Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences
www.pjlss.edu.pk

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Research on the Regional Dissemination Paths of Chinese Culture and Cultural Diplomacy Strategies in the Context of the "Belt and Road Initiative"

Ying Cui*

College of Humanities, Xi'an Shiyou University, Xi'an 710065, Shaanxi, China

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	In the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's international cultural dissemination and cultural diplomacy have emerged as crucial elements in enhancing national soft power. However, current cultural communication practices face challenges such as insufficient regional adaptability, monotonous dissemination patterns, and inadequate cultural identity construction. To address these challenges, this research, grounded in cross-cultural communication theory and public diplomacy theory, focuses on the regional cultural characteristics of countries along the Belt and Road, exploring optimized strategies for cultural dissemination and implementation mechanisms for cultural diplomacy. Through analyzing the heterogeneity of four major cultural spheres—Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe—the study proposes principles of respecting cultural differences, excavating shared memories, strengthening bilateral interactions, and promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration, while integrating new media and digital technologies to achieve precise communication. This research elucidates the necessity and feasibility of regionalized cultural dissemination at a theoretical level and presents specific practical approaches and optimization recommendations, aiming to provide theoretical insights and policy references for cultural communication and diplomatic practices within the Belt and Road framework, demonstrating significant academic value and practical implications.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by China in 2013, represents a global cooperative development initiative aimed at establishing an economic cooperation network spanning Asia, Europe, and Africa through collaboration in five key domains: policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds (Huang, 2016). Beyond economic cooperation, the BRI emphasizes cultural exchange and humanitarian connectivity among diverse nations and regions. Cultural interactions not only strengthen relationships between participating countries and China but also present opportunities for China to cultivate a positive international image and enhance its cultural soft power (Johnston, 2019). Cultural diplomacy, as a crucial manifestation of soft power, serves as a strategic instrument for shaping international perceptions through cultural dissemination, educational cooperation, and historical accumulation (Goff, 2020). China endeavors to showcase the charm of Chinese civilization and foster international understanding through platforms such as Confucius Institutes, academic exchanges, and diversified media communications. However, cultural dissemination remains a bilateral interactive process, with its effectiveness often constrained by regional cultural affinity, geopolitical relations, and historical foundations. The BRI encompasses over 100 countries across diverse cultural spheres, from Southeast Asia to Central Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. The variations in historical backgrounds, religious beliefs, languages, and social customs across these regions present complex

challenges for Chinese cultural dissemination. For instance, while Chinese cultural transmission in Southeast Asian nations benefits from historical cultural permeation and the influence of Chinese communities, it encounters linguistic barriers, cultural prejudices, and political sensitivities in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The formulation of precise dissemination strategies tailored to regional characteristics has emerged as a critical issue in building China's cultural soft power and cultural diplomacy. This research aims to systematically explore the pathways and optimization strategies for Chinese cultural dissemination within the BRI context from a regionalized perspective, providing theoretical support and practical references for achieving effective cultural communication.

Academic research has yielded significant findings regarding cultural soft power development and cultural diplomacy. The "soft power" theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding culture's role in international relations (Nye, 1990), with scholars exploring culture as a vital instrument in national image construction through this theoretical lens (Flew, 2016; You, 2018). Regarding the cultural significance of the Belt and Road Initiative, research suggests it offers a novel platform for diverse global cultural exchanges (Li et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020; Winter, 2021). Studies emphasize the significance of cultural outreach in enhancing national influence and position cultural diplomacy as a bridge for harmonious international relations development (Dwyer et al., 2005). However, existing research predominantly remains at the macro level, examining the significance of cultural dissemination in shaping national soft power within the BRI context, while offering limited exploration of specific implementation pathways and strategies. For instance, studies on cultural transmission vehicles such as Confucius Institutes and audiovisual works primarily focus on transmission effectiveness and significance, with limited investigation into cultural adaptability across different regions (Cai, 2022). Furthermore, current research often treats BRI countries as a homogeneous entity, overlooking their distinct historical, religious, linguistic, and political characteristics, and neglecting the impact of regional cultural heterogeneity on transmission pathways.

Against this backdrop, this research aims to explore China's cultural dissemination pathways and cultural diplomatic strategies along the Belt and Road from a regionalized perspective. Specifically, this study seeks to address two core questions:

1. What are the primary pathways and patterns of Chinese cultural dissemination across BRI regions?
2. How should China's cultural diplomatic strategies be optimized to enhance transmission efficiency in response to diverse regional cultural characteristics?

Through examining regional cultural characteristics and transmission practices along the Belt and Road, this study aims to construct an analytical framework for transmission pathways tailored to different cultural spheres and propose specific cultural diplomatic optimization strategies. Theoretically, this research will enrich the interdisciplinary application of cultural communication studies and public diplomacy theory; practically, it will provide scientific policy references for Chinese government and cultural institutions engaged in cultural transmission and diplomatic work under the BRI framework.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical foundations of cultural communication and cultural diplomacy

2.1.1. Cross-cultural communication theory

Cross-cultural communication theory, introduced by Edward T. Hall in "The Silent Language," examines how culture influences human communication behaviors, including non-verbal communication, temporal perception, and spatial cognition. This theoretical framework explores how cultural variables—including values, religion, language, and social customs—influence communication behaviors and interactive outcomes.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory serves as a pivotal model in cross-cultural communication research, analyzing cultural characteristics through six dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint (Mazanec et al., 2015). Culture is recognized as a

fundamental variable affecting human communication behaviors (Aune et al., 2001). Variations in cultural values, beliefs, customs, and languages lead to differences in communication methods and interpretative patterns (Bowe et al., 2014).

For instance, low-context cultures (such as the United States and Germany) favor direct expression, while high-context cultures (such as China and India) emphasize non-verbal cues and implicit meanings (Wurtz, 2005). The success of cultural communication depends on whether the transmitted content aligns with the target culture's values and behavioral norms (Castro et al., 2010). Communicators must comprehend the uniqueness of their audience's culture and adjust their content, form, and media accordingly.

Cross-cultural communication theory emphasizes cultural adaptability and interactivity, providing theoretical support for cultural dissemination along the Belt and Road Initiative countries. It aids in addressing cultural heterogeneity challenges and designing communication strategies adapted to diverse cultural characteristics. Through cultural dimension models, this theory guides content development, media selection, and pathway planning, enabling more targeted and effective communication to achieve the goal of "people-to-people bonds."

2.1.2. Public diplomacy theory

Public diplomacy theory, initially proposed by Edmund Gullion in 1965, examines how nations establish connections with foreign publics through non-official channels—including culture, education, and media—to shape national image and advance diplomatic objectives (Gilboa, 2008). The five-dimensional model of public diplomacy serves as a seminal framework in this field, encompassing Listening, Advocacy, Cultural Diplomacy, Exchange, and International Broadcasting (Pamment, 2012). Cultural diplomacy, as one of its five dimensions, emphasizes promoting international understanding and cooperation through the presentation and exchange of cultural resources.

