

A Study on Overseas Communication Effects and Cultural Image Construction of Chinese AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the deep integration of new media and AIGC technologies, Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas have emerged as an important vehicle for cross-cultural communication and outbound cultural products. Despite the growing commercial influence of AI-generated micro-dramas overseas, existing research has paid limited attention to how such productions shape China's national cultural image among foreign audiences. This study aims to examine the overall characteristics and effects of the overseas communication of Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas, analyze what kind of Chinese cultural image these works convey in cross-cultural communication, and accordingly propose targeted optimization suggestions. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, this paper integrates literature review, cross-border questionnaire survey, social-media text mining, and Python-assisted sentiment analysis. It finds that AI-generated micro-dramas have satisfied overseas Generation-Z audiences' fragmented entertainment demands. However, prominent communication deficiencies are observed, including homogenized template-driven production, flawed audiovisual and translation output, as well as superficial cultural expressions. Overseas audiences mostly encounter the micro-dramas through passive algorithm recommendations and hold fragmented perceptions of Chinese culture. Excessive "de-Sinicization" and melodramatic plots may even arouse cross-cultural controversies. Accordingly, the study puts forward targeted optimization suggestions covering content creation, creator awareness and platform operation. It maintains that the industry should conduct the transformation from "traffic-driven overseas output" to "culture-driven overseas output", thus improving cross-cultural communication of Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas in the new era.

Keywords: AI-generated micro-dramas; AIGC; Cultural going-global; Cross-cultural communication; National cultural image

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1. Introduction

Driven by the rapid growth of global short-form video platforms, micro-drama has emerged as one of

China's most influential vehicles for cross-border cultural output. Building China's national image serves as an important approach to enhancing international discourse power and influence, and to effectively conducting international public opinion guidance and struggles ^[1]. According to DataEye statistics, Chinese-origin micro-drama applications garnered more than 270 million downloads worldwide in the first quarter of 2025. By March of the same year, the number of Chinese-developed micro-drama applications launched in overseas markets had reached 237, representing a nearly four-fold year-on-year increase ^[2]. Recent advances in AI-assisted production have significantly reduced barriers to making micro-dramas targeting overseas audiences. Tasks including script writing, dubbing and subtitle translation can be completed in a shorter time, accelerating the global distribution of Chinese micro-drama content.

Although AI-generated micro-dramas gain millions of views on overseas streaming sites, their cross-cultural communication effects remain controversial. On one hand, fast-produced micro-dramas facilitate the delivery of Chinese cultural elements to global audiences. On the other hand, over-reliance on machine translation and formulaic plot templates may cause cultural misunderstandings or stereotyped images of China. Excessive "de-Sinicization" practices have resulted in the loss of cultural distinctiveness in these works ^[3]. Many existing studies focus on the overseas communication paths and strategies of microdramas, while fewer papers explore how these works shape China's national cultural image in foreign audiences' minds.

The study is mainly based on three core research questions. First, it explores the basic practical characteristics of Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas for overseas export. Second, it investigates the overall overseas communication effects of such micro-dramas and further analyzes the Chinese cultural images conveyed by these works in cross-cultural communication contexts. Third, it aims to propose feasible optimization strategies in response to the existing deficiencies. It intends to explore sustainable paths of leveraging AIGC technology to promote international cultural communication and present a comprehensive and multi-dimensional image of China in the AIGC era.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on AI-generated micro-dramas

Domestic and foreign academic circles have discussed AI-generated micro-dramas mainly in terms of technology applications, values, and optimization strategies.

International studies recognize that AIGC significantly optimizes micro-drama creation, enabling low-cost, large-scale overseas content output and effectively lowering cross-border communication barriers. Meanwhile, the latest research on emerging AI technologies highlights limitations of generative intelligent creation, including algorithmic homogeneity, mechanical symbolic stacking, and systematic defects in semantic understanding and cultural interpretation ^[4]. Still, such discussions remain largely at the technical level, with insufficient attention paid to their practical impacts on national cultural image shaping.

