

Multimodal Synergy: Multimodal Communication Pathways for Hengyang Regional Culture

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the deep integration of globalization and digitalization, the international communication of regional cultures is undergoing a paradigm shift from "text-centeredness" to "modal convergence." Hengyang regional culture, as a distinctive part of Chinese culture, faces persistent challenges in its international dissemination, including cultural discount, platform dependence, and stereotypical perceptions. To address these challenges, this study aims to explore multimodal international communication pathways for Hengyang regional culture. Drawing on multimodal discourse analysis theory and digital humanities technologies, the study adopts a systematic approach that integrates literature review, case analysis, and comparative studies. The findings reveal that Hengyang regional culture exhibits a five-dimensional structure comprising "Nanyue Longevity Culture," "Chuanshan Culture," "Anti-Japanese War Culture," "Red Culture," and "Modern Culture." Accordingly, the study proposes a multimodal pathway model centered on the dual strategies of "creative transformation" and "multimodal synergy," supported by specialized corpus construction, 3D digitization of cultural relics, and innovative multimodal content production. The results indicate that such an integrated pathway can effectively mitigate the cultural discount effect, reduce platform dependency, and break down stereotypical barriers in cross-cultural communication. In conclusion, this study provides a systematic theoretical framework and practical insights for the international cultural communication of Hengyang and other similar small and medium-sized cities, offering actionable strategies for enhancing global cultural outreach.

Keywords

Hengyang Regional Culture, Multimodal Communication, Digital Humanities, Creative Transformation, International Communication.

1. Introduction

As an integral component of Chinese culture, regional culture embodies unique historical memories, spiritual values, and aesthetic experiences. Its international communication is of great significance for showcasing the diversity of Chinese civilization and enhancing cross-cultural understanding [1]. Located in the hinterland of southern Hunan, Hengyang possesses rich and diverse cultural resources: the "Longevity Culture" of Mount Nanyue and its harmonious coexistence of Buddhism and Taoism, Wang Chuanshan's philosophical thought of "practical statecraft" (jingshi zhiyong), the national spirit embodied in the Battle of Hengyang, and Red Culture resources such as the Southern Hunan Uprising. Together, these constitute a multifaceted Hengyang cultural system.

However, the international communication of Hengyang regional culture faces multiple challenges: first, a "translation gap" in cultural connotations, where core concepts suffer severe semantic attenuation in cross-cultural contexts; second, "platform dependence" in

communication channels, constrained by Western-dominated international media platforms; third, "stereotyping" in audience perception, where the richness and uniqueness of regional culture are easily oversimplified. In recent years, the rapid development of digital humanities technologies has provided new possibilities for addressing these cultural communication challenges. Hengyang City has actively promoted the "integration of culture and technology" and the "integration of culture and tourism" (referred to as the "two integrations"), implementing innovative practices such as digital upgrades of Nanyue scenic areas and immersive Red Tourism experiences, which provide empirical support for this study.

This study attempts to answer the following questions: What specific challenges does the international communication of Hengyang regional culture face? How can creative transformation of cultural content be achieved through multimodal means? How can digital humanities technologies empower innovation in communication pathways? How can multimodal communication pathways be constructed? Based on these questions, this paper examines multimodal international communication pathways for Hengyang regional culture from the perspective of digital humanities, providing reference points for the international cultural communication of Hengyang and other small and medium-sized cities.

2. Current Dilemmas in the International Communication of Hengyang Regional Culture

Due to cultural differences between China and other countries, limited communication channels, and constrained foreign audience cognition, the international communication of Hengyang regional culture faces dilemmas including "cultural discount" in content transduction, platform dependence in channel construction, and stereotyping in audience perception.