Public diplomacy functions as a crucial instrument for enhancing soft power, which comprises cultural attractiveness, value identification, and policy legitimacy. Through public diplomacy, nations can enhance their appeal within the international community, thereby gaining competitive advantages (Nye, 2008). The theory aligns closely with the Belt and Road Initiative's goal of "people-to-people bonds" by leveraging cultural and educational channels to enhance national soft power.

Within this framework, cultural diplomacy fosters emotional connections through various forms of exchange, such as art exhibitions and cultural festivals, while the multi-stakeholder collaboration model promotes the joint expansion of communicative influence through both governmental and civilian efforts. This theoretical foundation provides effective guidance for cultural dissemination practices within the Belt and Road Initiative context.

2.2.Cultural communication research from a regional perspective

The Belt and Road countries and regions exhibit diverse cultural characteristics, with Chinese cultural dissemination constrained by regional heterogeneity in cultural features, religious beliefs, and political ecology. Southeast Asia exemplifies this diversity, encompassing Malaysia's predominantly Malay culture, Thailand's Buddhist-centered culture, and Singapore's East-West cultural fusion (Thompson et al., 2007). Existing research suggests Southeast Asia's relatively high receptivity to Chinese culture stems from two primary factors: first, the presence and social influence of Chinese cultural communities (Beng, 2012); second, the region's longstanding historical and economic ties with China, fostering strong cultural affinity (Roy, 2005). However, cultural dissemination must address internal religious and ethnic differences, particularly in predominantly Islamic nations like Malaysia and Indonesia, where cultural transmission must navigate religious sensitivities.

Central Asia presents dual challenges of religion and language in cultural dissemination. The five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, etc.), influenced by Soviet culture, exhibit complex receptivity to foreign cultures due to their multi-ethnic, multilingual composition and predominantly Islamic religious background. For instance, while Uzbekistan shares deep historical connections with China through the Silk Road, it remains sensitive to perceived "Sinicization" in cultural transmission (Abazov, 2006).

The Middle East presents unique challenges in cultural dissemination due to religious sensitivities and political complexities. Middle Eastern nations, centered on Islamic culture, face constraints from both religious regulations and geopolitical dynamics. Research indicates relatively low public receptivity to Chinese cultural transmission in this region, partly attributed to longstanding Western-centric perspectives and inherent skepticism toward foreign cultures (Pappe, 2014).

Regional cultural characteristics directly influence the selection of Chinese cultural transmission pathways. In Southeast Asia, the presence of Chinese cultural communities and longstanding historical connections facilitate smooth cultural dissemination. For instance, Chinese media content distributed through streaming platforms gains popularity due to thematic resonance with local cultural values, particularly regarding family values and community consciousness (as exemplified by the success of "Story of Yanxi Palace" in Thailand) (Cheu, 2021).

In contrast, Central Asian regions face challenges due to language barriers and insufficient cultural adaptation of transmitted content. Historical narratives centered on Han Chinese culture sometimes encounter resistance, while localized approaches—such as the Sino-Kazakh co-produced film "The Composer"—effectively enhance cultural affinity through the integration of local elements.

3. CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS ANALYSIS OF REGIONS ALONG THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

3.1. Regional classification along the belt and road initiative

Through the lens of cross-cultural communication theory, the regions along the Belt and Road Initiative can be categorized based on four fundamental elements: historical and civilizational heritage, religious and ideological foundations, linguistic and media landscape, and contemporary geopolitical configurations. Historical evolution has shaped distinct cultural systems across regions: Southeast Asia's pluralistic religious landscape, Central Asia's dual heritage of Silk Road and Soviet influence, the Middle East's Islamic civilization, and Eastern Europe's Orthodox Christian culture. Religion, serving as a core cultural dimension, profoundly influences societal moral frameworks and cultural expressions (Geertz, 2013). The linguistic ecosystem determines cultural transmission pathways and adaptation requirements, exemplified by Russian language prevalence in Central Asia and Eastern European nations' adherence to their native languages (Bonvillain, 2019). Geopolitical dynamics shape cultural receptivity, as evidenced by the Middle East's cultural vigilance and Southeast Asia's embracing disposition. Founded on these considerations, the participating nations are classified into four cultural spheres: Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, establishing a framework for cultural studies and communication practices, as illustrated in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1: Regional classification of the belt and road initiative

Cultural Sphere	Main Characteristics	Countries or Regions Covered
Southeast Asian	Characterized by multiculturalism, including the Malay cultural sphere, Buddhist cultural sphere, and urban cultures that blend Eastern and Western influences; Known for cultural diversity and inclusivity; The Chinese diaspora strengthens ties with Chinese culture.	Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Singapore
Central Asian	Influenced by both Islam and Soviet culture, it is a region where multiple ethnicities, languages, and cultures converge.	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, etc.
Middle Eastern	Centered around Islam, with religious norms deeply influencing social customs and cultural expression; Known for religious sensitivity and geopolitical complexity, with high selectivity and vigilance towards foreign cultures.	Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, etc.
Eastern European	Includes the Russian cultural sphere and the Orthodox Christian cultural sphere, with deep influence from Soviet historical legacy; Different countries exhibit unique cultural histories and religious beliefs.	Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Serbia, etc.

3.2. Cultural characteristics analysis of regions along the belt and road initiative

3.2.1. Southeast Asian cultural sphere

The Southeast Asian cultural sphere exhibits remarkable cultural pluralism, religious diversity, and exceptional inclusivity. The region encompasses the Islamic Malay cultural zone (including Malaysia and Indonesia) and predominantly Buddhist nations (such as Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia), each possessing distinctive social norms and value systems. Islamic traditions in Malaysia and Indonesia maintain stringent guidelines regarding matrimony, dietary practices, and gender comportment; however, due to historical and geographical influences, the region's Islamic culture demonstrates greater moderation and receptivity compared to the Middle East (Hooker, 1988). Buddhist nations like Thailand and Cambodia emphasize ceremonial culture, collectivism, and profound respect for social order, manifested in festivals, religious ceremonies, and daily life. The Chinese cultural presence in Southeast Asia holds significant influence in economic, educational, and cultural domains, serving as a cultural bridge within the region. Linguistically, while Southeast Asia exhibits considerable diversity, the widespread use of English facilitates cross-cultural communication and exchange.

