



## Abstract

This study adopts empathic communication theory as its analytical framework and examines a contemporary paradox in the short-video dissemination of Xunpu culture, in which the growing visibility of cultural symbols is accompanied by a weakening of cultural context and value recognition. Using a qualitative research design, the study draws on field observations in Xunpu Village, semi-structured interviews with 12 local intangible cultural heritage inheritors and knowledgeable community members, and content and case analyses of 300 short-video samples collected from Douyin and Xiaohongshu. The data were coded and analyzed in terms of narrative structures, audiovisual presentations, and interaction patterns, with findings triangulated across field observations, interview data, and online samples. Based on this analysis, the study develops a three-tier framework encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral empathy. The findings indicate that short-video representations of Xunpu culture often compress cultural contexts into highly recognizable visual symbols, diminish women's lived experiences and ritual emotions, and restrict audience engagement to imitation and performative check-ins. These limitations constrain deeper cultural understanding, emotional identification, and meaningful participation. Accordingly, the study proposes strengthening cognitive empathy through temporal narrative reconstruction and contextual restoration, enhancing affective empathy through regional soundscapes and detailed sound effects, and facilitating behavioral empathy through embodied experiences and user co-creation. Together, these strategies form a progressive communicative pathway that guides audiences from viewing to understanding and from emotional resonance to active participation. The study concludes that an empathic communication perspective can contribute to deeper cultural meaning-making and audience participation in Xunpu short-video communication, while providing practical guidance for the living transmission of Minnan intangible cultural heritage in digital media environments.

**Keywords:** empathic communication, Xunpu culture, short videos

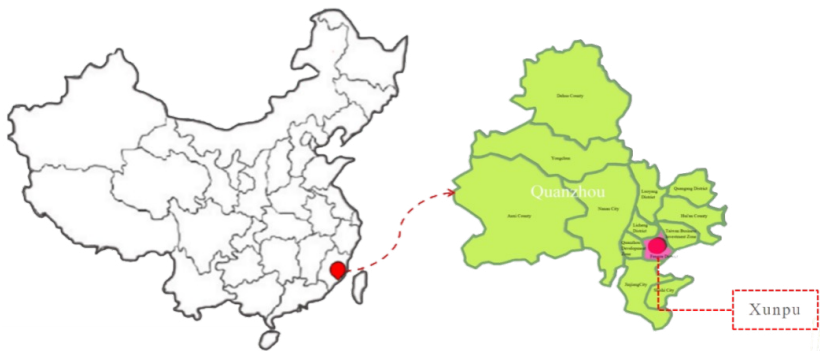
## 1 Introduction

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Xunpu Village, located in the Fengze District of Quanzhou in southern Fujian, China, is a representative maritime women's folk settlement along the Maritime Silk Road (see Figure 1). Its local culture has been shaped by marine-based production activities, wedding customs, women's community traditions, and everyday life practices. Supported by core elements such as oyster-shell houses, fisheries-related livelihoods, ritual festivals, and the Zanhua floral headdress tradition (see Figure 2), Xunpu forms a distinctive cultural landscape characterized by strong regional identity. With the rapid expansion of short-video platforms, visually distinctive cultural features such as the Zanhua headdress, women's everyday life scenes, and coastal village settings have been widely disseminated on platforms including Douyin and Xiaohongshu. However, under the combined influence of algorithmic mechanisms and platform-driven aesthetics, these representations increasingly remain at a surface level. Many videos emphasize stylized posing, travel-oriented reenactments, and symbolic consumption. As a result, cultural context, emotional structures, and ritual meanings are continuously compressed, leading to symbolic simplification, spectacle formation, and a weakening of cultural significance. Building on this perspective, the present study has two primary objectives. First, it examines the characteristics and key limitations of Xunpu cultural communication in short-video environments, with particular attention to cultural representation, emotional expression, and audience participation. Second, it explores how empathic communication can enhance cultural understanding, emotional identification, and participatory engagement through the dimensions of cognitive, affective, and behavioral empathy. By integrating empathic communication theory into the analysis of Xunpu cultural communication, the study seeks to shift the focus of digital cultural dissemination from visual presentation toward value recognition, thereby providing theoretical and practical insights for the living transmission of Xunpu culture in digital media environments.

