

The Construction and Path of Cross-Cultural Communication Discourse of Traditional Chinese Clothing Culture

Guo Haiyan

Jiangxi Institute of Fashion Technology

Email: 475535329@qq.com

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Abstract

In today's international world, traditional Chinese clothing, especially Hanfu and cheongsam (qipao), has become an important tool for cultural expression and soft power. This article uses the existing research literature and the analysis of the text to explore the establishment and development of the discourse of cross-cultural communication about traditional Chinese clothing culture, adopting a qualitative research approach. The study shows five main thematic dimensions: (1) Digital platforms and the global expansion of Chinese clothing traditions; (2) National identity, soft nationalism, and affective economies of Chinese communities overseas; (3) The role of translation aesthetics and linguistic mediation in cultural dissemination; (4) The gendered nature of traditional clothing as a cultural nationalism space; and (5) The embodied nature of traditional clothing through tourism and experiential engagement. The results indicate that the process of the cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese clothing is multidimensional and conflictual, influenced by digital affordances, national sentiment, diasporic experience, political context and commercial strategy. The findings from this research inform larger knowledge of the ways in which material cultural heritage is translated, circulated and contested across cultural boundaries and have implications for public policy, cultural diplomacy and world fashion discourse.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Clothing, Hanfu, Cheongsam, Cross-Cultural Communication, Cultural Identity, Soft Power, Digital Media, Diaspora

Introduction

In the last decade, traditional Chinese clothing has experienced a worldwide wave of interest, which is one of the most visible and controversial forms of Chinese cultural diplomacy and national identity in the twenty-first century. Today, Hanfu (historical Chinese clothing before Manchu Qing dynasty) and the cheongsam/ qipao (common name for qipao) are not only garments with historical origins but are also powerful symbols of cultural continuity, national pride and soft power. The clothes have become a surprisingly active and

multi-layered arena of cultural negotiation and communication as China increasingly plays an active role in the international arena.

In this sense, cross-cultural communication would not only mean the actual process of exchange of garments across national boundaries but also the discursive process of making meaning as the garments are interpreted, performed and contested by actors from different cultural backgrounds. The introduction of traditional Chinese clothing into the world is not simple and nonpolitical. It's a complicated mix of digital media, government policy, business, diasporic communities, youth subcultures, and transnational fashion networks. All these actors play a part and sometimes challenge the prevailing discourses on Chinese clothing culture that are exchanged globally.

This article fits into a growing area of scholarship that has looked at traditional clothing as a way of shedding light on other cultural globalization, identity construction, and communicative strategy processes. Previous studies of fashion in China were primarily economic studies of the global fashion industry or studies on the aesthetics of a single designer, but more recent scholarship has been directed to the cultural and political dimensions of clothing as a mode of communication. In particular, the Hanfu revival has been studied as part of a social movement, a subculture and more recently as a means of national cultural promotion spearheaded by the government (Davis, Xiao & Wei, 2025; Fan & Ip, 2022; Jiang, 2025).

This article's main research question is: What is the discourse of traditional Chinese clothing culture like and what are the channels to enable or hinder the cross-cultural transmission of this culture in the context of globalization? To answer this question, the article has a qualitative and thematic analysis of the available academic literature. The study does not produce primary data, such as in interviews or surveys, but rather it collates and critically analyses existing literature to uncover themes, tensions and communicative strategies. This is fitting because the field is interdisciplinary, having been inspired by cultural studies, communication studies, fashion theory, sociology and area studies.

The article continues in the following manner. The literature review was conducted in part two to examine previous studies related to traditional Chinese garments and cross-cultural communication. The methodological approach is explained in section three. The analysis leads to the five thematic dimensions which are elaborated in sections four. The last section, titled "Theoretical implications and future research," offers reflections on the theoretical implications and future research directions of the book.