3.2.2. Central Asian cultural sphere

The Central Asian cultural sphere is distinguished by its intricate fusion of multiethnic, multilingual, and dual cultural characteristics, shaped by both Islamic heritage and Soviet legacy. Islam, as the predominant religion, profoundly influences social customs, festive celebrations, and ethical norms; however, due to prolonged exposure to Soviet secularization policies, religious practices exhibit distinct regional characteristics (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009). While Russian serves as the lingua franca, several nations (notably Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) are gradually implementing linguistic de-Russification policies to reinforce indigenous linguistic and cultural identity. Central Asian nations universally cherish their folklore and traditions, exemplified by Nowruz (Spring Equinox Festival) as a regional cultural emblem, reflecting the peoples' reverence for natural cycles and communal solidarity.

3.2.3. Middle eastern cultural sphere

The Middle Eastern cultural sphere is characterized by its pronounced religious sensitivity and rich civilizational heritage, with cultural attributes predominantly shaped by Islamic doctrines and geopolitical dynamics. Islam transcends mere religious devotion, permeating society through legal frameworks, artistic expression, and dietary practices. Religious observances such as Ramadan, halal dietary requirements, and gender segregation protocols profoundly influence the region's social structure and cultural manifestations (Esposito & Burgat, 2003). Linguistically, Arabic serves as the predominant language, functioning both as a crucial medium for religious transmission and a fundamental symbol of cultural identity.

3.2.4. Eastern European cultural sphere

The Eastern European cultural sphere embodies a complex amalgamation of Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, and Soviet legacy, manifesting both enduring religious traditions and robust national consciousness. Orthodox Christianity, prevalent in Russia, Ukraine, and Serbia, emphasizes traditionalism, collectivism, and liturgical solemnity, while Catholicism in Poland and Hungary places greater emphasis on familial and individual values. The Soviet heritage continues to exert substantial influence on language, culture, and social norms in certain Eastern European nations. While Russian remains the lingua franca in Russia and adjacent territories, other nations (such as Poland and the Baltic states) predominantly utilize their national languages to reinforce their distinct cultural identities.

The cultural characteristics of these four regions are summarized in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2: Cultural characteristics of regions along the belt and road initiative

Cultural Sphere	Cultural Characteristics	Linguistic Characteristics	Other
Southeast Asian	Religious diversity (mainly Buddhism and Islam), strong cultural inclusivity; significant	Diverse languages, widespread use of English, facilitating	Emphasis on etiquette and collectivism, rich in festival culture.

	influence of Chinese culture.	cross-cultural communication.	
Central Asian	Dominated by Islam, deep Soviet legacy, emphasis on traditional customs and historical memory.	Russian is commonly used, with increasing status of national languages.	Rich Silk Road heritage, traditional festivals hold great importance.
Middle Eastern	Islam comprehensively regulates social life, high religious sensitivity; focus on shared historical identity.	Arabic is the core language, with English as a secondary means of communication.	Complex geopolitics, low acceptance of foreign cultures.
Eastern European	Deep-rooted Orthodox and Catholic traditions, strong sense of national cultural pride.	Coexistence of Russian and native languages, with notable linguistic localization.	Emphasis on tradition and independence, religious ceremonies are highly significant.

3.3. Impact of cultural differences on communication along the belt and road initiative

3.3.1. Cultural barriers to communication

1. Religious sensitivity

Religious sensitivity constitutes a primary barrier to cultural communication (Bisin et al., 2023), particularly in Middle Eastern and Central Asian regions where Islamic principles strictly govern cultural content. Middle Eastern cultural transmissions must adhere to Islamic precepts, avoiding depictions of pork consumption, alcohol use, or gender interactions that contravene Islamic teachings. In nations like Saudi Arabia, female representation in media must strictly conform to religious protocols, lest it provoke significant social backlash. While Central Asian Islamic practices have undergone localization due to Soviet-era secularization policies, respect for religious taboos remains fundamental to cultural communication.

2. Linguistic barriers

Language, as the vehicle of cultural transmission, presents complex adaptation requirements across different linguistic ecosystems (Kramsch, 2014). Although Russian in Central Asia and English in Southeast Asia somewhat mitigate cross-linguistic communication barriers, the multilingual environment along the Belt and Road Initiative remains a significant impediment. For instance, Central Asian nations' recent emphasis on national languages, exemplified by Uzbekistan's diminishing Russian's official status, suggests that cultural content without local linguistic adaptation risks being perceived as "cultural arrogance" and potentially faces rejection.

3. Political sensitivity

The intricate geopolitical landscape of certain Belt and Road nations creates substantial communication barriers (Haji Naseri, 2019). Eastern European nations' strong national consciousness and historical memory engender vigilance toward external cultural influences. Chinese cultural narratives emphasizing themes of sovereignty or national strength might be interpreted as threats to cultural independence by Eastern European audiences. Similarly, regional conflicts in the Middle East, such as Saudi-Iranian rivalry, can lead to politicized interpretations of cultural content, complicating its reception.

3.3.2. Communication opportunities within cultural differences

1. Cultural commonalities

The historical narrative of the Belt and Road Initiative provides emotional connection points for cultural transmission. The Silk Road, as a historical channel of cultural fusion, carries profound historical recognition in Central Asia and the Middle East. In Central Asian history, the Silk Road symbolizes not merely commercial exchange but cultural collaboration and mutual learning. In the Middle East, Admiral Zheng He's maritime expeditions are increasingly reexamined as precedents for amicable interaction between China and the Islamic world. By exploring shared historical and cultural elements across nations, cultural communication can transcend existing religious and

political barriers, reconstructing cultural connections based on a "historical emotional community," thereby enhancing content relatability and acceptance.

2. Bridging role of Chinese cultural spheres

The Chinese cultural sphere in Southeast Asia provides connectivity channels for Chinese cultural transmission. Chinese communities, particularly in Malaysia and Singapore, serve not only as primary consumers of Chinese culture but also as cultural intermediaries. For instance, Malaysian Chinese communities' celebrations of festivals like Spring Festival and Dragon Boat Festival provide a social foundation for Chinese cultural festival transmission. Singapore, as a confluence of Eastern and Western cultures, facilitates Chinese cultural integration into mainstream society through its multicultural policies.

3. Multicultural collaboration and co-construction

Multilateral cultural cooperation projects under the Belt and Road Initiative create opportunities for cultural transmission. For example, Sino-Egyptian collaboration in mosque restoration projects demonstrates respect for Islamic culture while strengthening cultural ties between both nations. The "cultural co-construction" model emphasizes respect for local cultures, enhancing the local adaptability of cultural transmission content.