Domestic research has also affirmed the role of AI technology in enhancing micro dramas, but most studies adopt a utilitarian perspective that emphasizes technical logic and commercial benefits. Some scholars analyzed the underlying logic of AI technology to explore the potential for the integrated development of AI-generated micro-shorts and traditional Chinese culture ^[5], while others focused more on commercial value, examining the application and value creation of AI technology within the micro-drama industry chain and affirming the promising future of AI-generated micro-shorts ^[6]. However, neither of the two studies examined

the international cross-cultural communication effects of AI micro-dramas, which focused more on domestic aspects.

2.2. Research on national cultural image construction

Domestic and foreign research on national image construction has long confirmed that audiovisual media is an important carrier of cross-cultural soft power communication and plays an irreplaceable role in shaping a three-dimensional and credible national image.

Foreign studies focus on the cultural adaptation and audience reception of crossborder audiovisual productions, highlighting that differentiated, authentic localoriented content is critical for the construction of national image. Much recent foreign research on China's national-image construction takes China-themed short-form videos on TikTok as empirical objects. Highhouse surveyed 120 American college students, who were shown two real-world TikTok clips about China, to measure respondents' cognitive knowledge, affective attitudes and stereotyped perceptions toward China, thus exploring the impact of social media on the construction of a country's image^[7]. However, fewer studies have focused on AI micro-dramas as subjects of research.

Domestic studies on nationalimage construction mostly draw on newspaper reports. Taking China Daily's documentaries as samples, Zhang and Zhou analyze its spatialnarrative structure in international communication and advocate multimedia collaboration for China's positive overseas images^[8]. By contrast, similarly using China Daily's reports as a corpus, Liu examines nationalimage construction from a transitivity perspective^[9]. While both offer valuable insights into this media outlet, neither turns attention to emerging audiovisual forms such as microdramas. With the rapid popularization of AIGC technology, empirical and systematic research on the national image construction and communication effect of emerging AI-generated micro-dramas is still scarce, which leaves room for the present study.

3. Research questions and research methods

3.1. Research questions

Aiming at the overseas communication effects and cultural image construction of Chinese AI micro-dramas, this study mainly addresses the following 3 core research questions: (1) What are the basic practical characteristics of Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas for overseas export? (2) What are the overall overseas communication effects of Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas? What kinds of Chinese cultural images are delivered by these works during cross-cultural communication? (3) In view of the existing deficiencies in overseas communication, what feasible optimization strategies can be put forward? Through these three questions, the study intends to promote international cultural communication and better tell Chinese stories to global audiences by way of micro-dramas.

3.2. Research methods

- (1) Cross-Border Questionnaire Survey. English questionnaires are distributed to general overseas audiences to collect empirical data on respondents' subjective perceptions of Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas and cognition of China's national cultural image. 82 valid questionnaire samples are finally retained. The questionnaire adopts skip logic. Items concerning viewing experience, content preferences and perceived national image are answered only by respondents who have watched the Chinese AI-generated

micro-dramas (N=70). Awareness and demographic items are answered by the full sample (N=82). The reasons-for-non-viewing item is answered only by respondents who have never heard of such works (N=12). SPSS is employed to process the questionnaire data, mapping out overseas respondents' general viewing habits and their cognition of Chinese cultural elements.

- (2) **Social Media Text Mining and Word Cloud Visualization.** With the assistance of overseas international students, publicly available English user comments related to Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas are legally collected from mainstream overseas social-media platforms including TikTok and Instagram. In total, 2,097 raw comments are collected. User account IDs and meaningless repetitive filler content are removed, and evaluative texts with subjective emotional stances are reserved for subsequent research. From the cleaned corpus, 9,742 emotion-oriented words are extracted for the subsequent word-cloud visualization and sentiment analysis. The generated word cloud acts as an intuitive visual instrument to exhibit high-frequency concerns reflected in overseas audience comments.
- (3) **Python-Based Quantitative Sentiment Analysis.** Pre-processed comment texts are automatically classified into positive-emotion and negative-emotion corpora via Python programming. Word frequencies of emotion-oriented vocabulary are calculated and corresponding visual charts are produced. This quantitative sentiment-analysis procedure is adopted to quantify overseas audiences' overall positive and negative attitudes toward Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas, and further identify practical strengths and prominent deficiencies of such works in cross-cultural communication practices.