Literature Review

In the last few years, the scholarly literature on traditional Chinese clothing and its circulation worldwide has increased significantly, as has the cultural relevance of the Hanfu movement, which has also engaged a larger range of theoretical perspectives on the link between fashion, identity and nationalism. This review examines the most important works within multiple overlapping categories: cultural politics of Hanfu revival, mediation of traditional clothing in the digital space, diaspora communities in traditional clothing, gender aspects of traditional clothing, and policy frameworks for cultural dissemination.

The Hanfu revival has received in-depth analysis from multiple disciplines. Davis, Xiao, and Wei (2025) provide one of the longest analyses in which they place the movement within the context of soft nationalism, which they define as "the expression of cultural pride and national sentiment through everyday practices and consumption rather than through overtly political discourse. From their research it is clear that Hanfu is not only the recovery of a lost fashion, but an active construction of national identity, which uses historical aesthetics in support of the current political and cultural agendas. This analysis echoes studies in the field of cultural nationalism and dress, in which there has been for a long time a discussion about how traditional dress can be seen as a strong sign of collective memory and communal identity.

There has been a lot of research on the function of the digital platforms in the mediation of Hanfu revival and its globalization. This aspect (the mediation function of the digital platforms in the Hanfu revival and its globalization) has been covered widely. Min (2023) describes TikTok as a space where Hanfu cross-dressing videos are creatively reimagined and then shared with a global audience in the context of the short-form video platform. Social media is participatory, allowing the users to not only consume, but also produce and contest cultural narratives, which is a different way of communication ecology, as compared to the preceding top down approach of cultural diplomacy. Likewise, Zou (2023) explores the cross-cultural communication of Chinese culture on YouTube, discovering that there is a significant amount of cross-cultural engagement with Chinese culture on the platform and that Hanfu posts are a convenient starting point for non-Chinese users who are interested in Chinese history and aesthetics.

Turning to the Chinese video-sharing platform Bilibili, Ip and Fan (2024) analyze how affective and collective identity were mobilized during online Hanfu ceremonies in China during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the unique culture of commentating real time, danmaku. Their work shows that digital platforms are not simply vehicles for the delivery of the "cultural property" but are instrumental in producing the emotional and communal aspects of culture, and defining new kinds of imagined communities by shared sartorial and historical signposts. This result is consistent with the previous study by Fan and Ip (2022), which examined the attitudes of Chinese migrant youth in the United Kingdom, which revealed a high level of cultural pride and belongingness in using and showing Hanfu in an environment with a different cultural context.

The cheongsam, or qipao, is a case study in contrasting, if not equally illuminating, cultural politics of traditional Chinese clothing. The cheongsam is discussed from its roots in early-twentieth century Shanghai to its canonization as a symbol of Chinese femininity and world fashion in Ouyang's essay (2025). The cheongsam's journey reveals the intricate dynamics by which Chinese clothing travels the global circuit of culture, hybridizing, commercializing, and being co-opted for new meanings. The cheongsam, in contrast, has a more ambiguous cultural history because it originated from the interaction of Hanfu and the Han Chinese manner of dress, in early Republican China.

Wang (2024) explores the role of "translation aesthetics" in the spread of Hanfu, focusing on the issues of translation and linguistic mediation in the global dissemination of Chinese clothing culture, as well as the opportunities of such spread. Wang's analysis

highlights the role of the linguistic and aesthetic framing of Chinese cultural products in their reception in non-Chinese contexts, suggesting that the communicative process is equally affective and aesthetic as the content being communicated and that effective communication in the cross-cultural context needs to be concerned with the affective and aesthetic aspects of the communicative process as well as with the content of the communicative process.

In her critical feminist analysis, Jiang (2025) explores how the Hanfu movement is mobilising and limiting female subjectivity within a culture of cultural nationalism. The work of Jiang reveals how women are simultaneously central characters and idealized symbols in the Hanfu movement, and how they carry the burden of cultural authenticity to represent while also facing strong normative pressure on what is acceptable to wear, how to behave and act, and their appearance.