**Figure 1**

*Location of Xunpu village*



The study adopts multiple research methods, including field observation, content analysis, case analysis, and interviews, to ensure the diversity of data sources and the validity of research conclusions. The researcher conducted several field visits to Xunpu Village, systematically documenting wedding rituals, the Zanhua headdress process, village spatial settings, and related cultural activities. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with twelve local intangible cultural heritage inheritors and knowledgeable community members to collect key insights on the Zanhua tradition, wedding customs, and their dissemination through short-video platforms. A total of 300 short-video samples related to Xunpu culture were gathered from platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu. These samples were coded and analyzed in terms of their narrative structures, audiovisual presentations, and interaction patterns. Representative cases were then selected for further in-depth discussion. Based on the triangulation of field observations, interview data, and online samples, an analytical framework grounded in cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and behavioral empathy was constructed. This framework explains how Xunpu culture transitions from mere visibility to cultural understanding and participatory engagement within the short-video media environment.

**Figure 2**

*The headdress worn by Xunpu women*



## 2 Minnan Xunpu Culture on Short-Video Platforms: Current Situation and

### Challenges

#### 2.1 Current Communication Status

In recent years, Xunpu culture has gained substantial visibility on short-video platforms and is often regarded as a breakthrough in the digital dissemination of traditional folk customs. However, the expansion of communication volume has not been accompanied by a corresponding deepening of cultural understanding. Influenced by platform-driven aesthetics, algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, and template-based content production, the representation of Xunpu culture has gradually shifted from community-grounded narratives to platform-oriented visual production. The most prominent expressions of this shift appear in the visual reproduction of Zanhua headdressing, Xunpu women's fishing labor, and oyster-shell house clusters. Taking Zanhua as an example, its vivid colors and high recognizability make it especially attractive within platform traffic systems, leading to extensive replication and formulaic reuse online. As shown in Figure 3, contemporary short-video platforms visually standardize and stylize Zanhua through repeated aesthetic templates and staged

compositions, gradually transforming it from a ritual practice into a reproducible visual motif. Filters, lighting effects, and aestheticized compositions further enhance its performative qualities, detaching the practice from the everyday life, family structures, and wedding rituals in which it is originally embedded, and reducing it to a medium of visual display. A similar pattern is evident in videos depicting Xunpu women’s labor scenes, oyster-shell house settings, and traditional ceremonial practices. A large proportion of content reduces cultural expression to surface-level visual demonstration and pose-based reenactment, while weakening the embedded social relations, emotional structures, and lived logics that give the culture its meaning. Through continuous replication, these images become increasingly detached from their original life contexts, resulting in the erosion of cultural significance and creating tension between the rapid circulation of cultural forms and the shallow depth of cultural understanding. Overall, Xunpu culture on short-video platforms exhibits a clear trend toward de-contextualization. Watching replaces understanding, imitation replaces lived experience, and surface-level dissemination struggles to convey the deeper layers of cultural meaning.

**Figure 3**

*Short-video representations of Xunpu zanhua*



*Note.* From Zanhua [Video], by J. T. Zang, 2024, March 10, TikTok. (<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSPfRgRCj/>)

## 2.2 Existing Problems

Despite the growing visibility of Xunpu culture on short-video platforms, multiple ruptures emerge in the process of cultural representation under the combined influence of visualized presentation, aestheticization, and algorithmic reinforcement. The major challenges at this stage can be summarized in three aspects.

### 2.2.1 Weakening of Cultural Context

The visual-centered structure of short-video communication compresses diverse elements of Xunpu culture into easily recognizable visual symbols, such as the Zanhua headdress style, the postures of Xunpu women engaged in fishing labor, the exterior features of oyster-shell houses, and fragmented gestures from wedding rituals. The original narrative logic, everyday background, and ritual structure of the culture are difficult to express through such imagery, resulting in fragmented and decontextualized representations. Most content consumed by viewers consists of aesthetically polished and technologically processed segments that lack the contextual information necessary for cultural understanding. Consequently, the meaning-bearing capacity of cultural expression declines, and the representation shifts from a lived cultural landscape to a surface-level visual style.