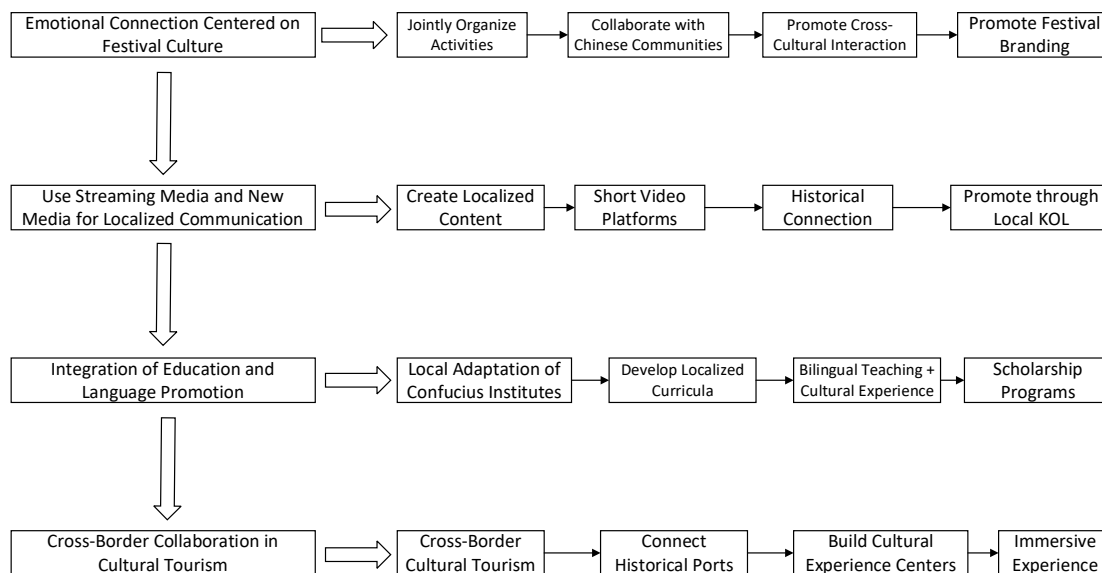## 4. TRANSMISSION PATHS OF CHINESE CULTURE ALONG THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

4.1. Transmission path in Southeast Asian cultural sphere

According to cross-cultural communication theory, similarities in cultural background, values, and historical context form the foundation for successful cultural transmission. Cultural affinity effectively reduces comprehension barriers arising from cultural differences and enhances audience identification and acceptance of transmitted content (Li, 1999). Chinese and Southeast Asian cultures share similarities in three key aspects:

Firstly, through the Maritime Silk Road, Southeast Asian nations maintained extensive economic and cultural exchanges with China. Secondly, the presence of Chinese cultural spheres, where Chinese communities exert significant influence in Southeast Asian economic, social, and cultural life, serves both as audience and cultural intermediaries. Thirdly, shared cultural values, exemplified by Confucian cultural penetration, manifest similar cultural logic in family values, social order, and ceremonial culture.

Cultural similarity provides natural affinity for transmission, enabling content to rapidly establish emotional connections with local cultures by emphasizing commonalities (White et al., 2021). Simultaneously, Southeast Asia's cultural diversity and inclusivity offer high receptivity to external cultural integration. However, cultural transmission must carefully respect religious and ethnic sensitivities to avoid potential conflict points.

Therefore, based on cultural similarity principles from cross-cultural communication theory, Chinese cultural transmission in the Southeast Asian sphere follows the principle of "commonality as foundation, difference as boundary." This approach constructs emotional connections and social recognition through festive culture, media communication, and educational exchange. The transmission path of Chinese culture in the Southeast Asian cultural sphere is illustrated in Figure 4-1.

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┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ Emotional Connection    │ ═══▶ │ Jointly      │──▶│ Collaborate  │──▶│ Promote      │──▶│ Promote      │
│ Centered on Festival    │      │ Organize     │   │ with Chinese │   │ Cross-       │   │ Festival     │
│ Culture                 │      │ Activities   │   │ Communities  │   │ Cultural     │   │ Branding     │
└─────────────────────────┘      └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   │ Interaction  │   └──────────────┘
            │                                                           └──────────────┘
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ Use Streaming Media and │ ═══▶ │ Create       │──▶│ Short Video  │──▶│ Historical   │──▶│ Promote      │
│ New Media for Localized │      │ Localized    │   │ Platforms    │   │ Connection   │   │ through      │
│ Communication           │      │ Content      │   │              │   │              │   │ Local KOL    │
└─────────────────────────┘      └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ Integration of          │ ═══▶ │ Local        │──▶│ Develop      │──▶│ Bilingual    │──▶│ Scholarship  │
│ Education and Language  │      │ Adaptation   │   │ Localized    │   │ Teaching +   │   │ Programs     │
│ Promotion               │      │ of Confucius │   │ Curricula    │   │ Cultural     │   │              │
└─────────────────────────┘      │ Institutes   │   └──────────────┘   │ Experience   │   └──────────────┘
            │                    └──────────────┘                      └──────────────┘
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ Cross-Border            │ ═══▶ │ Cross-Border │──▶│ Connect      │──▶│ Build        │──▶│ Immersive    │
│ Collaboration in        │      │ Cultural     │   │ Historical   │   │ Cultural     │   │ Experience   │
│ Cultural Tourism        │      │ Tourism      │   │ Ports        │   │ Experience   │   └──────────────┘
└─────────────────────────┘      └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   │ Centers      │
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Figure 4-1: Transmission paths of Chinese culture in Southeast Asian cultural sphere

1. Festive culture as core emotional connection

Southeast Asia's emphasis on festive celebrations provides entry points for Chinese cultural transmission through traditional festivals like Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival. Through collaboration with local Chinese communities and government institutions, region-specific festival activities are created. For example, "Chinese Cultural Weeks" in Malaysia and Singapore feature interactive activities like dragon and lion dances, lantern-making, and calligraphy experiences, attracting diverse ethnic participation and promoting cross-cultural exchange. Festival activities are operated as branded events, incorporating Spring Festival celebrations into multicultural festive frameworks through local government partnerships, establishing them as representations of Southeast Asian cultural diversity.

2. Localized transmission through streaming and new media

Southeast Asia's high internet penetration and youth dependency on streaming and social media platforms provide digital windows for Chinese cultural transmission. Localized short-video content on platforms like TikTok and YouTube can feature familiar historical figures and events, such as Admiral Zheng He's voyages, highlighting historical Chinese-Southeast Asian cultural fusion. Collaboration with regional KOLs on Instagram or Facebook promotes Chinese cultural elements like cuisine, music, or fashion, integrating content with local cultural characteristics to enhance audience engagement and acceptance.

3. Integration of education and language promotion

Education and language promotion serve as long-term cultural transmission strategies, fostering younger generation's interest and identification with Chinese culture. Confucius Institutes provide foundational platforms throughout Southeast Asia, requiring enhanced local adaptation through courses like "Chinese Cultural History in Southeast Asia" addressing local identity concerns. Partnerships with local schools combine language teaching with cultural experiences through practical courses in calligraphy, tea ceremony, and Peking opera. Expanded scholarship opportunities, particularly in cultural, artistic, and historical fields, develop cultural transmission networks through returning students as civilian cultural ambassadors.