Lastly, Chen (2025) places the propagation of traditional Chinese attire in the context of public policy and cultural communication and explores how the Chinese government has used traditional attire as a tool for cultural diplomacy and soft power promotion. The analysis of Chen is especially significant in terms of the convergence of grassroots cultural practices, such as the Hanfu revival, and official policy agendas for the internationalization of Chinese culture, thus posing questions regarding popular cultural agency and state-directed cultural strategy.

Collectively, the papers constitute a rich and complex scholarly dialogue on the communicativeness of traditional Chinese attire. This article develops a thematic account of the construction of discourse of cross-cultural communication and the paths it can take in this field, which builds on and synthesizes this literature.

Methodology

The study is of the qualitative type, literature-based and uses the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is a methodological approach that aims to identify, conceptualise and interpret patterns of meaning, or themes in a set of textual data (in this instance, published scholarly texts) with reference to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis focuses on the interpretive aspects of communicative acts rather than attempting to quantify their frequency or distribution, as do quantitative methods, it asks what meaning(s) are being built, how they are being built, and what social and political work is being done by the constructions.

There are multiple reasons for choosing a qualitative, literature-based approach to data collection, and not a primary data collection approach. First, the research question (construction of discourse) requires interpretive methods as opposed to enumerative. Cross-cultural communication discourse is a multi-layered phenomenon, which is very complex and difficult to be captured fully with survey or structured interview. Second, there are enough and a wide variety of published materials to justify substantive thematic analysis. The secondary synthesis presented in this article is based on a wide empirical grounding as the scholars involved in the review have also performed primary research in ethnographic fieldwork, content analysis, textual analysis, and archival research.

This study's corpus is composed of 10 scholarly and peer-reviewed publications, which were chosen for their relevance to the research question, methodological soundness, and the representation of different aspects of the communicative phenomenon studied. The corpus covers publications from 2022 to 2025, marking the recent period of Hanfu's revival and the overall trend of Chinese cultural diplomacy. The publications were read closely and interpreted in a comparative fashion, focusing on the theoretical approaches used, empirical claims made, and the overall arguments concerning the communication of across cultures presented in each text.

Thematic coding was done in an iterative manner, starting from an open reading of each text to come up with the codes for each text, then comparing codes across texts to expand and clarify the thematic framework. This process resulted in the formulation of five themes: digital mediation; national identity and affective economies; translation and symbolic representation; gendered cultural nationalism; and embodied heritage through tourism, which are not to be found in any single text, but are the result of the convergence of multiple scholarly accounts. The convergent method enhances the analytical legitimacy of the thematic framework, which means the themes do not represent the special interests of individual scholars but rather patterns that emerge in the literature.

The following should be noted as a limitation of this methodology. Thematic analysis is essential in the literature, being interpretive by nature and not having the representational comprehensiveness of the large-scale empirical research. The corpus is well chosen but also represents the specific views and issues of the compiler(s) and their own discipline, nation, or ideology. However, thematic analysis of the scholarly literature has broad, deep, and interpretive strengths as a method of synthesizing and building a conceptual grasp of a complex communicative phenomenon.

Discussion

Here are the five thematic dimensions that emerge from the qualitative analysis of the scholarly literature. Each theme is explored in interaction with available sources, looking at the intersections and conflicts in the texts.

Digital Platforms as Vectors of Cross-Cultural Dissemination

The current cultural communication of traditional Chinese clothing is undoubtedly the most important aspect from a structural point of view, because the digital platform has become the most important carrier in both the content and scope of cultural dissemination. The communicative ecology in which traditional clothing cultures circulate has been redefined by social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Bilibili, and Instagram; which allows for the production, distribution, and reception of clothing culture, unimaginable for previous generations of cultural diplomats and community activists.