### 2.2.2 Absence of Women's Subjectivity

Xunpu culture is deeply intertwined with women's lived experiences, including identity transformation in the Zanhua ceremony, family roles in fishing labor, and social responsibilities within marriage customs. However, in short-video dissemination, the subjectivity of Xunpu women is often reduced to a visual object. Their emotional structures, life trajectories, and cultural identities are insufficiently represented. The Zanhua practice is frequently treated merely as a decorative display; fishing labor is simplified into stylized poses; and festive events are detached from their cultural contexts and reproduced as performative spectacles. As a result, the cultural depth of women's identities is diminished. Narrative agency shifts from subject-centered expression to aestheticized observation, gradually diluting the emotional, social, and existential dimensions embedded in the culture.

### 2.2.3 Superficial Interaction

Interactive mechanisms on short-video platforms are largely shaped by imitation, check-ins, templated shooting, and the application of filters. Such forms of participation remain centered on visual replication rather than genuine engagement with the value systems, ritual meanings, or emotional structures embedded in Xunpu culture. Platform algorithms tend to amplify easily reproducible visual elements instead of culturally substantive content, creating a paradox in which user participation increases while cultural understanding decreases. Since interactive behaviors lack immersion and continuity, the development of cultural identification becomes difficult. As interaction becomes shallow and transient, cultural dissemination expands in breadth but experiences substantial losses in depth.

The dissemination of Xunpu culture on short-video platforms thus displays a dual tendency of expanding visual forms while diminishing cultural meaning. Platform mechanisms heighten the visual appeal of cultural symbols but do not effectively promote cultural understanding, emotional resonance, or identity formation. Surface-level viewing is insufficient to meet the deeper needs of cultural communication, resulting in representations that remain predominantly visualized, symbolized, and superficially interactive. Under these conditions, adopting an empathy-based communication framework becomes particularly necessary. By reinforcing cognitive understanding, emotional connection, and behavioral participation, Xunpu culture can regain cultural depth and communicative agency within digital media environments.

## 3 Applicability of Empathy Communication to the Short-Video

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### Dissemination of Xunpu Culture

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Empathy communication, developed through the intersection of communication studies and psychology, emphasizes that communication involves not

only the reception and interpretation of information but also a multilayered interactive process encompassing cognitive understanding, emotional experience, and behavioral participation. Within short-video media environments, empathy communication focuses on the gradual transition of audiences from viewing to emotional projection and behavioral response. Through the interaction of cognitive engagement, emotional activation, and action-based expression, audiences move from surface-level watching to deeper cultural experience, eventually forming cultural identification and participatory intention through sustained emotional connection. This section reviews the theoretical foundation of empathy communication and explores its applicability and theoretical value in the dissemination of Xunpu culture through short-video platforms.

### **3.1 Empathy Communication Theory**

The theoretical origins of empathy communication can be traced to early psychological studies of empathy. In its earliest form, empathy was understood as a process of emotional projection in which individuals infused their own feelings into the objects they perceived (Duan et al., 1996). As research evolved, empathy came to be conceptualized as both a cognitive and emotional capacity that enables individuals to understand the internal experiences of others. Rogers (1957) emphasized that empathy is not merely a psychological technique but a way of entering another person's experiential world. He argued that empathy requires individuals to sense others' emotions while maintaining self-awareness. Kalisch (1973) further noted that empathy is reflected in the ability to recognize, understand, and respond to others' emotions in interactive contexts, with emotional perception and sharing at its core. Building on these psychological foundations, communication scholars began integrating empathy into media research. Empathy communication emerged from the psychological concept of empathy but shifted its focus from individual internal experience to the generation, diffusion, and interaction of collective emotions within the communication process. Liu and Song (2020) argued that empathy communication involves the acceptance, expression, and sharing of emotions within group emotional contexts, forming a process of multi-actor emotional participation. Zhao (2021) further proposed that the essence of empathy communication lies in the formation and expansion of shared emotions, high-

lighting the cascading effects of emotional transmission throughout the communication chain.