4. Cross-national cultural tourism coordination

Chinese cultural transmission leverages collaboration in cultural tourism development, creating cross-border cultural routes. The "Zheng He Maritime Route" theme tour connects Chinese and Southeast Asian historical port cities, showcasing Maritime Silk Road cultural fusion. Chinese cultural experience centers in tourist hubs like Bangkok and Singapore incorporate VR technology for immersive experiences of traditional festivals, ethnic arts, and historical culture.

4.2.Transmission path in central asian cultural sphere

According to the theory of public diplomacy on cultural co-construction, collective identity is established through shared historical memories and cultural symbols among specific groups. Memory serves as both the foundation of individual cognition and a vital link in cross-cultural communication (Melissen, 2005). Central Asia maintains profound cultural connections with China, with the Silk Road serving as a historical nexus for commerce and cultural convergence. This historic route not only represents a shared historical memory among Central Asian nations but also functions as a crucial bridge fostering regional cultural identity. Furthermore, Central Asian regions, having experienced Soviet-era secular transformation in modern times, are currently devoted to revitalizing their national cultures and reconstructing indigenous identities, presenting an opportune moment for Chinese cultural dissemination: through exploring the cultural integration history of the Silk Road, creating resonance with Central Asian nations' aspirations for cultural renaissance. Additionally, aligning with Central Asian regions' emphasis on traditional arts, religious heritage, and folk customs, communication strategies should center on "cultural co-construction," enhancing receptivity and regional cultural connectivity through collaborative exploration of historical memories, joint preservation of cultural heritage, and innovative localization of cultural content. The pathways for Chinese cultural dissemination within the Central Asian cultural sphere are illustrated in Figure 4-2.
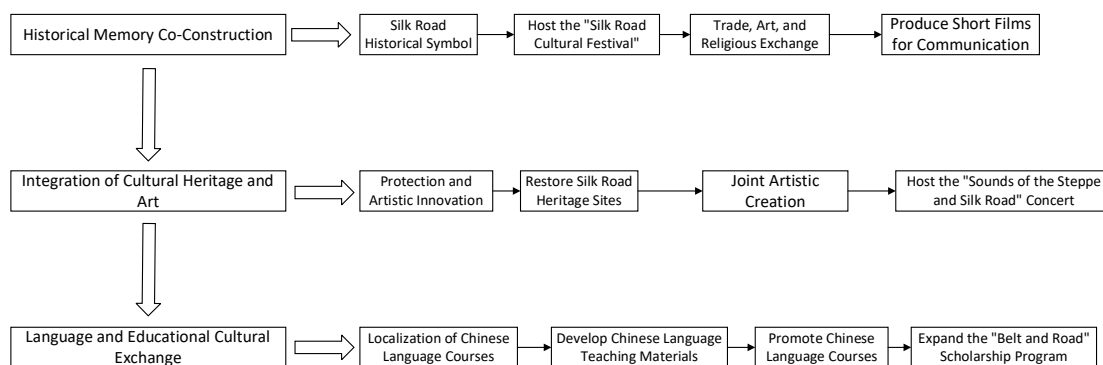
Figure 4-2: Pathways of Chinese cultural dissemination in the central Asian cultural sphere

1. Co-constructing historical memory through the Silk Road bond

The Silk Road serves as a shared historical symbol between Central Asian countries and China, its cross-border cultural significance providing natural connection points for transmission. Chinese cultural transmission can collaborate with Central Asian countries to organize "Silk Road Cultural Festivals" or "Silk Road Cultural Relics Exhibition Tours," showcasing trade, artistic, and religious exchanges along the Silk Road through multinational cooperation. For instance, collaborating with Uzbekistan to hold joint exhibitions in Samarkand and Xi'an, demonstrating cultural interconnections between the two locations during the Silk Road era; employing digital technology to recreate ancient Silk Road caravan scenes and cultural interactions at marketplace stops, enhancing public immersion.

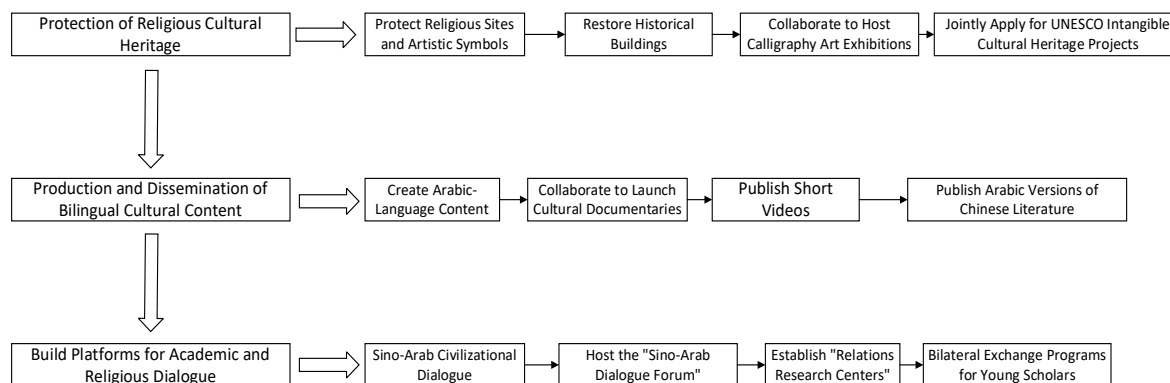## 2. Cultural heritage protection and traditional arts collaboration

Central Asia's emphasis on cultural heritage and traditional arts creates cooperation opportunities for cultural transmission. Chinese cultural transmission should utilize cultural heritage protection as an entry point, jointly conducting artifact restoration, site preservation, and traditional arts innovation with Central Asian countries. For example, cooperating with local governments in Kazakhstan to restore ancient post station ruins along the Silk Road, utilizing VR technology to recreate historical scenes and develop "Silk Road Cultural Tourism Routes"; collaborating in Kyrgyzstan to protect the World Heritage Site "Suyab," demonstrating China's technological advantages and cultural respect through historical research and on-site restoration. Additionally, partnerships with Central Asian artists can be established for joint creation in music, dance, and traditional crafts, such as combining Kazakhstan's grassland music characteristics with Chinese traditional instruments to present "Sounds of Steppe and Silk Road" concerts, showcasing deep cultural integration through diverse artistic forms.