In the TikTok videos, Hanfu cross-dressers have utilized the algorithm-driven architecture of global social media platforms to amplify their videos to audiences larger than any newsworthy promotion, as revealed by the analysis of these videos by Min (2023). The creative and sometimes humorous aspects of tiktok posts, such as presentation, transformation sequences, historical role-play, and comparative displays of traditional Chinese attire versus modern Chinese attire, render traditional Chinese clothing aesthetically

accessible and culturally legible to non-Chinese viewers that may not normally have access to Chinese sartorial heritage. Importantly, the participatory nature of TikTok's architecture allows for anyone, outside of China, to engage with, remix, and respond to the content, thereby fostering forms of dialogue that are fundamentally different from those used in traditional cultural diplomacy, where cultural goods are broadcasted from a single source.

This analysis is expanded by Zou (2023) in a study of YouTube, which has a more dispersed and international user base and a longer video culture. YouTube's platform allows for more in-depth and contextually meaningful representations of Hanfu history, appearance, and cultural value, giving content creators the tools to create comprehensive educational content that places traditional clothing in the context of Chinese history and culture. In conclusion, Zou's findings indicate that this contextual richness is a vital component in inciting positive audiences reaction of Hanfu with non-Chinese spectators, who appreciate the aesthetic values of Hanfu and also feel curious about the historical and cultural aspects. The comments feature a cross-cultural discourse of their own, an evolving dialogue between Chinese and non-Chinese participants regarding the type, substance and aesthetic of dress, as well as elements of history and identity.

As a distinctly Chinese digital platform that culture forms through its architecture, such as the danmaku comment system, Bilibili allows for affective aspects of community that are unique from those offered by western platforms, as discussed by Ip and Fan (2024). The danmaku system – where comments are released on the video's screen in real time - evokes a sense of co-presence and allows geographically distant viewers to enjoy a high level of shared experience, thus strengthening a sense of collective identity around traditional dressing. In the era of COVID-19 when physical Hanfu ceremonies were unavailable, online Hanfu ceremonies on Bilibili became the authors' term "affective apparatus," a technological and cultural mechanism that creates, directs, and maintains emotional investment in traditional culture. Although Bilibili is a domestic platform, it also has a certain influence on the affective infrastructure of the Hanfu community, which also impacts the intensity and nature of the cultural identity that will be communicated on other more international media platforms.

Overall, these findings indicate that digital platforms are not merely carriers of traditional Chinese cultural artifacts, but carriers that also contribute to the construction and re-construction of traditional Chinese clothing culture. Every platform has its own affordances, algorithms, culture of comments and image conventions that define the communicative potential of cultural producers and audiences. To grasp the cross-cultural communication of traditional clothing, it is important to explore the infrastructural attributes of the digital media environment as well as the content that circulates within it.

National Identity, Soft Nationalism, and Affective Economies

The other thematic line that comes from the traditional attire is about the link between traditional wear, national identity and what Davis, Xiao and Wei (2025) theorise as soft nationalism. This idea engages with the practices of consumption, clothing, and cultural engagement that are ways of expressing and reinforcing national sentiment and cultural pride, which are not necessarily in the explicitly ideological realm of political nationalism. The soft nationalist aspect of Hanfu revival is also important for the cross-cultural communicative

aspects as it influences the rationale of Hanfu as used by Chinese Hanfu enthusiasts, as well as how it is viewed by international audiences.

In general, the discourse of Hanfu practitioners is expressed in terms of cultural pride, cultural continuity, and the desire to bring traditional dress into visibility and dignity in the realm of their own culture and society, as well as beyond. As the analysis by Davis et al. (2025) shows, the discourse of Hanfu practitioners is predominantly in terms of cultural pride, cultural continuity, and the restoration of the visibility and dignity of the Han Chinese sartorial heritage in the local and international field. The motivational system is also the result of the overall cultural and political situation in modern China, where the topic of the revival and propagation of traditional Chinese culture and customs is promoted by the national discourse of cultural revival, which is embodied in the idea of the Chinese Dream. In this sphere, cross-cultural communication is never just the exchange of aesthetic information, but also, always, the statement of cultural value and national presence of the soft nationalist Hanfu movement.