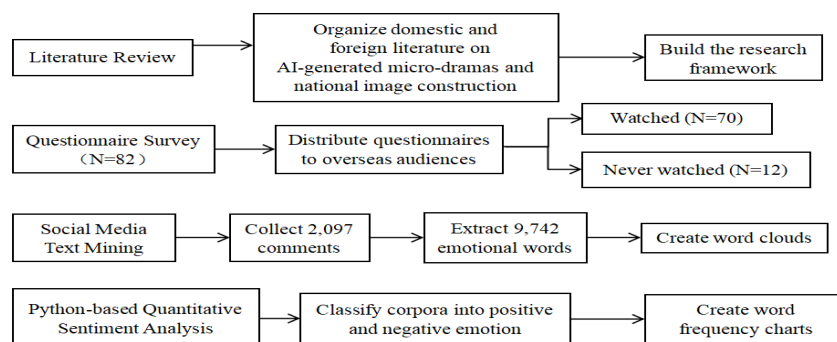


Figure 1. Research Roadmap.

4. Overseas communication and cultural image analysis of Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas

4.1. Quantitative findings on audience viewing behaviors

The respondents in this survey are highly concentrated in the 18-24 age group, accounting for 68.29 %. This demonstrates that Generation Z young people constitute the core overseas audience for Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas, while middle-aged and elderly audiences have low exposure to such works (Table 1). Notably, 37.14 % of respondents selected “Others” in terms of content access platforms (Table 2), indicating that specialized standalone micro-drama applications such as ReelShort and DramaBox serve as important viewing channels for audiences, in addition to mainstream social-media platforms.

Table 1. Age Profile of Survey Respondents

Age	Number	Percentage
Under 18	2	2.44%
18-24	56	68.29%
25-34	18	21.95%
35-44	5	6.1%
45-54	1	1.22%

Table 2. Distribution of Access Platforms for Chinese AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

Platform	Number	Percentage
TikTok	41	58.57%
YouTube	18	25.71%
Facebook	2	2.86%
Instagram	15	21.43%
Others	26	37.14%

With respect to the willingness for social dissemination, only 31.43 % of respondents are willing to share Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas on social platforms, and half of the respondents hold a neutral attitude (**Table 3**). Overall, overseas audiences show a weak inclination for spontaneous secondary communication, and the works can hardly achieve further outreach relying on user-driven social fission.

Table 3. Willingness for Social Dissemination of Chinese AI-Generated

Willingness	Number	Percentage
Willing	22	31.43%
Neutral	35	50%
Unwilling	13	18.57%

According to the survey, 61.43% of audiences passively watch AI-generated micro-dramas only upon platform recommendations (**Table 4**), demonstrating low voluntary viewing intention and weak user stickiness.

Table 4. Viewing Frequency of Chinese AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

Frequency	Number	Percentage
Every day	2	2.86%
Several times a week	16	22.86%
Occasionally a month	9	12.86%
Only when I come across them casually	43	61.43%

A further 25.61% of audiences are aware of Chinese AI micro-dramas but have never watched them (**Table 5**), primarily due to insufficient content exposure and algorithm push notifications, as well as unsatisfactory content selection, visual quality and subtitle translation of such works (**Table 6**).

