shunde (International) XiangYunSha Cultural and Creative Design Week" with the theme "Inheriting Intangible Cultural Heritage, Creative Living" was held. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on offline activities during this period, online promotion data for XiangYunSha has been continuously improving with government support.

The dissemination of intangible cultural heritage not only requires support from the national and local levels but also relies on continuous efforts from individuals to carry forward and pass down the heritage. In recent years, a search on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database regarding XiangYunSha reveals a yearly increase in research, indicating that national policies play a significant role in boosting the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

Under the influence of the policies vigorously promoting and inheriting outstanding intangible cultural heritage domestically, China's intangible cultural heritage has been receiving attention. However, certain elements, such as XiangYunSha, with strong local characteristics due to reliance on geographical and environmental factors, may have lower popularity among people outside the local region.

### ***2.2. The overseas market has a significant gap, providing ample room for expansion.***

Through an understanding of history, it is discovered that XiangYunSha existed as early as the Yongle period of the Ming Dynasty in the Guangdong region. This fabric was produced and exported to countries with similar climates in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia. This indicates that this type of fabric appeared long ago, though it remained largely unknown to most people. In the Ming and Qing periods, during the Ming Dynasty, XiangYunSha began to be exported overseas on a large scale. Due to the complex production process, a singular usage, and specific climatic conditions, it earned the title of "soft gold." However, the inability for large-scale production and exportation was a result of these factors.

Cross-cultural international dissemination. It is an important part of the international dissemination of China's foreign intangible cultural heritage in recent years [3]. This cross-cultural research on China's intangible cultural heritage has attracted widespread attention from scholars both domestically and abroad. Research directions include not only the commercial and cultural marketing communication of intangible cultural heritage on the international stage but also academic exchanges in culture. In the research on the commercial marketing communication of culture, various forms of communication strategies, such as event design and promotion, are often employed. In academic exchanges, approaches like cultural integration and cultural sharing are used for cross-cultural exploration, aiming to "take the essence and discard the dross."

Regarding how cultural communication is conducted for commercial promotion, American scholar McCracken has explored the relationship between culture and consumption in North America. He outlined the generation and innovation of cultural elements and how they are conveyed to consumers through the process of product design and marketing. He pointed out that cultural innovation is a significant driving force for Western business and social development. Fashion systems and advertising systems are crucial in combining cultural innovation with products and ultimately conveying them to consumers [4].

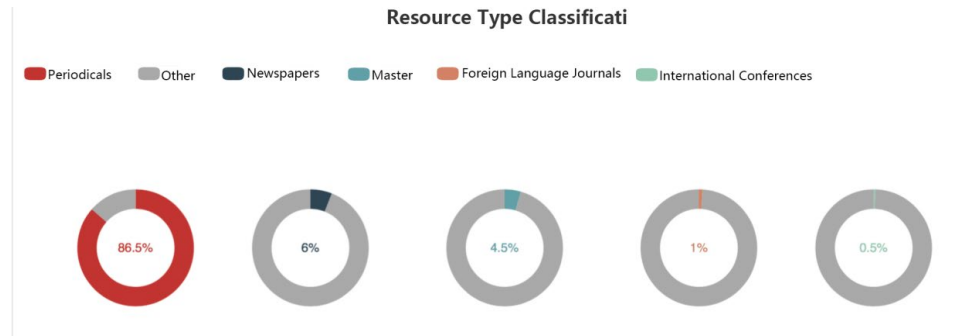


Figure 1: Resource Type Classification of Xiangyun yarn (Picture source: CNKI)

According to the data from Figure 1, foreign publications only account for one percent of the total, while international conferences represent only 0.5 percent; this indicates a relatively low proportion, suggesting a significant gap in the global discussion of XiangYunSha culture.

Through an investigation and analysis of representative media both domestically and internationally, it is observed that, influenced by the "Belt and Road" initiative and the current globalized context, numerous media platforms have emerged that are suitable for both domestic and international audiences. These platforms aim to provide access to the latest developments globally, creating an excellent avenue for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. This trend is currently a favorable aspect of the media landscape.