The traditional clothing of Chinese migrant youth in the UK is a particularly striking example of how traditional clothing might act as a resource when negotiating identity and building community in diaspora settings, as explored by Fan and Ip (2022). According to their participants, dressing in Hanfu in the public space of Britain is a way of asserting cultural identity and 'visibility' as a 'conceptualised' (as the authors put it, based on Benedict Anderson's idea of 'imagined communities') sense of belonging to a larger Chinese community, which extends beyond the local social environment. Understanding these practices requires attention to the affective economy of Hanfu wearing—the flow of pride, belonging and recognition associated with these traditional garments—because these economies lie at the heart of the "communicative act" of wearing Hanfu.

The affective economy comes into its own here, as it helps to highlight the emotional aspects of cultural communication: feelings of pride, longing, solidarity, and curiosity are not just by-products of the transmission of cultural information but are the very substance of cultural engagement. In this affective experience, the wearing of Hanfu is the motivation for and content of the cross-cultural encounter, as shown by the migrant student's pride in wearing it in the centre of the British city (Fan & Ip, 2022). The foreign viewer who shows interest or interest in the Chinese dress is involved in an affective exchange as important as any information conveyed with regard to the history of Chinese clothing.

In addition to this affective picture, Chen (2025) has analyzed the dimensions of public policy. With the gradual rise of the Chinese state's promotion of traditional clothing culture in the field of education, public diplomacy programs and the official introduction of Hanfu into the official cultural display of Chinese cultural heritage, there exists a structural environment where traditional clothing culture has been officially promoted and its grassroots affective investment is in harmony with, and even enhanced by, the official culture promotion. The alignment brings up difficult questions regarding popular cultural agency and state power in the context of cross-cultural communication, as well as the degree of autonomy of the affective economies of the Hanfu community from the strategic games of cultural diplomacy.

Translation Aesthetics, Linguistic Mediation, and Symbolic Representation

The third theme is about the translation of traditional Chinese clothing in terms of language and aesthetics for intercultural audiences. This theme includes the literal translation of cultural and historical terms from Chinese to other languages, as well as the aesthetic mediation in which the visual and material features of traditional garments are made meaningful for audiences who are not familiar with the culture or history from which they are drawn.

The analysis of translation aesthetics in the dissemination of Hanfu under the Belt and Road Initiative by Wang (2024) provides a sophisticated approach to thinking about these issues. Effective cross-cultural communication of traditional clothing, Wang contends, does not only involve the accurate translation of the clothing terminology used—historical clothing type names, symbolic meanings of clothing, clothing craft techniques—but the aesthetic dimensions of the act of translation itself. This includes decisions regarding the style and level of detail included in the descriptive text, including the use of visionary images to support the written description and the context in which traditional garments are described, as they are told in the story. In this sense translation aesthetics is as much an issue of affect/impression as one of semantic equivalence, and the success of cross-cultural communication relies on the skill of the translators and mediators to evoke the right affect/impression in the target cultures.

Wang's results also point to the political aspects of translation in this context. The Belt and Road Initiative offers a specific institutional framework, which influences the cultural promotion resources, as well as the ideologies within the formulation of the translation choices. Under the BRI umbrella, translations of Hanfu-related content are likely to focus on themes of continuity, cultural refinement, and peaceful exchange—one that fits the overall soft power agenda of the BRI. The strategic nature of translation aesthetics is reflected in the fact that the linguistic mediation of traditional clothing is not politically neutral at all, but always part of a broader discourse on China's projection towards the world.