Table 5. Viewing Status of Chinese AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

Status	Number	Percentage
Frequently	10	12.2%
Occasionally	39	47.56%

Status	Number	Percentage
Heard of but never watched	21	25.61%
Never heard of	12	14.63%

Table 6. Reasons for Non-Viewing of Chinese AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

Reasons	Number	Percentage
No relevant social media recommendations	5	41.67%
Not interested in Chinese fantasy/wuxia/rebirth themes	3	25%
Dissatisfied with AI production quality(image and dubbing)	2	16.67%
Prefer Western local-themed stories	3	25%
Dislike short and fragmented viewing format	0	0%

In terms of content preference, audiences favour live-action micro-dramas. Those who prefer AI-generated productions account for merely 7.14% (**Table 7**), while 57.14% acknowledge that live actors deliver more authentic emotional performances with stronger audience immersion (**Table 8**). This indicates that AI-generated micro-dramas should strive for greater authenticity and genuine emotional expression in their future development.

Table 7. Genre Preference of Chinese AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

Genre preference	Number	Percentage
AI-generated micro-dramas	5	7.14%
Traditionallive-action micro-dramas	27	38.57%
No obvious preference for both	23	32.86%
Interested in neither of them	15	21.43%

Table 8. Perceived Comparative Advantages of Live-Action and AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

Factors	Number	Percentage
More authentic emotional expression	40	57.14%
Natural facial and body performance	35	50%
More rigorous plots closer to real life	23	32.86%
Higher-quality realistic shooting visuals	29	41.43%
More natural cultural expression	24	34.29%
Natural lines and dubbing	26	37.14%

In respect of communication perception, 58.57% of audiences appreciate the tight narrative pacing of AI-generated micro-dramas, satisfying fragmented entertainment needs. Nevertheless, only 20% can perceive traditional Chinese cultural elements within the content (**Table 9**), indicating limited effectiveness of cultural communication.

Table 9. Distribution of Attractive Factors of Chinese AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

Factors	Number	Percentage
Compact plots with rich twists and creative story settings	34	48.57%
Innovative AI visuals and virtual scenes	25	35.71%
Distinctive traditional Chinese cultural elements	14	20%

the high frequency of negative terms including “bad”, “trash” and “disgust” suggests that exaggerated, melodramatic plot settings tend to trigger audience resentment and give rise to controversies in cross-cultural communication (Figure 4).

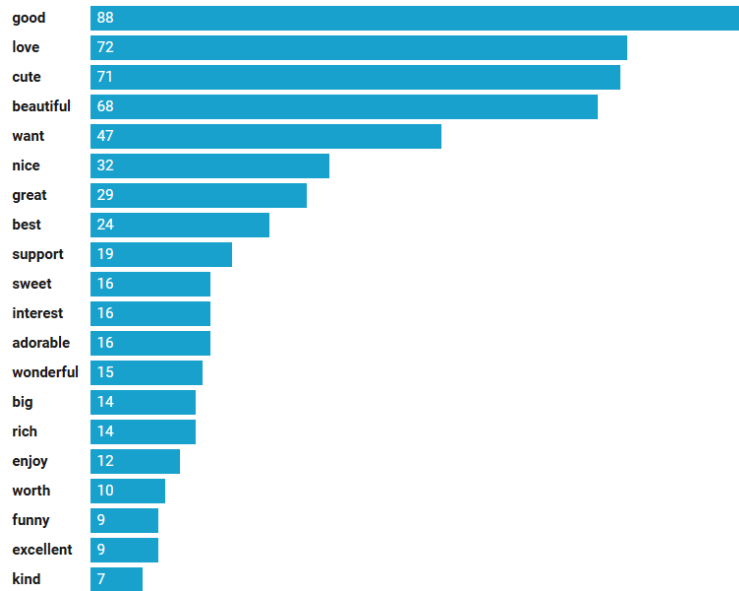


Figure 3. Frequency Distribution of Top-20 Positive Sentiment Words.