Taken together, empathy communication provides a theoretically robust framework for interpreting the dissemination patterns of Xunpu culture on short-video platforms. The theory conceptualizes communication as a continuous chain linking cognitive understanding, emotional activation, and behavioral response. It highlights whether audiences can move beyond surface-level sensory stimulation to grasp cultural meaning, establish emotional connections, and develop action-oriented intentions when encountering Xunpu cultural content. Compared with traditional models that prioritize visibility and communication efficiency, empathy communication places greater emphasis on meaning-making, emotional bonding, and the depth of participant engagement. It therefore offers a more effective explanation of how Xunpu culture may shift from aesthetic consumption to cultural identification, and it provides a theoretical foundation for understanding its deeper dissemination mechanisms within short-video environments. Recent Chinese scholarship applying empathy-based frameworks to online communication, short-video narratives, and the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage further supports the theoretical construction of this study.

### **3.2 Feasibility of Applying Empathy Communication to the Short-Video Dissemination of Xunpu Culture**

The dissemination of Xunpu culture within short-video environments can be understood as a dynamic system composed of cultural foundations, empathy mechanisms, audience transformation, and feedback loops. Xunpu culture serves as the value source of communication and enters audience cognition through two complementary pathways: immersive empathy and interactive empathy. Under the operation of empathy communication mechanisms, these pathways progressively generate three sequential layers of empathy: cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and behavioral empathy. Once audiences move through this multilayered empathy chain, cultural identification and culturally motivated actions emerge as resonance-based outcomes. These outcomes allow Xunpu culture to shift from symbolic visibility to value-oriented recognition, thereby producing substantive communicative effectiveness. The proposed empathy-based communication

framework emphasizes the bidirectional and even multidirectional interactions among the communicator, the cultural text, and audience experience. Short-video content constructs meaning and emotion not only through narrative structures, ritual elements, and lived cultural contexts but also through interactive mechanisms such as comments, dialogic exchanges, and participatory creation, which incorporate audiences into the ongoing reproduction of culture. When communicative effects flow back to creators and cultural texts through feedback systems, the resulting new patterns of cognition, emotion, and action stimulate the next cycle of dissemination. This process enables local culture to achieve a dynamic and living circulation within digital media environments, supporting its continuous regeneration and sustained reproduction.

### 3.2.1 Cognitive Empathy

Xunpu culture functions as the foundational text within short-video communication, and its narrative construction, contextual restoration, and symbolic interpretation together guide audiences into the stage of cognitive empathy, where understanding becomes the central mode of engagement. At this stage, the clarity and interpretability of cultural information enable viewers to establish a stable and coherent meaning framework during initial exposure. The symbolic system, ritual logic, and collective memory embedded in Xunpu's floral-headdress tradition carry a high degree of cultural density. Their meaning formation depends on a complete narrative chain and a perceptible cultural environment. Integrating the wedding sequence, the bride's identity transition, and the emotional ties among kinship networks into an overarching narrative structure allows audiences to create cognitive links between cultural symbols and their own experiential references. The emergence of cognitive empathy thus marks a shift from surface recognition to semantic understanding, laying the groundwork for emotional empathy and pushing short-video communication beyond the limits of visual consumption.

**Figure 4**

*Midnight Wedding Ritual in Xunpu*



Building on this foundation, Figure 4 illustrates how cognitive empathy is activated through cultural temporality and ritual sequencing by presenting key scenes from a short animated film depicting the Xunpu Midnight Wedding custom. The narrative follows the chronological order of traditional Xunpu weddings and links actions such as the escorting of dowries, bridal grooming, floral-headdress preparation, ritual exchanges, nocturnal walking, and spatial transitions through a coherent sequence of shots. Representative scenes include the matchmaker leading the dowry procession accompanied by the rhythmic sounds of shoulder poles, family members helping the bride with grooming and Zanhua adornment, and the bride walking to the groom's home between 3:00 and 5:00 a.m. while carrying an umbrella, a practice rooted in local beliefs about avoiding spiritual interference. The video also presents the bride's quiet midnight return to her parents' home, which further highlights the distinctive temporal and spatial logic of Xunpu wedding rituals (Zhang, 2004). These ritualized actions, emotional rhythms, and spatial movements together form a culturally grounded narrative through which the meaning of the wedding ritual unfolds progressively. The visual representation not only reconstructs the socio-cultural context of Xunpu marriage customs but also allows viewers to perceive shifts in identity, kinship relations, and emotional structures through temporal coherence. In this way, the animated sequence more effectively activates cognitive empathy and

enhances the ability of short-video communication to generate and convey cultural meaning.