The traditional Chinese garments have symbolic connotations which pose unique difficulties in intercultural communication. Clothing items such as Hanfu and cheongsam are packed with historical, ethnic, gender and political meanings, which can be ambiguous or even misleading to foreigners. Ouyang's analysis of the cheongsam is instructive here because it shows how, in the face of this complex and contested cultural genealogy, an article of clothing that was created in the interaction between Manchu and Han Chinese dress traditions, then hybridized with Western tailoring techniques in Republican Shanghai, can be decontextualized and reduced to a symbol of generic Chineseness in international fashion discourse. The symbolic simplification may help in cross-cultural recognition and appreciation, but can also mask the cultural specificity and history that makes this garment culturally significant.

Based on the above observations, it can be seen that traditional Chinese attire cross-cultural communication is bound to encounter problems and conflicts between accessibility and depth, between the communication needs of cross-cultural understandability and the cultural requirements of historical authenticity and symbolism. Traditional costumes should be treated with sensitivity in cross-cultural communication, in order to make them relevant

and interesting to the international audience, while preserving the complexity that is the essence of their cultural value.

Gendered Narratives and Cultural Nationalism

Gender and cultural nationalism are combined with each other, forming a new aspect of gender and cultural nationalism in the field of traditional Chinese clothing and cross-cultural communication, which is also a major theme in the literature. Traditional dress is always not gender neutral: it carries and perpetuates specific notions of femininity and masculinity, and the revival and internationalisation of traditional dress involves these gendered aspects. Reviewing the literature examined here, one would find a nuanced and even ambivalent understanding of gender in the cross-cultural communication discourse of traditional Chinese clothing.

These issues are addressed most thoroughly in the corpus by the feminist discussion of women in the Hanfu movement by Jiang (2025). In the process of the Hanfu cultural nationalist movement, women play a paradoxical role of being the most visible and active wearable and promotional practitioners of Hanfu and also the subject of the most intensive Hanfu normative regulation in terms of what women should wear, how they should behave and what they should represent. The idealized Hanfu woman, being graceful, historically knowledgeable, aesthetic and culturally proud, serves as a representative of the movement's arguments regarding the superiority of Chinese civilization and the refinement of Chinese aesthetics. This puts strong pressure on women practitioners, who are required to balance individual agency with the representation expectations of the greater movement.

These gendered processes are important in the context of cross-cultural communication because women's bodies and clothing are used as salient symbols of cultural distinction and national identity in intercultural encounters. The communicative exchange between Chinese women in Hanfu and foreign observers, or between Hanfu content with female practitioners and foreign digital platforms, revolves around the subject of traditional clothing and the gendered aesthetics it embodies. The elegant femininity of Hanfu and cheongsam in international fashion discourse has also embodied the other gendered stereotypes in which Chinese culture is represented and received in western contexts, which can enrich the aesthetics of traditional Chinese clothing and shape the negative stereotype of Chinese women and Chinese culture.

In his analysis of the cheongsam Ouyang (2025) also reveals these gendered dynamics by detailing how the garment has been linked throughout its history with specific conceptions of Chinese femininity (feminine, sensual, cosmopolitan) which have been commercial and diplomatic in function in international contexts. It is only because the cheongsam is recognized as an iconic symbol of Chinese feminine elegance that it can be worn as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and soft power projection, but the recognition of the cheongsam as an iconic symbol of Chinese feminine elegance is not without the connotation of objectification of Chinese women.

It is not, however, a story of constraint and objectification in all contexts of traditional Chinese clothing, as gender relations have not always been as oppressive. It seems that, as Fan and Ip (2022) argue, this practice of Hanfu wearing is a truly empowering one for young

Chinese women in diaspora contexts, allowing them to take ownership of cultural visibility, historical depth, and an identity that is not defined by Western stereotypes of Chinese identity. These women view the representation of their culture as a way of asserting themselves as well as displaying their aesthetic beauty; positive cross-cultural recognition is felt as personal and collective empowerment. This complexity indicates that gendered cultural nationalism regarding traditional dress is not just an imposition from above but a site of negotiation in which women are involved, but limited agents.