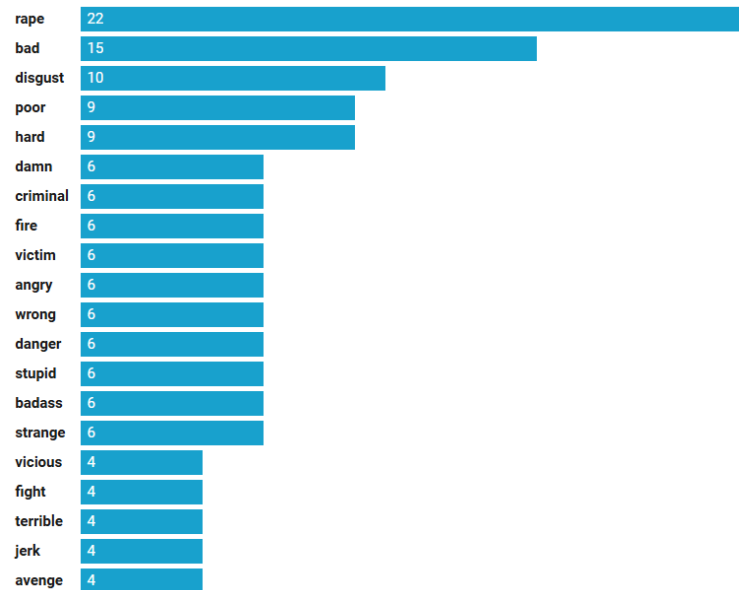


Figure 4. Frequency Distribution of Top-20 Negative Sentiment Words.

According to the word frequency and categorization, we found that emotional words extracted from valid user comments show prominent polarization. High-frequency positive words, including “good”, “love”, “cute”, and “beautiful”, focus on superficial entertainment experiences such as plot impression and character depiction. Representative remarks include “She is so cute like a doll, I like this drama!”

However, high-frequency negative words include “rape”, “bad”, “disgust”, “poor,” and so forth. Some of these terms criticize dramatic conflict settings, as reflected in comments like “Disgust sexual assault is a crime”, while others express audience dissatisfaction with content quality and narrative arrangement, illustrated by statements such as “AI is trash, poor quality. I could only watch a couple of minutes.”

Notably, neither the positive nor negative Top 20 emotional words embody vocabulary related to traditional Chinese culture, Chinese aesthetics, or indigenous cultural characteristics. Overseas audiences confine their discussions merely to entertainment experience without exploring in-depth cultural connotations. This further verifies that although AI-generated micro-dramas can arouse audiences’ basic emotions, they fail to stimulate overseas viewers’ perception and reflection on Chinese culture, resulting in evident disconnection in cultural communication.

4.3 Communication dilemmas

Chinese AI-generated microdramas produce limited national-cultural image communication effects. Highly entertaining and dramatized content lacks substantial cultural connotations.

AI-generated micro-dramas exhibit pronounced quality deficiencies and widespread homogenization in content production. Current AI-generated content still contains problems such as narrative homogenization and distorted cultural details that may mislead overseas audiences’ cognition of China ^[10]. Mass production based on proven hit templates prioritizes output quantity over quality. The survey results corroborate that 32.86% of overseas audiences criticize formulaic plots and incoherent narrative logic. Half of respondents complain about stiff virtualcharacter expressions. Compared with live-action dramas, AI characters struggle to convey subtle and authentic emotions, discouraging continuous viewing and resulting in insufficient user stickiness.

Content creation follows utilitarian tendencies with superficial cultural expression, lacking consciousness for constructing positive cultural images. To chase traffic benefits, creators tend to cater excessively to overseas entertainment demands and merely pile up cultural symbols. However, generative models can only generate content based on statistical patterns in the training data. They cannot independently understand the value and meaning behind cultural symbols ^[11]. Therefore, these superficial cultural symbols do not effectively contribute to the construction of a comprehensive national image. Data demonstrate that only 20% can identify traditional Chinese cultural elements.