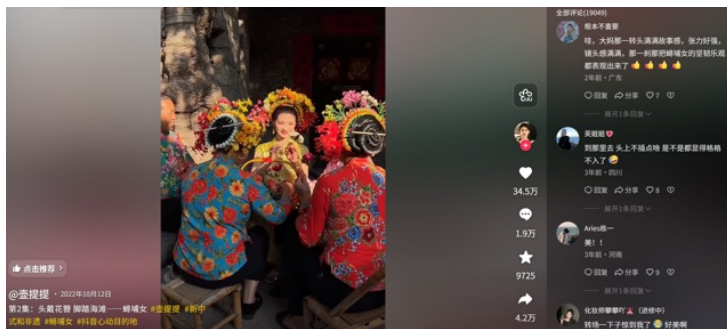
### 3.2.2 Affective Empathy

Once the cognitive framework has been established, the communicative structure guides audiences toward affective empathy, a process that typically unfolds along two pathways: immersive empathy and interactive empathy. Immersive empathy draws on contextualized narratives and ritual detail to construct an emotional atmosphere that enables viewers to enter the cultural scene at an affective level. Interactive empathy, by contrast, is facilitated through platform mechanisms such as comments, dialogic exchanges, and livestream interactions, which heighten emotional presence and create a continuous flow between watching and participating. Life-cycle rituals, family relations, and women's labor in Xunpu culture all contain dense affective cues. Whether in the cooperative interactions of daily work or in the emotional bonds expressed during wedding ceremonies, these culturally embedded situations provide powerful triggers for affective resonance. When short videos present these contexts through embodied perspectives, close-up details, and experiential storytelling, viewers shift from rational comprehension to emotional immersion, transforming observation into affectively engaged cultural experience. Affective empathy therefore functions as a pivotal transitional link in the communication chain and serves as a key mediator in the formation of cultural identification. As illustrated in Figure 5, a representative short-video example further demonstrates how affective empathy emerges in practice. The image on the left depicts Xunpu women collaboratively crafting floral headdresses, where their focused and rhythmic movements create a warm and emotionally charged atmosphere characteristic of women's collective labor. The comment section on the right shows audience responses that include memory recall, aesthetic appreciation, and identity-based emotions. This juxtaposition of visual context and user interaction suggests that emotional resonance arises not only from the internal dynamics of the imagery but also from the amplification and accumulation produced through platform-based interaction. The process reveals how Xunpu culture, within short-video environments, generates and expands affective

empathy through the combined effects of immersive storytelling and interactive participation.

**Figure 5**

*Immersive presentation of a Xunpu cultural scene and emotional interactions among short-video users*



*Note.* From *Head adorned with floral pins and feet on the seashore: Xunpu women* [Video], by T. T. Hu, 2022, October 12, Douyin. (<https://v.douyin.com/O3xUIT8NRZ4/>)

### 3.2.3 Behavioral Empathy

Behavioral empathy represents the highest stage in the empathy chain and indicates that audiences transform cognitive understanding and emotional resonance into concrete cultural action. At this level, individuals shift from being viewers to becoming cultural agents. Manifestations of behavioral empathy include content reposting, secondary creation, narrative responses, and participation in cultural practices, all of which serve as key evidence of cultural vitality and autonomous transmission. In the context of Xunpu culture, such depth of engagement extends far beyond simply imitating the floral headdress or applying aesthetic filters. Instead, it emerges through identity-driven participation, such as sharing personal wedding memories, engaging in offline cultural experiences, or producing culturally grounded creative content. These practices expand the

depth of communication and, through feedback loops, influence creators' narrative strategies and production choices. The reciprocal reinforcement between communicative action and cultural identification enables Xunpu culture to regenerate dynamically within digital media spaces and to sustain a vibrant cultural ecosystem. The illustrates participants embodied engagement in a Zanhua experiential workshop, including hands-on floral-headdress making, direct interaction with cultural inheritors, and in-situation learning of cultural knowledge. Such embodied and contextualized practices transform culture from an object of viewing into a lived form of action, effectively activating behavioral empathy and enhancing the capacity of Xunpu culture for living transmission.