Tourism, Embodiment, and the Experiential Transmission of Heritage

The fifth theme is about the process of traditional Chinese clothing heritage passing from one region to another through the tourism experiences of people. Digital media has extended the reach of the traditional clothing culture to the global audience, but the embodied aspects of dress – the tactile experience of wearing a dress, the performative aspects of traditional dress in particular cultural settings – continues to be important vectors of cross-cultural cultural engagement. Tourism involves the contact of the tourist with traditional Chinese dress, providing an especially useful context for analysis of the role of embodied experience in cross-cultural communication.

Cui, Song, and Tang (2025) study the Hanfu costume tourism reveals insights into the ways in which tourism contexts facilitate cross-cultural encounter beyond the informational or visual aspects of digital media engagement. Hanfu tourism experiences allow visitors to wear the traditional dress in historical settings, to experience traditional activities and ceremonies, and to interact with cultural interpreters to learn about the traditional Hanfu culture through experience, a translation of the cultural meaning that has been mediated with the body and through the senses rather than linguistically or visually.

The body aspects of the experience of traditional clothes within tourism are important for various reasons. First, the wearing of a garment gives a different kind of somatic knowledge which the visual cannot provide: the texture of the garment, the weight and movement of the garment, the postural adjustments of traditional silhouettes, and the social responses that are generated when a person wears traditional dress makes for a much more multisensory experience of cultural difference and cultural contact. Second, the experience of wearing Hanfu puts visitors in a social setting (usually with knowledgeable guides and other participants), which allows them to learn about traditional dress with text in context, which is not easily obtained from a video. Second, it's the act of wearing Hanfu that puts them in a social context (usually with the guide and other wearers of Hanfu), where such "contextual" learning about the traditional dress, which is not easy to get from a video, can take place.

The tourism context also shows important dynamics of cultural commodification and authentication essential for understanding the cross-cultural communication of traditional clothing heritage. The packaging of traditional clothing as a tourism experience inevitably entails simplification, selection, and dramatization, which help to make the traditional culture accessible and fun to tourists while necessarily influencing the meanings of the culture which are communicated. The challenge for the operators of heritage tourism is the way to present the heritage of sartorial culture in a way that is experientially exciting, culturally accessible and yet also true to the complexity and depth of the sartorial heritage that is being presented.

Here, the institutional aspect of heritage tourism has been highlighted by Chen (2025), who pointed out that cultural heritage tourism institutions have been deliberately cultivated by the Chinese government to develop cultural heritage and spread Chinese culture abroad. The fact that tourism promotion is emerging as an active tool in the implementation of cultural diplomacy's goals generates an increasing strategic dimension to the experiential aspects of traditional clothing heritage, a dimension determined both by the "strategic" aspect of how the Chinese culture should be presented to the international visitor, as well as by the commercial logic of the tourism industry.

The cultural connotations of traditional clothing in cross-cultural communication are not only in the formal tourist setting. Everyday wearing of Hanfu and other traditional Chinese garments in public places, both by Chinese people in China and by practitioners of the Hanfu culture overseas, is an impromptu event of cross-cultural encounter and cultural exchange, not organised or scripted by any institution. These unofficial meetings are embodied cultural diplomacy and are part of the research findings of Fan and Ip (2022) on young Chinese migrants in the UK, where the cultural diplomacy is at a personalised level of interaction and communal practice rather than institutional strategy. The value they bring to cross-cultural communication is underestimated: culturally embodied experiences of the personal and relational may lead to more affectively resonant and lasting forms of cross-cultural understanding and appreciation than those that can be created through mediated or institutionally-focused cultural promotion.

Conclusion

Based on qualitative thematic analysis of the literature, this article has explored the process and route of the discourse of cross-cultural communication in the context of traditional Chinese clothing culture. The role of digital platforms in the mediation of the global dissemination of culture; the national, soft national and affective economies; the problems and solutions of translation aesthetics and symbolic representation; the gendered aspects of cultural nationalism in the field of traditional dress; and the embodied aspects of the transmission of heritage through tourism and everyday practice.