Overseas communication channels remain relatively monotonous, with traffic acquisition heavily reliant on algorithmic recommendations. Among respondents who have never watched AI-generated microdramas, 41.67% cannot access such works due to insufficient platform exposure. From the perspective of international communication structure, developed countries often deliberately reduce the distribution of related content for political-strategic ends, while technologically lessadvanced states struggle to shape foreign public perceptions due to information constraints ^[12]. Over-dependence on algorithmic distribution, alongside the lack of diversified operations and crossplatform cooperation, restricts audience expansion.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Major findings

The study finds that the core overseas audience of Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas is the Generation-Z group aged 18-24. Audiences access works through two types of channels: mainstream social-media

platforms and standalone micro-drama applications. Formulaic plots of romance, family ethics, and wish-fulfillment revenge themes dominate the content. Compared with AI-generated productions, audiences prefer live-action micro-dramas and focus more on character building and storylines. Meanwhile, some overseas audiences have heard of AI-generated micro-dramas but never watched them. Lack of relevant socialmedia recommendations and disinterest in available story themes serve as major barriers preventing potential audiences from engaging with the content.

Chinese AI-generated micro-dramas meet Generation-Z audiences' demand for fragmented, fast-paced entertainment, yet their effectiveness in cultural communication is limited. Audience evaluations are highly polarized. Some audiences appreciate the tight narrative pace and well-developed characters, while others criticize the overly sensational plots and frequent sexually suggestive and violent content. Most audiences encounter such content via passive algorithm-driven recommendations. Low user stickiness and weak willingness for secondary social sharing make it difficult for the content to achieve further outreach through user-led organic dissemination.

Only a small share of overseas audiences can perceive elements of traditional Chinese culture within the micro-dramas. Overseas audiences form fragmented and one-sided perceptions of China. While some audiences recognize China's advanced modern-technological development and harmonious social atmosphere through AI-generated micro-dramas, a considerable number fail to obtain a clear national-cultural image from these works. Some audiences hold the view that exaggerated plots are inconsistent with real China, which gives rise to cultural misunderstandings and constrains the construction of a comprehensive and multi-dimensional Chinese cultural image. Accordingly, joint efforts from the whole industry, creators and platforms are required to collaboratively optimize content production and overseas communication strategies.

5.2 Suggestions for improvement

Building a favourable international image cannot be accomplished in the short term. It requires the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders to advance national image construction^[13].

The industry should promote high-quality creation through human-AI collaboration, balancing entertainment value and cultural expression. Though AI can generate content rapidly, it often lacks the instantaneous sparks derived from individual intuition and inspiration, which makes it difficult for works to truly capture and convey the emotions intended by creators^[14]. By refining virtual characters' facial expressions, movements, and machine-translated subtitles, AI micro-dramas' visual quality can be improved, which further enhances audience immersion and user stickiness.

The creators should cultivate cultural self-awareness to balance commercial and cultural values by rejecting the traffic-oriented utilitarian mindset. Film and television "going global" is not only a vital component of the cultural industry's overseas market expansion, but also exerts significant impacts on the international exchange of Chinese culture and the shaping of national image^[15]. While retaining the strengths of micro-dramas featuring fast pacing and intense conflicts, creators need to deeply explore cultural content. Cultural elements should be naturally woven into drama instead of being superficially stacked as symbols so that overseas audiences can develop rounded and diversified perceptions of Chinese culture, which will drive the transformation of AI-generated micro-dramas from "traffic going global" to "cultural going global".

The platform should establish diversified communication approaches to expand overseas outreach channels, building a multi-channel overseas communication system to break the reliance on the single

model of algorithmic recommendations. Datafication serves as a core mechanism of the platform society. By converting user behaviors, preferences and other attributes into computable data, it enables precise user profiling and content recommendation^[16]. Platforms such as ReelShort and DramaBox leverage this mechanism for targeted content distribution to improve the efficiency of overseas reach. Strategies including cross-platform content distribution, overseas community management and the development of dedicated applications can raise content exposure and address insufficient reach to potential audiences.

As emerging vehicles of cultural going global, AI-generated micro-dramas enable overseas audiences to perceive a comprehensive China, thereby strengthening soft power, deepening cross-cultural understanding, and advancing international cultural exchange.

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