In summary, the empathy-based mechanism reveals how the dissemination of Xunpu culture progresses through a sequential deepening of audience engagement. Cognitive empathy opens access to cultural meaning; emotional empathy strengthens affective resonance and experiential involvement; and behavioral empathy transforms this resonance into concrete cultural action. As these layers interact and are reinforced through feedback, they enable cultural communication to remain dynamic and regenerative. Ultimately, this mechanism supports a transition from superficial visual consumption toward participatory, meaning-centered, and value-co-creative forms of cultural transmission within digital media environments.

#### 4 Optimizing the Short-Video Dissemination of Xunpu Culture

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##### from the Perspective of Empathy Communication

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The dissemination of Xunpu culture on short-video platforms can be understood as a process in which cultural meaning, sensory perception, and participatory behavior jointly drive the formation of empathy. Communication is no longer limited to the presentation of visual symbols; rather, it operates

through the interplay of narrative, soundscape, and interactive mechanisms, guiding audiences from cognitive understanding to emotional resonance and ultimately toward action-based participation. Cultural subjects, audiovisual texts, and audience experience interact cyclically, enabling traditional culture to move beyond surface-level viewing. Drawing on the three-tier structure of empathy communication, this section explores optimized communication pathways across three dimensions: narrative construction, audiovisual integration, and interactive co-creation.

#### **4.1 Narrative Construction to Strengthen Cognitive Empathy**

Cognitive empathy marks the critical transition from recognizing surface symbols to comprehending cultural meaning. Its formation relies on the completeness of narrative chains, the perceptibility of cultural contexts, and the use of experiential subject perspectives. In the lived context of Xunpu Zanhua culture, wedding rituals follow a clear temporal rhythm and ceremonial logic. However, short-video platforms often fragment or compress this structure, making it difficult for audiences to accurately perceive cultural significance. It is therefore necessary to reconstruct narratives along an immersive empathy pathway, repositioning Xunpu culture from static folkloric images to lived practices with temporal depth and social structure, thereby providing stable entry points for cognitive empathy.

##### **4.1.1 Reconstructing Narrative Sequences Through Cultural Temporality**

The Zanhua wedding ritual consists of interconnected steps, including preparing dowries, dressing and grooming, wearing the floral headdress, and proceeding to the bridal sedan chair. Each step embodies shifts in identity, kinship relations, and value commitments. Converting this cultural process into a scripted narrative sequence suitable for short-video formats makes it possible to present a complete cultural timeline within limited duration. As the narrative unfolds, audiences can understand why Zanhua appears, how the ritual progresses, and within what relational networks it acquires meaning. Cultural logic thereby shifts from being an implicit background to becoming an explicit narrative context, enabling cognitive empathy to emerge naturally within an orderly temporal structure.

#### 4.1.2 Enhancing Cultural Perceptibility Through Contextual Restoration

Context is essential to cultural meaning-making. Interactions among family members, ceremonial spatial arrangements, ritualized bodily movements, and the physical attributes of cultural objects collectively form the textured environment of Xunpu wedding customs. Through deliberate cinematographic strategies—such as framing a grandmother adjusting the bride’s floral headdress, capturing family members gathering to send off the bride, or highlighting the material textures of oyster-shell houses along the coastal settlement—Zanhua ceases to appear as an isolated visual motif and becomes embedded within concrete familial structures and community relations. Observing these contextual details allows audiences to engage with the material, symbolic, and emotional layers of culture simultaneously, fostering more grounded cognitive empathy.