2.1. The Dilemma of "Cultural Discount" in Content Transduction

"Cultural discount" refers to the phenomenon whereby cultural products experience diminished value and appeal when entering foreign markets due to cultural background differences [2]. Core concepts in Hengyang culture undergo serious semantic attenuation in cross-cultural communication. For example, the character shou (寿, longevity) in Nanyue's "Longevity Culture" denotes not only lifespan but also embodies philosophical connotations of "harmony between heaven and humanity" (tianren heyi) and "happiness, fortune, health, and peace" (fushou kangning), as well as folk sentiments. The single English word "longevity" cannot fully convey its rich meaning. Wang Chuanshan's philosophical concepts such as "qi monism" (qi yiyuan lun) and "unity of principle and circumstance" (lishi tongyi) are even more profound and challenging for international audiences lacking the requisite philosophical context [3]. The historical background of the Battle of Hengyang and the comprehensive perspective of China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression are also relatively unfamiliar to international audiences. Moreover, symbols, imagery, and allusions in Hengyang culture (such as Nanyue Temple Fair rituals and the architectural layout of Chuanshan Academy) lack adequate cultural contextual support for international audiences, hindering accurate interpretation.

The underlying causes of this "cultural discount" phenomenon are threefold: first, the limitations of linguistic conversion—mere textual translation cannot convey the profound meanings embedded in culture; second, the absence of cultural context—international audiences lack the background knowledge necessary to understand Chinese regional culture; third, differences in value systems—there exist fundamental disparities in the perception of concepts such as "longevity," "courage" (xuexing), and "practical statecraft" across different cultural backgrounds.

2.2. The Dilemma of Platform Dependence in Channel Construction

Major platforms for international cultural communication, such as YouTube, Netflix, Facebook, and Instagram, are predominantly Western-dominated. The algorithmic recommendations, content moderation policies, and business models of these platforms reflect Western values and aesthetic standards [4]. The dissemination of Hengyang cultural content on these platforms is inevitably constrained by platform rules and faces the risk of marginalization. For example, On November 6, 2025, Hengyang City opened the "Discover Hengyang" account on Facebook and TikTok and released the video Hengyang, "A City Where Wild Geese Linger", showcasing local cultural and tourism attractions including Mount Nanyue and Shigu Academy. Regrettably, the video did not achieve significant international reach or influence.

The dilemma of platform dependence stems primarily from three factors: first, algorithmic bias. Western-dominated recommendation algorithms tend to privilege content conforming to Western aesthetics and values, making it difficult for Hengyang's regional and traditional cultural content to gain algorithmic traction. Second, cultural disparities in content moderation. Content related to Nanyue religious culture and Red revolutionary history may encounter moderation obstacles due to cultural misunderstandings or different interpretative frameworks. Third, limited user base. Although local Hengyang media and cultural tourism departments have established overseas social media accounts, significant gaps remain in user scale, content richness, and brand influence. Compared to world-class urban cultural communication platforms, Hengyang's proprietary communication platforms demonstrate noticeable deficiencies in technical infrastructure, content production capacity, and operational professionalism.

2.3. The Dilemma of Stereotyping in Audience Perception

Under the lens of "Orientalism," Chinese culture is often reduced to symbolic images such as "dragon," "panda," "kung fu," and "Peking opera" [5]. The richness and distinctiveness of Hengyang regional culture are easily overlooked. External perceptions of Hengyang may be limited to the tourist symbol of "Mount Nanyue," with minimal awareness of its profound Chuanshan thought, heroic war history, or moving Red revolutionary narratives.

In international communication practice, this stereotyping dilemma manifests in two dimensions: first, simplification and exoticization of cultural presentation. Hengyang cultural content is easily reduced to tourism promotional videos or exotic imagery, lacking substantive cultural interpretation and value transmission. For instance, Nanyue Longevity Culture is simplified to a tourist selling point of "longevity and blessings," while Wang Chuanshan's thought is either ignored or mislabeled as merely "ancient philosophy." Second, marginalization of cultural value. Within international discourse systems, local and regional cultures are frequently regarded as "subcultures" or "local particularities," struggling to enter mainstream cultural dialogue. The entrenchment of such stereotypes not only affects international recognition of Hengyang culture but also undermines its potential for enhancing cultural soft power.

3. Literature Review

Research on Hengyang regional culture has predominantly focused on its constituent components. Regarding Nanyue culture, scholars have conducted in-depth explorations of its religious history, sacrificial culture, and the connotations of Longevity Culture, including studies on the unique phenomenon of the "coexistence and co-prosperity" of Buddhism and Taoism at Nanyue [6]. The study of Wang Chuanshan (Chuanshan studies) has evolved into an international scholarly field, with domestic and international scholars systematically interpreting his philosophical, historiographical, and literary contributions [3][7]. Research on

the Battle of Hengyang primarily approaches the subject from military history and War of Resistance perspectives, examining its strategic significance and historical impact [8]. Studies of Red Culture focus on revolutionary events in Hengyang, such as the Southern Hunan Uprising and the Shuikoushan Workers' Movement [9].