3. Localized language and educational cultural exchange

Language and education serve as long-term pathways for cultural transmission, with Central Asian countries' emphasis on national languages and demands for educational modernization providing opportunities for deep cooperation in Chinese cultural transmission. China can collaborate with Confucius Institutes and local universities in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other locations to offer Chinese language courses incorporating local culture, such as developing "Silk Road Chinese Textbooks" that combine language learning with Silk Road cultural history, enhancing regional course adaptability. Simultaneously, expanding study abroad exchange programs through "Belt and Road" scholarship initiatives supports Central Asian students studying culture, arts, and history in China, nurturing future cultural transmission bridges. Furthermore, promoting Chinese traditional culture experience courses in Central Asian higher education institutions and schools, such as calligraphy, embroidery, and Chinese tea ceremony workshops, helps students understand Chinese culture's traditional artistic spirit through practice, establishing long-term cultural identification and transmission networks among younger generations.

4.3. Pathways of cultural dissemination in the middle eastern cultural sphere

According to cross-cultural communication theory regarding cultural adaptation, communicators must thoroughly comprehend the target culture's core institutional systems, religious beliefs, and social customs. Through localization and adaptation of content, cultural conflicts can be minimized while enhancing receptivity to transmitted messages (Liddicoat, 2009). Islamic culture permeates deeply into the social life and value systems of Middle Eastern populations, necessitating absolute respect for their religious traditions in any cultural exchange. The Islamic world's heightened sensitivity to historical narratives and cultural heritage, coupled with their vigilance against cultural infiltration from external sources, renders unilateral transmission approaches ineffective. Hence, Chinese cultural dissemination should center on "cultural dialogue," establishing a foundation of trust through profound respect for Middle Eastern culture and equitable exchange. The pathways for Chinese cultural dissemination within the Middle Eastern cultural sphere are illustrated in Figure 4-3.

Figure 4-3: Pathways of Chinese cultural dissemination in the Middle Eastern cultural sphere

1. Religious cultural heritage protection and cooperation

Religious cultural heritage constitutes the cultural core of the Middle East, where protecting religious sites and artistic symbols serves not only as an opportunity for collaborative transmission but also as a crucial pathway to gaining Middle Eastern society's trust. China can engage in religious site restoration projects, collaborating with Middle Eastern countries to protect historical buildings and cultural heritage, such as cooperating with Egypt in mosque restoration, demonstrating respect for Islamic culture through professional expertise. Additionally, traditional culture with religious connotations can be explored through artistic cooperation, such as supporting Middle Eastern calligraphy revival, engaging in exchanges with Chinese calligraphic traditions, and organizing Chinese-Arabic calligraphy exhibitions to showcase the artistic charm of both cultural writing systems.

2. Bilingual cultural content production and transmission

Bilingual content production represents a key strategy for Middle Eastern cultural transmission, reducing language barriers while enhancing transmission receptivity through content localization. Initially, China can collaborate with mainstream Middle Eastern media (such as Al Jazeera) to produce Arabic-language cultural documentaries focusing on Chinese Muslim community life and religious practices, demonstrating a picture of multicultural coexistence and reducing psychological distance for Middle Eastern audiences. Furthermore, localized content can be distributed on social media platforms (such as YouTube, Instagram), featuring short videos of Chinese cuisine, traditional festivals, and craftsmanship, emphasizing similarities or commonalities with Middle Eastern culture. Finally, publishing Arabic translations of Chinese classic literature, such as "Dream of the Red Chamber" and "The Analects," with appropriate translations and annotations, helps Middle Eastern readers discover possibilities for cultural dialogue within texts, thereby bridging the distance between civilizations.

3. Establishing academic and religious dialogue platforms

The Middle Eastern cultural sphere's deep tradition of knowledge exchange and religious dialogue provides important high-level transmission channels for Chinese culture. The primary approach involves organizing "Chinese-Arab Civilizational Dialogue Forums," themed around religious interactions and cultural integration along the Silk Road, inviting Islamic scholars from the Middle East and Chinese religious scholars to explore historical cultural interactions and cooperation between the two regions. Additionally, supporting Chinese studies programs in Middle Eastern higher education institutions and jointly establishing "Research Centers for China-Islamic World Relations" with local universities provides systematic knowledge support through research and publication funding. Finally, implementing bilateral young scholar exchange programs supports Middle Eastern young scholars studying Chinese culture while inviting Chinese students to experience Islamic culture, cultivating new-generation cultural transmission bridges through cross-cultural knowledge dissemination.

4.4. Pathways of cultural dissemination in the eastern european cultural sphere

According to cross-cultural communication principles regarding low-context communication, cultural transmission requires explicit conveyance of information, independent of implicit background knowledge or cultural assumptions, particularly in regions with strong national consciousness, where low-context communication proves more comprehensible to audiences (Levitt, 2022). Eastern European nations possess profound historical memories, robust national identities, and maintain heightened vigilance toward external cultural influences. Consequently, cultural dissemination necessitates explicit content expression while avoiding potential cultural misinterpretations or excessively complex implicit messages. Therefore, cultural transmission in the Eastern European sphere should be founded upon respect for their national consciousness and cultural autonomy, employing clear and direct modes of expression to establish equitable dialogue and cultural resonance. The pathways for Chinese cultural dissemination within the Eastern European cultural sphere are illustrated in Figure 4-4.
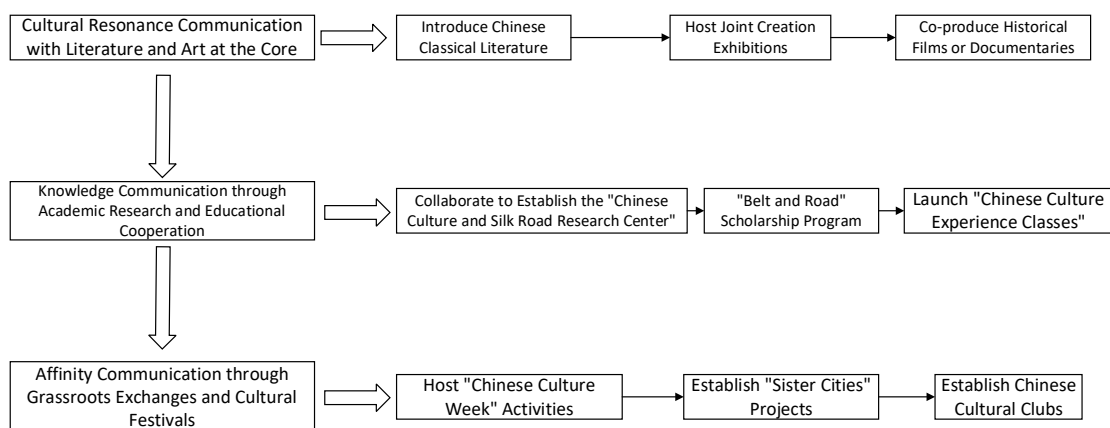

Figure 4-4: Pathways of Chinese cultural dissemination in the eastern European cultural sphere

1. Cultural resonance through literature and arts

Literature and arts serve as gateways to establish profound cultural connections with Eastern European nations. Initially, introduce Chinese classical literature to Eastern European readers through translation initiatives, rendering masterpieces such as "Dream of the Red Chamber" and "Rickshaw Boy" into Polish, Hungarian, and Czech languages. Collaborate with local publishers and organize literary salons and book clubs to bridge emotional distances between the cultures. In the artistic sphere, orchestrate "China-Eastern Europe Art Exchange Exhibitions" or joint artistic creation projects, such as combining Chinese ink painting with Eastern European abstract art, inviting artists for collaborative creation and organizing touring exhibitions in major cities. Co-produce historical films or documentaries, focusing on Eastern European trade narratives along the Silk Road, incorporating historical narratives familiar to Eastern European audiences to enhance visual appeal and narrative resonance.