Under the influence of globalization, there is a continuous proliferation of shared media outlets both domestically and internationally. While, at present, there may be some inadequacy in the overseas understanding of China's intangible cultural heritage, the ongoing strengthening of China and the development of the international digital cultural industry contribute to an increasing understanding, acceptance, and consumption of Chinese culture worldwide. This serves as a positive catalyst for the cross-cultural dissemination of China's intangible cultural heritage.

### 3. Communication Strategy under the Belt and Road Initiative

#### 3.1. Communicate China stories well

To improve effective communication, the prerequisite should be well-prepared. In the social and international environment, more people are seeking to return to the basics. For a long time, China's foreign communication is usually politically oriented, and this government-driven mode is accompanied by strong propaganda, which directly leads to the concept of people attaching more importance to the country's image, interests, and emphasizing the cultural differences. In recent years, the continuous development of China's economy has led to the lagging behind of the economic development of China's foreign communication ability, and the arrival of the Internet and the new media era has led to the rapid circulation of information. The principles and concepts of China's external communication under the new situation have been undergoing a major transformation, not only internal communication and external publicity, but also focusing on how to communicate in an innovative sense, and at the same time, transforming from "External Publicity" to "External Communication", and from "Self-centeredness" to "Cultural Differences"[5]. From "self-centered" to "integration of China and foreign countries," from simply introducing China to the world to carefully narrating, or what we call "telling Chinese stories well," this change is noticeable. This evolution in communications strategy does not mean our national interest in external communications will diminish. Instead, it reflects a balanced approach to the interplay between cultural communication and advocacy. By leveraging national policies, we aim to achieve more impactful communication outcomes. We encourage countries along the route to transition from passive understanding to active participation so that more people can develop an appreciation for Chinese culture.

### **3.2. Disseminating Intangible Cultural Heritage along the Belt and Road**

With the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative, and the report of the Twentieth National Congress pointed out that "the joint construction of the 'One Belt, One Road' has become a popular international public product and international cooperation platform." The culture along the route plays a very good role in promoting. Fragrant cloud yarn, as a culture and a traditional fabric in Guangdong, has a long history, and is one of the few silk fabrics in the world that is handmade with vegetable dyes and mineral dyes, with rich historical and cultural connotations and unique texture of the product, and its dyeing and finishing techniques have been included in the list of China's intangible cultural heritage<sup>[6]</sup>, so it is more representative of the dissemination of the case. As a non-legacy "Fragrant Cloud Yarn" clothing culture, it is disseminated into the market so that inheritance and innovation are significant; this not only promotes the Chinese national culture and spreads the intangible cultural heritage but also lets more people understand and recognize the profoundness of Chinese culture. With the country's good policies and geographical advantages, the intangible cultural heritage replaced the dissemination to achieve the role of XiangYunSha in the dissemination of different regions, undoubtedly creating an excellent opportunity for the iconic product XiangYunSha to leave the country.

### **3.3. Overlay of Intangible Cultural Heritage Industries**

Integrating intangible cultural heritage into products that align with the industrial characteristics of each country isn't about abandoning the traditional practices of singular "Chinaization" and "unification." Instead, it involves tailoring the integration of Yun Brocade culture according to the regional characteristics of each country, taking into account specific climates, cultural customs, and political backgrounds. This approach allows for a more nuanced and adaptable strategy that respects and aligns with the diverse contexts of each region.<sup>[7]</sup> Effective integration of resource advantages, doing an excellent job of China's non-heritage industry special planning, and grasping the relevant non-heritage industrialization overlay construction. In terms of publicity, we should make good use of modern technology for advertising, promotion, and dissemination, adopt diversified forms of media, understand and analyze the differences between different countries, and make use of information media communication to realize an effective communication strategy for the superposition of non-heritage industries between other regions. In terms of products, besides the fabrics of "Fragrant Cloud Yarn" itself, garments, accessories, silk scarves, embroidery, bags, shoes, the derivatives of peripheral products, cultural and creative products, etc., can be superimposed on the related industries in different regions for exporting, such as functional pharmacological massage whacks made from Fragrant Cloud Yarn, masks and eye masks made from Fragrant Cloud Yarn, and printed tea sets, etc., or combining with the printed tea sets, etc. to realize the effective communication strategy of the non-heritage industry among different regions. Combined with the country's characteristics, the product superposition is integrated into the local industry to eliminate a single form of dissemination of products and achieve the effective dissemination of "Fragrant Cloud Yarn" in different regions of the culture.