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) theory was systematically formulated by Kress and Van Leeuwen, emphasizing that meaning is co-constructed through various semiotic modes including visual, auditory, and spatial modalities [10]. This theory transcends the traditional linguistics paradigm centered on written language, incorporating non-linguistic signs such as images, sounds, space, and gestures into the analytical framework of meaning-making. Chinese scholar Zhang Delu constructed a comprehensive theoretical framework for MDA comprising four levels: culture, context, content, and expression [11], providing localized theoretical support for multimodal research within the Chinese context. In recent years, the application of multimodal theory to cultural communication has expanded. Song Hongli et al., examining China in the Classics, explored the metaphorical transduction mechanisms in the cross-cultural communication of Chinese canonical texts, revealing the crucial role of multimodal semiotic synergy in cultural communication [12].

Digital humanities, as an interdisciplinary field bridging the humanities and digital technologies, offers new tools and methodologies for cultural communication [13]. Schreibman et al. systematically expounded the theoretical framework and application paradigms of digital humanities, emphasizing the transformative role of digital technologies in the preservation, research, and dissemination of cultural resources [13]. Yu Guoming discussed paradigm shifts in communication during the algorithmic age [14], while Peng Lan investigated applications of virtual reality technology in news communication [15]. These studies provide important analytical frameworks for this paper's technical pathway analysis.

A review of existing research reveals several limitations: first, research on Hengyang culture has largely focused on individual domains (such as Chuanshan studies or Nanyue history), lacking integrated research on cultural holism and communicability; second, studies of regional culture's international communication often adopt macro perspectives (such as Huxiang culture) or single-disciplinary approaches, with insufficient attention to small and medium-sized city case studies; third, although multimodal communication theory is theoretically robust, its application to regions with multidimensional cultural characteristics like Hengyang remains relatively underdeveloped; fourth, research on digital technology-empowered cultural communication predominantly remains at the level of technical description, lacking systematic pathway construction tailored to specific cultural resources such as those of Hengyang.

This study proposes a five-dimensional framework of Hengyang regional culture—"Nanyue Longevity Culture," "Chuanshan Culture," "Anti-Japanese War Culture," "Red Culture," and "Modern Culture"—and integrates multimodal discourse analysis theory, cross-cultural communication theory, and digital humanities technologies to construct a multimodal international communication pathway for Hengyang regional culture across three levels: cultural content, technological empowerment, and communication strategies.

4. Constructing Multimodal Communication Pathways

Multimodal discourse analysis theory posits that meaning is co-constructed not solely through linguistic signs but through the synergistic interaction of multiple semiotic modes including visual, auditory, tactile, spatial, and gestural modalities [10]. The "visual grammar" theory proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen elucidates the meaning-making mechanisms of visual elements such as images, colors, and spatial layouts [16]. This theory provides analytical instruments for cultural communication that transcend linguistic boundaries. Based on these theoretical foundations, this paper examines the construction of multimodal international

communication pathways for Hengyang regional culture across three dimensions: cultural content, technological empowerment, and communication strategies.

4.1. Cultural Content: The Five-Dimensional Structure of Hengyang Regional Culture

Hengyang regional culture refers to the cultural system with distinctive regional characteristics formed through prolonged historical accumulation within Hengyang's geographical scope. Drawing on multiple scholarly perspectives and Hengyang's local cultural characteristics, and employing criteria including temporal dimension (ancient, Ming-Qing, modern, contemporary, and present-day periods), cultural typology (religious, philosophical, military, revolutionary, and industrial culture), and communication value (universal blessings, philosophical inquiry, shared human memory, revolutionary spirit transmission, and developmental achievement demonstration), this study delineates Hengyang regional culture into five dimensions: "Nanyue Longevity Culture," "Chuanshan Culture," "Anti-Japanese War Culture," "Red Culture," and "Modern Culture." The five-dimensional structure is as follows:

(1) Nanyue Longevity Culture Dimension: Centered on Mount Nanyue, this encompasses the blessing culture of "longevity as lofty as the Southern Mountain," millennia-old sacrificial traditions, the religious culture of "three teachings in harmony" (Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism), and intangible cultural heritage including the Nanyue Temple Fair and pilgrimage customs [6]. This represents Hengyang's most recognizable cultural icon, possessing universal cross-cultural appeal.