#### 4.1.3 Entering Internal Cultural Experience Through Subjective Perspectives

Subjective perspectives bridge external viewing and internal experience. First-person narration or camera angles that closely follow the protagonist can reveal the bride’s psychological shifts before and after wearing Zanhua, the mother’s whispered instructions and reluctance, or the grandmother’s recollections of her own wedding customs. Such representations allow audiences to enter the emotional world of cultural subjects. Culture consequently becomes not a static ethnographic display but a sequence of vivid and personal life experiences. The presence of subject voices reduces emotional distance and enables audiences to understand cultural logic through situational identification, transforming cognitive empathy from knowledge-based comprehension into experience-based understanding.

### 4.2 Audiovisual Integration to Strengthen Emotional Empathy

Emotional empathy represents the shift in cultural communication from rational understanding to affective engagement. Its development relies on the coordinated interaction between auditory elements such as music, ambient sound and detailed sound effects and the narrative structure of audiovisual content. At this stage, immersive empathy and interactive empathy intersect. Immersive empathy constructs emotional atmospheres through the integrated expression of sound and image, while interactive empathy extends emotional

experience through participatory spaces such as comments, bullet screens and user generated follow up videos. The regional soundscape of Minnan culture embedded in Xunpu traditions provides essential resources for shaping a distinctive and emotionally stable cultural field.

#### 4.2.1 Using Soundscapes to Create Cultural Emotional Atmospheres

Nanyin melodies, wedding drum patterns and ambient coastal or street sounds together form a unique acoustic spectrum of Xunpu culture. When these sounds accompany visuals of Zanhua headdressing or bridal departure, they evoke impressions of ritual solemnity, familial warmth and local memory. Integrating traditional soundscapes into short video narratives through contemporary recording and selective editing helps establish a clear emotional tone at the beginning of the viewing process. This auditory foundation enables viewers to enter cultural emotions early and provides the basis for the formation of emotional empathy.

#### 4.2.2 Advancing Emotional Progression Through Audiovisual Rhythm

The coordination between musical rhythm and visual pacing plays an important role in deepening emotional experience. Gentle instrumental pieces are well suited for depicting intimate moments of grooming and Zanhua preparation, while more intense rhythms can reflect the psychological tension associated with identity transitions. Slow and resonant melodies align naturally with scenes of departure and separation. When audiovisual rhythms unfold in a layered and progressive manner, viewers follow the emotional trajectory shaped by the soundscape and gradually enter the emotional world of the cultural subjects. Through this process, emotional empathy develops from simple sentiment into deeper resonance.

#### 4.2.3 Enhancing Embodied Experience Through Detailed Sound Effects

Compared with background music, detailed sound effects provide more tactile and immediate emotional cues. Sounds such as the soft click of a hairpin touching the hair, the subtle friction of garments, the rhythm of slow breathing or the gentle voice of an elder can be captured through close range recording and moderate amplification. These fine grained and authentic auditory details allow viewers to sense the tension, anticipation and bittersweet emotions experienced

by the cultural subjects. Emotional empathy is therefore transformed from an abstract response into an embodied experience. The audience is placed as if physically present within the ritual scene and gains a more immersive and culturally grounded emotional perception.

### **4.3 Interactive Co-Creation to Facilitate Behavioral Empathy**

Behavioral empathy represents the highest tier in the empathy communication chain and serves as an important indicator of whether Xunpu culture can achieve living transmission within digital environments. It appears first in audience actions that are motivated by cultural identification, and second in the feedback process through which user interactions influence content creators and cultural texts, allowing continuous refinement of narrative strategies. Short video platforms provide practical mechanisms such as likes, comments, follow shot videos and hashtag participation. These mechanisms form the operational basis for generating behavioral empathy and expanding its influence.

#### **4.3.1 Promoting Embodied Participation Through Experiential Engagement**

Simple imitation of the Zanhua hairstyle may increase online visibility, but it does not constitute meaningful cultural participation. Deeper forms of engagement can be cultivated through experiential activities such as Zanhua experience days, reenactments of wedding customs and hands on workshops organized with the involvement of intangible cultural heritage bearers. These settings, whether conducted offline or through integrated online and offline formats, allow participants to carry out actions such as hair grooming, floral pin placement and bridal send off rituals. The combination of physical participation and emotional experience strengthens behavioral empathy. In this process, culture shifts from a distant spectacle to a lived practice, leading participants from passive observation to active involvement as cultural agents.