### **3.4. Event Logo Communication**

The 20th Congress report emphasizes: "The next five years are a crucial period for the initial stage of comprehensively building a socialist modern country. The main goal is to make the spiritual and cultural life of the people more enriching, and the cohesion of the Chinese nation and the influence of Chinese culture continue to strengthen." To promote the effective popularization and development of intangible cultural heritage, it is first essential for communicators to understand and identify with their own culture, integrating culture into daily life through internal influence. Secondly, by organizing online and offline dissemination activities and utilizing pre, during, and post-event branding to continually reinforce the impact of activities, one can enhance the cumulative communication benefits, thereby playing a supportive role.

#### **3.4.1. Pre-event**

1) Start with a market environment analysis and promote "conceptual advertising." Collect basic public opinions on "XiangYunSha" related advertisements through preliminary surveys.

- Objective of "conceptual advertising": Disseminate concepts.

2) Adjust promotion based on collected data, mobilize the public's enthusiasm, and promote "responsive advertising" to guide public enthusiasm and focus through pre-market warming.

- Objective of "responsive advertising": Target the audience.

#### **3.4.2. Mid-event**

1) Position advertising based on the direction of the target audience, highlight the strength of the event through "powerful advertising." Persuade the public with real data to strengthen awareness of the event, gaining public recognition and trust.

- Objective of "powerful advertising": Improve credibility.

2) Use "symbolic advertising" with concrete symbols to increase public information recognition and enhance the public's impression of the event.

- Objective of "symbolic advertising": Symbolize.

#### **3.4.3. Post-event**

1) Post-event promotion is particularly crucial. The purpose of "nostalgic advertising" is to increase public memory points and lay the groundwork for future event promotion through nostalgic promotion.

- Objective of "nostalgic advertising": Strengthen memory.

2) Given the strong support for public welfare activities, tracking reports on excellent public welfare projects can mobilize the public's sense of charity.

- Objective of "public welfare advertising": Track feedback.

### **4. Activity Stimulates Industrial Economic Development**

This study examines the cultural impact of Guangdong Province, a key region along the Belt and Road initiative, through the perspective of traditional Chinese culture, with a focus on the cultural significance of XiangYunSha. The research explores how XiangYunSha, as a cultural symbol, can be promoted through event planning to enhance the region's cultural identity and contribute to the short-term and long-term development of surrounding industries.

#### **4.1. Short-term Plan**

1) The objective of the short-term plan is to leverage favorable government policies to promote XiangYunSha, enhance traditional Chinese culture, and create a memorable cultural symbol for the region.

2) Improve media platform communication channels and use cultural resources to create unique initiatives. To enhance attendee engagement, integrate interactive elements into the event to encourage active participation in XiangYunSha culture among participants, thus fostering the subsequent dissemination of local resources in the market. It will help enhance communication efficiency and stimulate the growth of industries and economies along the Belt and Road.

#### **4.2. Long-term Plan**

1) The long-term plan focuses on the promotion of activities and cultural awareness to drive cultural, tourism, and economic development. This, in turn, influences communication between related industries such as shopping, dining, and leisure, forming a scientifically planned layout for cultural, tourism, and economic integration.

2) Establishing a clear framework through the implementation of the Xiangyun yarn promotion plan. Organizers should prioritize the tangibility and participation of Chinese traditional culture to form a unique cultural identity and adopt a recognizable marketing communication method.

3) Recognizing the constraints of the real economy on cultural communication within the current international context. It is imperative to advocate for the integration of culture and digital industries. By actively utilizing digital platforms, we can expand cultural dissemination and promote the digital transformation and integrated development of the "Belt and Road" culture.

## 5. Summary

The article analyzes the current domestic and international situations, pointing out the limited dissemination of ICH. Despite strong support from national policies in recent years, most ICH is still not well-known, particularly local ICH, which faces challenges in reaching a global audience. The article proposes communication strategies to address this issue, leveraging the "Belt and Road" initiative as a breakthrough. Tailored strategies are suggested based on the diverse conditions of different countries, emphasizing storytelling, regional strategies along the Belt and Road, industry overlay, and establishing identification for effective ICH communication. The article advocates for increased efforts in digital cultural industry promotion, utilizing the benefits of events to drive economic development in the cultural industry.

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