(2) Chuanshan Culture Dimension: Centered on the late Ming and early Qing dynasty thinker Wang Fuzhi (styled Chuanshan), this encompasses his philosophical concepts including "qi monism," "unity of principle and circumstance," and "unity of knowledge and action," alongside monumental works such as the Complete Works of Chuanshan [3][7]. Chuanshan thought constitutes a seminal source of Huxiang culture and modern Chinese intellectual history, possessing profound academic value and ideological historical significance.

(3) Anti-Japanese War Culture Dimension: Centered on the 1944 "Battle of Hengyang," one of the most brutal urban defense engagements in China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression [8]. This dimension encompasses the historical facts of heroic resistance by Hengyang's military and civilian population, wartime site remains, and the embodied spirit of "resolute courage" (xuexing) and patriotism, which can be situated within the grand narrative of the World Anti-Fascist War.

(4) Red Culture Dimension: Encompasses major revolutionary historical events in Hengyang during the New Democratic Revolution period, including the Southern Hunan Uprising and the Shuikoushan Workers' Movement, as well as the heroic deeds of revolutionary martyrs such as Xia Minghan and Mao Zejian [9]. This represents a crucial manifestation of Hengyang's revolutionary tradition, bearing contemporary significance for transmitting revolutionary spirit.

(5) Modern Culture Dimension: Cultural innovations emerging in Hengyang since the reform and opening-up period, including industrial transformation and development (such as TBEA and the power transmission and transformation industrial cluster), modern cultural and creative industries (such as the emergence of Baoweili Cultural and Creative District), and the contemporary Hengyang spirit of "enduring hardship and perseverance" (chi de ku, ba de man) [17]. This represents the cultural expression of Hengyang's contemporary developmental achievements.

This five-dimensional structure results from a comprehensive and systematic examination of Hengyang's cultural resources, providing a coherent content framework for subsequent communication strategies.

4.2. Technological Empowerment: Data Reconstruction of Hengyang Culture

Multimodal communication necessitates systematic digitization of cultural resources. The core objective of this stage is to transform Hengyang's cultural resources from physical manifestations to digital formats, establishing a "digital resource pool" for multimodal content production.

(1) Specialized Cultural Corpus Construction

Given the specialized and regional characteristics of Hengyang culture, dedicated cultural corpora should be constructed. For example:

Nanyue Culture Corpus: Digitizing explanatory texts, inscriptions, and religious ritual texts from core scenic areas such as Nanyue Grand Temple and Zhurong Peak, establishing multilingual parallel corpora (Classical Chinese–Modern Chinese–English/Japanese/other languages).

Chuanshan Thought Corpus: Digitizing and creating bilingual versions of core chapters from Wang Chuanshan's works (such as *Du Tongjian Lun* [Reading the Comprehensive Mirror] and *Huang Shu* [Yellow Book]) alongside interpretive scholarship, constructing specialized terminological glossaries to establish foundations for cross-cultural philosophical communication.

Red and Anti-Japanese War Culture Corpus: Collecting oral histories from Battle of Hengyang veterans, martyrs' correspondence (such as Xia Minghan's letters), and explanatory texts from revolutionary sites, building multimodal corpora integrating textual materials with historical photographs, video documentation, and physical artifacts, thereby providing multimodal resources for emotionally resonant narratives.

(2) 3D(Three-dimensional) Digitization of Cultural Artifacts and Heritage Sites

Utilizing 3D modeling technology and mobile applications to digitize Hengyang's cultural artifacts and heritage sites. For instance:

Creating high-precision 3D models of ancient architectural complexes such as Nanyue Grand Temple and significant cultural artifacts. International users can appreciate architectural details from multiple perspectives via mobile applications or web platforms.