#### **4.3.2 Building Distributed Cultural Memory Through User Co-Creation**

User co-creation plays an essential role in expanding behavioral empathy. When audiences reproduce Xunpu wedding customs from different narrative positions such as bride, mother, relative or observer and continuously generate content related to specific cultural themes, the authority of narration gradually

shifts from a single creator to a collective group of participants. For instance, a hashtag activity that invites users to record their grandmother's Zanhua stories or share personal memories related to Zanhua participation can encourage extensive cultural documentation. As these narratives accumulate, they form a dispersed and interconnected network of cultural memory. Through repeated storytelling and collaborative creation, Xunpu culture is continuously revised, enriched and revitalized, while cultural identity is strengthened through ongoing participation by many contributors.

#### 4.3.3 Using Feedback Loops to Sustain Cultural Regeneration and Dynamic Growth

Interactive behaviors such as comment exchanges, real time on screen messages, reposting with personal reflections and sharing within private communication channels broaden the circulation of cultural content and at the same time generate important feedback effects. These responses enable creators to adjust narrative structures, audiovisual approaches and interactive designs so that later works align more effectively with the expectations and emotional tendencies of the audience. Within this open and iterative system, cultural representation is continually updated and regenerated. In this way, Xunpu culture maintains dynamic vitality and sustained growth within digital environments.

In summary, the three dimensional communication pathway proposed in this chapter demonstrates how cognitive empathy, emotional empathy and behavioral empathy can be activated through narrative construction, audiovisual integration and interactive co creation. These mechanisms help short video representations of Xunpu culture move beyond fragmented symbolism and enable audiences to gain clearer cultural understanding, richer emotional connection and more meaningful forms of participation. By strengthening each stage of the empathy process, the optimized pathway provides a coherent structure for enhancing the communicative effectiveness of Xunpu culture in digital environments.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

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This study adopts empathic communication as its analytical framework to examine the communicative logic, symbolic transformation, and audience engagement patterns of Xunpu culture in short-video environments. The findings reveal a clear disconnection between cultural visibility and cultural understanding. While highly recognizable symbols enhance the visibility of Xunpu culture, the compression of cultural context, women's lived experiences, and ritual emotions limits deeper meaning-making and value identification. Audience engagement likewise tends to remain at the level of viewing, imitation, and performative participation rather than developing into sustained cultural involvement. These findings suggest that the communication challenges surrounding Xunpu culture arise not simply from insufficient exposure, but from discontinuities across the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of empathy.

These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of understanding and emotional resonance in empathic communication (Liu & Song, 2020). However, the Xunpu case further demonstrates that increased visual exposure and digital interaction do not necessarily lead to deeper cultural understanding, emotional identification, or meaningful participation. Highly recognizable cultural symbols may circulate widely while becoming detached from the historical contexts, everyday experiences, and cultural meanings from which they originate. Similarly, imitation, check-ins, and other forms of platform interaction may increase audience involvement without necessarily developing into sustained cultural engagement. The findings therefore extend existing discussions of empathic communication by showing that, in short-video environments, cognitive understanding and emotional resonance need to be connected with embodied experience and co-creation to facilitate meaningful cultural participation.

Based on these findings, the study proposes a three-dimensional pathway that integrates narrative reconstruction, audiovisual expression, and interactive co-creation across cognitive, affective, and behavioral empathy. Rather than treating empathy as an auxiliary communicative effect, this framework positions

it as a connective mechanism linking cultural understanding, emotional identification, and participatory engagement. Theoretically, the study extends the application of empathic communication from interpersonal and psychological contexts to the digital communication of local culture. Practically, the proposed pathway offers guidance for local communities, intangible cultural heritage inheritors, short-video creators, and cultural and tourism practitioners in developing culturally grounded communication practices through contextualized narratives, audiovisual storytelling, embodied experiences, and participatory co-creation. These practices may, in turn, encourage tourists and other audiences to move beyond visual consumption toward deeper cultural understanding, emotional engagement, and meaningful participation. Future research could examine the applicability of this framework across different intangible cultural heritage contexts and digital platforms, while also exploring how cognitive, affective, and behavioral empathy develop through sustained audience participation.

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