The analysis sheds light on the cross-cultural communication in this dimension as a multi-dimensional and at the same time a contested process. Traditional Chinese clothing, with Hanfu's references to Han ethnic and historical background, or cheongsam's more hybrid and cosmopolitan genealogy, embraces aesthetics, history, ethnicity, gender and in some aspects politics simultaneously. The process of transculturing these meanings across cultures is a natural process of simplification, reframing, and reinterpretation, both that can lead to appreciation across cultures and that can lead to misrepresentation or flattening of the symbol.

The digital media has changed the conditions and possibilities of this cross-cultural communication in a fundamental way, in ways that provide opportunities for participatory engagement, affective connection, and global reach, which were not available to previous generations. For example, platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Bilibili are not just tools for cultural communication, but are also actively forming cultural meanings, influencing the affective and aesthetic aspects of traditional clothes discourse communicated on these platforms. These platforms are participatory and form new ways of cross-cultural

communication that supplement and sometimes contradict the traditional cultural diplomacy model in which Chinese cultural institutions project traditional culture abroad.

The intersection of popular cultural agency and state power becomes a recurring theme in the literature as the Hanfu revival and the state's push for internationalizing Chinese culture become more closely intertwined (Chen, 2025; Davis et al., 2025). This alignment brings up some pertinent questions concerning the conditions of a real dialogic and enriching cross-cultural cultural communication to the forefront, rather than one that is strategically one-directional. The affective economies arguments proposed by Fan and Ip (2022) and Ip and Fan (2024) – the circuits of pride, belonging and communal recognition that activates traditional dress practices – indicate that the motivational underpinnings of cross-cultural communication in this field are not to be extrapolated from state strategy or commercial interest but rather from authentic experiences of cultural identity and communal belonging that deserve recognition and respect.

The cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese clothes has a gender component that needs to be continued in future research. According to Jiang (2025), women are over-represented in the Hanfu movement and are both the ones who promote culture and the ones who represent cultural authenticity and national femininity. The cross-cultural reception of these genders may be complicated, even contradictory, as they intersect with existing stereotypes of Chinese femininity and culture and can both hinder and help transmission. More systematic attention to the perspectives of the international audiences that receive and interpret these representations and to the negotiation of the cultural meanings of gender in specific cross-cultural encounters would be fruitful for future research in this area.

This article holds a number of theoretical and practical implications. In theory, it provides a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary framework for studying the interplay between digital media, cultural nationalism theory, translation theory, feminist cultural analysis and heritage tourism research and thus opens up the space for an existing interdisciplinary scholarly literature on fashion, identity and cross-cultural communication. The integrative approach shows aspects of the communicative phenomenon that would somehow not be visible in any one of the disciplines, which underlines the importance of thematic synthesis as a qualitative research method.

In practice, the results give some indications of the ways that greater effectiveness and equity in cross-cultural communication could be achieved in this area. These include: paying more attention to cultural complexity and historical depth of traditional dress in promotional and educational materials; investing in translation aesthetics that can communicate beyond informational to affective and aesthetic aspects of traditional dress culture; creating participatory and dialogic ways of engaging across cultures beyond the one-way cultural promotion approach; and paying more nuanced attention to gendered dynamics of traditional dress representation in international contexts.

To sum up, the research of traditional Chinese clothing culture reveals that it is a rich and complex field for cross-cultural communication, which is significant for the study of cultural globalization, cultural identity construction and soft power in the modern world. The

questions addressed in this article are becoming increasingly relevant as China delves deeper into cultural promotion internationally and as the audiences of the world increasingly turn to Chinese cultural content on the internet and other media. An intellectual obligation is just as well as a contribution to the cause of more just, more enriching, cross-cultural communication, is to advance the knowledge of these communicative processes—how they are constructed, how they traverse, how they compete, and how they are possible.

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