Establishing 3D digital models of Anti-Japanese War heritage sites, reconstructing battlefield topography and fortification layouts through integration of historical photographs and archival materials. Users can "enter" war trenches and "interact with" historical artifacts in virtual environments, experiencing historical gravitas through immersive experiences.

(3) Innovative Multimodal Content Production

The core objective of this stage is to transform digitized cultural resources into multimodal content products suitable for international communication. Different multimodal products should be developed according to content type variations.

First, develop immersive virtual experience applications. For example, users can "ascend" Zhurong Peak to observe sunrise, "ignite" blessing incense on smartphone screens, and inscribe wishes, with the system automatically generating multilingual blessing cards. Through synergistic deployment of multiple modes—visual (sunrise landscape), auditory (Buddhist chants and meditative music), and interactive (virtual blessing rituals)—international audiences obtain authentic cultural experiences within virtual spaces. Alternatively, based on 3D-reconstructed battlefield models, develop VR games or experiential projects whereby users can "assume the role" of Hengyang defense soldiers, experiencing 48 days of tenacious resistance. Through multimodal synergy encompassing visual (battlefield landscapes), auditory (gunfire and battle cries), and haptic (vibration feedback) dimensions, participants can profoundly experience the spirit of "resolute courage" and sacrifice.

Second, produce multimedia cultural performances. For example, create live performances at Nanyue Grand Temple or Wanshou Square integrating multimedia projection, laser spectacles, symphonic music, and dance, narrating the millennial history of Nanyue from the Fire God Zhurong to the coexistence of Buddhism and Taoism. Through transmedia storytelling, three-dimensionally present the historical depth and spiritual connotations of Nanyue culture, establishing it as a nocturnal attraction for international tourists. Using martyr Xia Minghan's correspondence—"Beheading matters not, so long as the doctrine remains true"—as source material, create theatrical productions enabling audiences to experience voice-over narration and witness scene reconstructions, evoking emotional resonance transcending temporal boundaries.

Third, produce short videos and conduct visualized philosophical international dialogues. For example, create animated short video series on "Chuanshan Thought," employing vivid visual language to explicate abstract concepts such as "qi monism" and "unity of knowledge and action," with bilingual Chinese-English subtitles, disseminated via platforms such as YouTube and TikTok to lower comprehension barriers and achieve creative transformation of philosophical thought.

Fourth, leverage social media platforms to disseminate Hengyang culture. For instance, encourage users to document Hengyang's modern architecture, industrial achievements, cultural and creative districts, and culinary experiences, showcasing a multidimensional and developing Hengyang on social platforms like TikTok. Produce bilingual brand narrative videos for leading enterprises such as TBEA (Tebian Electric Apparatus), recounting their technological innovation and internationalization trajectories, integrating multimodal elements including corporate interviews, production scenes, and product application cases, disseminated via international business and technology platforms such as LinkedIn and YouTube, thereby constructing a new image of Hengyang as representing "modern intelligent manufacturing."

4.3. Communication Strategies: Creative Transformation and Multimodal Synergy

The international communication of Hengyang regional culture requires adherence to the dual strategic pathways of "creative transformation and multimodal synergy": on one hand, through creative transformation, converting traditional cultural resources into content comprehensible and acceptable to international audiences within contemporary contexts; on the other hand, through multimodal synergy, integrating multiple semiotic modes to co-construct meaning and achieve profound cognitive empathy and cultural dialogue. The specific connotations and practical pathways of these two strategies are elaborated below.

4.3.1. Creative Transformation

Creative transformation refers to the process whereby, based on deep comprehension of cultural essences, innovative forms and expressions revitalize traditional culture in contemporary contexts while enabling it to traverse cultural boundaries and resonate with audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. This process constitutes not simple content transfer or mechanical translation but rather re-creation and re-expression of cultural meaning. The essence of creative transformation resides in "maintaining the core while innovating the form" (shou zheng chuang xin): preserving the "authentic" cultural core while innovating the "novel" expressive forms.

In the international communication of Hengyang regional culture, creative transformation manifests across three practical levels:

(1) Recontextualization of Meaning. Connecting the philosophy of "harmony between heaven and humanity" embedded within Nanyue's "Longevity Culture" with globally pertinent

contemporary issues such as "health," "sustainable development," and "ecological harmony," thereby acquiring new interpretive space within contemporary contexts.