2. Knowledge dissemination through academic research and educational cooperation

Establish high-level exchange channels with Eastern European countries through academic and educational initiatives. Collaborate with prestigious Eastern European universities to establish "Chinese Culture and Silk Road Research Centers," supporting Eastern European scholars in studying Chinese history, culture, and bilateral cultural exchanges. Through the "Belt and Road" scholarship program, support Eastern European students' studies in China, particularly in cultural studies, arts, and linguistics, nurturing communication professionals with dual cultural backgrounds. Additionally, implement "Chinese Cultural Experience Courses" in Eastern European primary and secondary schools, showcasing core elements of Chinese culture through practical activities such as calligraphy, Peking Opera, and kung fu, fostering long-term cultural understanding and emotional connections through knowledge dissemination.

3. Affinity building through people-to-people exchange and cultural festivals

Cultural festivals and interactive activities hold significant importance in Eastern European social culture. Chinese cultural dissemination can build cultural affinity through enhanced civilian interaction and daily experiences. Organize "Chinese Cultural Weeks" in major Eastern European cities, featuring food festivals, film festivals, and lantern festivals to engage the general public through experiential transmission. For instance, host "Chinese Food and Film Festivals" in Budapest, combining Chinese film screenings with culinary experiences. Promote cultural exchange between Chinese and Eastern European cities through "Sister Cities" programs, organizing youth artist exchange programs for joint creative exhibitions. Support the development of Chinese cultural clubs or civilian organizations in Eastern European countries, such as funding the Chinese Culture Enthusiasts Association in Poland, establishing grassroots cultural transmission networks for deeper cultural integration into Eastern European society.

5. OPTIMIZATION PATHWAYS FOR CHINESE DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY

5.1. Implementing targeted deployment based on regional cultural heterogeneity

Cultural diplomacy's regional strategy necessitates formulating differentiated diplomatic pathways based on target regions' social structures, cultural backgrounds, and receptivity to communication, thereby achieving precision and adaptability in cultural dissemination (Kim, 2017). In the Central Asian cultural sphere, cultural diplomatic emphasis should focus on language education and regional historical memory reconstruction. Central Asian nations, historically influenced by cultural integration along the Silk Road, share interweaving historical narratives with Chinese culture. Recent national cultural revival and identity reconstruction initiatives in Central Asian countries present opportunities for Chinese cultural dissemination through language education. Through strategic placement of Confucius Institutes in Central Asia, China can develop localized Chinese language teaching materials, such as "Silk Road Chinese Reader," integrating language learning with regional culture and history familiar to Central Asian audiences, reducing cultural alienation. Language education can also align with regional cooperation under the "Belt and Road Initiative," for instance, through the "Silk Road Youth Language Ambassador Program," supporting Central Asian youth in

studying language and culture in China while inviting Chinese young scholars to disseminate culture in Central Asia, establishing bilateral cultural exchange mechanisms (Lihe, 2019).

In contrast, cultural diplomatic strategy in the Middle Eastern cultural sphere should center on religious and cultural dialogue, fully respecting Islamic culture's profound social foundation while establishing deep-seated mutual trust through cross-cultural dialogue. Cultural diplomatic projects themed around "Civilizational Dialogue" can serve as effective mechanisms for exchange between China and Middle Eastern nations, such as organizing "China-Arab Religious and Cultural Cooperation Forum," inviting Chinese and Middle Eastern Islamic scholars to explore historical cultural integration and religious tolerance between China and the Islamic world. China can also enhance cultural diplomacy's appeal and affinity by supporting Islamic cultural heritage preservation and restoration. For example, collaborating with Egypt to restore Islamic architectural complexes in Cairo demonstrates China's respect for religious and historical heritage and technical support, thereby gaining trust and recognition from Middle Eastern nations.

5.2. Constructing a multi-actor collaborative system for cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy implementation is not an isolated state action but rather a complex process involving collaboration among multiple actors, encompassing the division of labor and cooperation among government, enterprises, and civil organizations in cultural dissemination (Cabauatan, 2024). Traditional cultural diplomacy typically follows a government-led approach, such as establishing Confucius Institutes and conducting cultural exchange activities (Pan, 2013). In the globalization era, single-actor dissemination models no longer satisfy multi-level communication needs, necessitating a synergistic system of "government leadership, enterprise support, and civil participation." Taking China's practices in the Eastern European cultural sphere as an example, government-led bilateral cultural agreements establish frameworks for cultural exchange with Central and Eastern European countries, such as the cultural cooperation agreement with Hungary, providing policy support for cultural dissemination. Simultaneously, Chinese enterprises expand cultural influence through market-oriented cultural products, exemplified by Tencent's collaboration with Polish game developers, incorporating Chinese cultural elements into electronic games to attract younger audiences. Furthermore, civil cultural organizations and individuals play crucial roles in cultural dissemination, such as Poland's "Chinese Culture Enthusiasts Association" directly reaching local communities through Chinese calligraphy exhibitions and tea ceremony experiences, achieving "cultural immersion" effects.

The core of multi-actor collaborative mechanisms lies in clearly defining functional divisions and cooperation methods among different actors. Governments should fulfill coordinating and policy-guiding roles, establishing fundamental frameworks for cultural dissemination through top-level design and resource allocation of cultural diplomatic projects. Enterprises should drive cultural product innovation and dissemination through market-oriented logic, transforming cultural content into publicly accessible forms through streaming platforms, film and television production, and game development. Civil organizations and individuals should enhance emotional connections and social recognition in cultural dissemination through "grassroots communication" approaches.