(2) Innovation of Form. Transforming Wang Chuanshan's profound philosophical concepts into formats including animated short films, digital courses, and visual charts to enhance communicative effectiveness. For instance, employing dynamic diagrams to illustrate the philosophical logic of "qi monism" and animations to demonstrate the historical evolutionary patterns of "unity of principle and circumstance," rendering abstract concepts concrete and visualized.

(3) Globalization of Narrative. Situating the heroic and tragic history of the Battle of Hengyang within grand narratives of the "World Anti-Fascist War" and "shared human memory," transcending regional limitations to become integral to humanity's common spiritual heritage. For example, constructing comparative narratives between the Battle of Hengyang and engagements such as the Battle of Stalingrad and the Siege of Leningrad, highlighting its distinctive value within the World Anti-Fascist War.

4.3.2. Multimodal Synergy

Multimodal synergy refers to the integrated deployment of multiple semiotic modes—visual, auditory, tactile, spatial, interactive, etc.—to co-construct meaning in cultural communication, achieving deep cognitive empathy and cultural dialogue. The core principle of multimodal synergy lies in "semiotic value augmentation": different modal signs do not simply aggregate but rather complement and reinforce one another, producing a "1+1>2" effect of meaning amplification.

Applications of multimodal synergy include:

(1) Visual Mode: Through high-definition imaging, VR/AR technology, animation design, etc., intuitively presenting Nanyue landscapes, historical scenes, and artifact details. For instance, utilizing ultra-high-definition photography to capture Nanyue's sea of clouds, sunrise, and starry skies, conveying the philosophical conception of "harmony between heaven and humanity" through visual impact.

(2) Auditory Mode: Through Nanyue Buddhist and Taoist sacred music, Hunan opera (xiangju) melodies, historical figure voice-overs, etc., establishing cultural atmosphere and transmitting emotional resonance. For example, incorporating Buddhist chants, bell resonances, and sutra recitations into Nanyue VR experiences to create immersive religious-cultural atmospheres.

(3) Spatial Mode: Utilizing digital twin technology to construct "Virtual Nanyue" and "Digital Chuanshan Former Residence," enabling international audiences to obtain immersive spatial experiences. For instance, reconstructing the Ming-Qing architectural layout of Chuanshan Academy, allowing users to "enter" Chuanshan's lifeworld and scholarly universe within virtual space.

(4) Interactive Mode: Through H5 interactive games, online blessing rituals, virtual study tours, etc., enhancing audience participation and cultural affinity. For example, developing a "Cloud Blessing" function enabling users to "ignite" blessing incense and "strike" blessing bells via smartphones, generating personalized multilingual blessing cards.

Creative transformation and multimodal synergy mutually support and reinforce one another, constituting the core methodology of multimodal international communication for Hengyang regional culture. Creative transformation endows content with renewed vitality, while multimodal synergy provides the technical infrastructure and expressive vehicles for this transformation.

5. Conclusion

Based on multimodal discourse analysis theory and digital humanities technologies, this study constructs a tripartite pathway model—"cultural content–technological empowerment–communication strategies"—for the multimodal international communication of Hengyang regional culture. The study proposes a five-dimensional framework of Hengyang culture and advances differentiated multimodal transduction strategies tailored to the characteristics of each dimension. At the communication strategy level, the study proposes dual pathways of "creative transformation" and "multimodal synergy": creative transformation through recontextualization of meaning, formal innovation, and narrative globalization; multimodal synergy through integrated deployment of visual, auditory, spatial, and interactive modes.

The theoretical contributions of this study include proposing the five-dimensional framework and tripartite communication model, providing novel perspectives for holistic regional culture research. The practical contributions involve distilling systematic communication pathways and strategic instruments, offering reference value for Hengyang's strategy of "building the city through manufacturing and revitalizing the city through culture and tourism" (zhizao lishi, wenlü xingcheng). Future research can further conduct cross-national comparative studies and longitudinal follow-up investigations, exploring the application potential of emerging technologies such as the metaverse and generative AI in cultural communication.

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