5.3. Innovating cultural communication through digitalization and new media

In the contemporary era of deeply integrated informatization and globalization, new media and digital technologies have emerged as vital instruments of cultural diplomacy. Digital technologies not only transcend the spatial-temporal boundaries of cultural dissemination but also achieve precision and personalization in content delivery through interactivity and data-driven approaches (Grincheva, 2024). China can facilitate the seamless integration of cultural transmission by producing localized cultural short videos, such as presenting Chinese traditional festivals, cuisine, and craftsmanship against the backdrop of Czech-familiar music or literature. Furthermore, the implementation of VR technology provides an immersive experience for cultural dissemination, as exemplified in Chinese cultural exhibitions in Poland, where visitors can virtually explore cultural heritage sites like the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, enhancing the intuitiveness and appeal of cultural experiences (Luo, 2021). Through analysis of user behavioral data on social media platforms, Chinese cultural communication can be tailored with differentiated content for diverse regional audiences. For instance, targeting Eastern European youth's preference for entertainment-oriented content through animated videos and online games incorporating Chinese cultural elements, while

developing documentaries and educational videos about the Silk Road for Middle Eastern audiences who value religious and historical content.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

This research examines China's regional cultural transmission pathways and cultural diplomatic strategies within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. Based on cross-cultural communication theory and public diplomacy theory, and considering the regional cultural characteristics of countries along the Belt and Road, the study proposes targeted dissemination approaches and optimization strategies for different cultural spheres.

The research reveals that cultural differences constitute the primary barrier to Chinese cultural transmission, with religious sensitivity, language barriers, and political sensitivities being particularly prominent in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe. However, enhanced cultural affinity and identification can be achieved by exploring inter-regional cultural commonalities (such as the historical memory of the Silk Road) and leveraging the bridging role of the Southeast Asian Chinese cultural sphere. Regarding specific transmission pathways, cultural dissemination in Southeast Asia should build upon cultural similarities, strengthening emotional connections through festival culture, new media communication, and educational exchanges. The Central Asian cultural sphere requires a focus on "cultural co-construction," combining Silk Road history and opportunities for ethnic cultural revival to jointly build regional cultural identity. In the Middle Eastern cultural sphere, mutual trust can be fostered through cultural dialogue and cooperation in protecting religious heritage, while respecting religious beliefs and social norms. For the Eastern European cultural sphere, direct low-context communication methods should be employed, enhancing transmission effectiveness through literature, arts, academic cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges. Additionally, the study suggests that cultural diplomatic strategies should be implemented with targeted arrangements based on regional cultural heterogeneity, establishing a multi-actor cultural transmission system that coordinates government, enterprises, and civil organizations, while utilizing new media and digital technologies to achieve precise and innovative cultural dissemination.

6.2. Implications

6.2.1 Respect regional cultural differences and create "localized" cultural transmission strategies

The success of cultural transmission largely depends on understanding and adapting to regional cultural differences. Religious beliefs, linguistic habits, and political backgrounds are crucial factors in cultural transmission along the Belt and Road countries, with different regions exhibiting significant variations in sensitivity and receptivity to foreign cultures. For instance, religious sensitivities in the Middle East and Central Asia, national consciousness in Eastern European countries, and cultural diversity in Southeast Asia all impose specific requirements on content design and transmission formats. Respecting differences and avoiding regional cultural taboos constitute the fundamental prerequisites for cultural transmission. Simultaneously, transmission content needs to undergo localization transformation aligned with the target region's cultural logic, such as through language adaptation, incorporation of local cultural symbols, or integration with regional historical memories to enhance cultural affinity and identification. Therefore, cultural transmission cannot pursue a unified output model but must center on regional cultures to formulate tailored transmission strategies.

6.2.2 From unilateral output to bilateral interaction: constructing a "cultural co-building" transmission model

Cultural transmission is not merely a process of cultural output but rather a bilateral interaction and co-creation process. Unilateral output-style transmission often proves ineffective in regions with high religious sensitivity or strong cultural awareness, potentially triggering cultural rejection or resistance. Therefore, advancing cultural transmission requires adopting "cultural co-building" as a core concept, achieving deep cultural identification through cultural dialogue and cooperation with

target regions. For example, in Central Asia, exploring shared historical memories of the Silk Road while responding to local ethnic revival cultural needs can enhance transmission receptivity; in the Middle East, establishing mutual trust and respect as a foundation for transmission can be achieved through protecting Islamic cultural heritage or engaging in academic and religious dialogue.

6.2.3 Multi-actor collaboration and digital innovation are key to cultural transmission

The complexity and multi-layered demands of cultural transmission determine that a single entity cannot independently achieve transmission objectives. Synergistic cooperation among government, enterprises, and civil organizations is crucial for enhancing cultural transmission effectiveness. Government provides policy support and resource integration, enterprises expand cultural products' influence through market-oriented transmission, and civil organizations play emotional connecting roles in grassroots transmission. Furthermore, the application of new media and digital technologies brings unprecedented opportunities for cultural transmission, effectively breaking through traditional transmission's spatial-temporal limitations through short videos, VR experiences, and precise audience targeting via social media. Therefore, cultural transmission must break from traditional singular models, relying on multi-actor collaboration and technological innovation to construct a flexible, efficient, and widely-covering transmission system, thereby achieving sustainable development in cultural exchange.

6.3 Research significance and practical value

This research deepens the understanding of cultural transmission adaptability and differentiated strategies by incorporating cross-cultural communication theory and public diplomacy theory, providing a novel theoretical framework for studying cultural heterogeneity and transmission patterns along Belt and Road countries. Additionally, the research focuses on the regional characteristics of cultural transmission, emphasizing the balance between cultural commonalities and differences, advancing cultural communication studies from macro-theoretical perspectives to practical applications.

The proposed regional transmission strategies offer guidance for governments, cultural institutions, and enterprises in designing specific transmission programs across different cultural spheres including Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. These strategies facilitate efficient cultural integration through festival culture, new media transmission, educational cooperation, and cultural co-construction. Furthermore, the research's emphasis on multi-actor collaboration and digital innovation provides new implementation pathways for cultural diplomacy practice, contributing to the deep integration of Chinese culture along Belt and Road countries, shaping China's positive international image, and enhancing cultural soft power and global influence.

6.4 Research limitations and future directions

This research primarily relies on theoretical analysis and literature review, lacking empirical validation through specific cases and data support, resulting in certain conclusions requiring enhanced operability and practical guidance. Due to the breadth and depth of cultural diversity and complexity among Belt and Road countries, the analysis of regional cultural characteristics inevitably tends toward simplification, failing to comprehensively cover subtle cultural differences among countries and their specific impacts on transmission. Moreover, with the rapid development of new media technologies and dynamic changes in international political landscapes, the cultural transmission environment and audience demands continue to evolve, and the research does not fully address the long-term impact of dynamic factors on cultural transmission strategies.

Future research could conduct systematic evaluations of cultural transmission effectiveness through field investigations and case analyses, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. Additionally, further attention should be paid to innovative transmission models in the new media environment and dynamic changes in cultural reception preferences among Belt and Road countries, thereby enhancing the research's practicality and foresight.

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