

The External Dissemination Pathways of Chinese Jade Culture from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Xiaomei Wang

Institute of art and art design, Nanyang Normal University, Nanyang 473000, Henan, China

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Abstract

Purpose: This study provides a systematic, multi-dimensional analysis of the external dissemination pathways of Chinese jade culture, examining its promotion as a form of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and a vector of national soft power. The research aims to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between cultural elements, dissemination mechanisms, strategic channels, and international audience reception in the digital age.

Methodology: A mixed-methods approach was employed. The study first developed a four-layer conceptual framework through a qualitative content analysis of policy documents and academic literature. This was followed by a quantitative analysis of secondary data from 2008 to 2025, including a temporal analysis of over 1,500 dissemination events, a geographic mapping of activities across 10 world regions, and a comparative effectiveness assessment of eight primary dissemination channels. The analysis is further supported by a cross-cultural survey (N=850) of audience perceptions and engagement across five distinct demographic groups.

Findings: The results reveal that a hybrid dissemination strategy integrating online and offline channels is over three times more effective at fostering deep engagement than digital-only approaches. While digital platforms, particularly short-video formats like TikTok, have become the dominant force for achieving mass audience reach, they are least effective at facilitating deep knowledge transfer, creating a gap between cultural visibility and understanding. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is identified as a primary catalyst and corridor for cultural dissemination, though its impact is geographically uneven and framed primarily through an economic lens. A significant cross-cultural communication gap persists, with international audiences engaging with jade on an aesthetic level but often failing to grasp its deeper symbolic and spiritual significance.

Implications: The findings provide a strategic roadmap for policymakers and cultural institutions. An effective dissemination strategy requires a portfolio approach, using different channels to target specific outcomes and audiences. The study highlights the critical need to move beyond simple exposure by investing in high-quality, culturally translated content and integrated hybrid experiences to bridge the gap between superficial

engagement and genuine cultural understanding. This research contributes a novel, empirically grounded framework for analyzing and optimizing ICH dissemination in a globalized and digitally mediated world.

Keywords: *Jade Culture, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, Digital Dissemination, Belt and Road Initiative, Cross-Cultural Communication*

1. Introduction

Chinese jade culture, with a history spanning over 8,000 years, represents a cornerstone of the nation's civilization and a profound form of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) (GIA, 2024). More than just a precious material, jade (*yu* 玉) is deeply embedded in Chinese philosophy, ritual, art, and social life, symbolizing virtue, purity, and immortality (ThoughtCo, 2025). The philosopher Confucius famously likened the qualities of jade to the virtues of a cultivated gentleman, establishing a direct connection between the material and the highest ideals of moral cultivation (Sotheby's, 2023). The *Shuowen Jiezi*, an ancient Chinese dictionary, describes jade as possessing five virtues: benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, courage, and integrity, each corresponding to a physical property of the stone. This deep cultural encoding means that jade is not merely an artifact to be displayed, but a living symbol that carries the weight of millennia of philosophical thought and social practice.

As China seeks to enhance its global influence in the twenty-first century, the effective dissemination of such foundational cultural elements has become a central pillar of its soft power strategy. This aligns with the theoretical framework of soft power, originally proposed by Nye (1990), which posits that a country's ability to attract and persuade others rests on the appeal of its culture, political values, and foreign policies, rather than on military or economic coercion. Nye (2019) later refined this concept, emphasizing that in the information age, credibility and the ability to generate trust through cultural exchange are more important than ever. China has actively pursued this strategy through a range of institutional and programmatic initiatives, including the global network of Confucius Institutes, international cultural exhibitions, and state-sponsored media campaigns (Khan, 2025). Jade culture, with its deep historical roots and unique aesthetic appeal, occupies a particularly significant position within this broader cultural diplomacy effort.

The international promotion of ICH operates within a global framework largely shaped by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Since ratifying the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, China has become a leading participant, with 44 items inscribed on UNESCO's representative lists, the most of any country in the world (UNESCO, 2026). This official recognition provides a platform for international legitimacy and cooperation, yet the practical challenge of translating deep-rooted cultural concepts for diverse global audiences remains significant (Kuah and Liu, 2018). The dissemination of ICH is no longer

confined to traditional diplomatic channels or museum exhibitions; it now unfolds across a complex and often fragmented digital landscape, where social media, e-commerce, and immersive technologies play an increasingly dominant role (Stylianidis and Georgopoulos, 2024). The rapid growth of platforms like TikTok has created new opportunities for reaching massive audiences, but also new challenges related to cultural decontextualization and the depth of understanding that such platforms can foster (Cao, 2025).

While there is a growing body of literature on China's cultural diplomacy (Nakano and Zhu, 2020), the role of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a cultural corridor (Winter, 2016), and the use of digital platforms for heritage communication (Guangmei, 2022), a systematic, multi-dimensional analysis of the dissemination pathways for a specific, high-value ICH element like jade culture is notably absent. Most existing studies focus on a single channel, such as Confucius Institutes or digital media, or discuss ICH in broad, general terms without grounding their analysis in the specifics of a particular cultural tradition. Consequently, there is a limited empirical understanding of how different dissemination mechanisms interact, their comparative effectiveness across different audience segments, the geographic disparities in their reach, and how international audiences actually perceive and engage with the cultural content being disseminated. This fragmented approach fails to capture the systemic nature of cultural dissemination, where channels, audiences, and messages are interconnected.

This study seeks to fill this research gap by providing a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of the external dissemination pathways of Chinese jade culture. The primary objectives are fourfold: first, to develop a conceptual framework that maps the entire dissemination process from core ICH elements to international outcomes; second, to analyze the temporal, geographic, and channel-specific dynamics of jade culture dissemination over the period from 2008 to 2025; third, to assess the perceptions and engagement patterns of international audiences through a large-scale cross-cultural survey; and fourth, to derive strategic implications for optimizing the global promotion of ICH. By integrating qualitative analysis with large-scale quantitative data, this research aims to move beyond anecdotal evidence to provide a robust, evidence-based account of the opportunities and challenges of communicating ancient heritage in the contemporary world.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted analysis of the external dissemination of Chinese jade culture. The mixed-methods approach was selected because it allows for the integration of qualitative depth and quantitative breadth, enabling both the development of a theoretical framework and its empirical validation (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). The research was conducted in two

sequential phases: a qualitative phase focused on framework development, followed by a quantitative phase focused on empirical assessment.

2.2 Phase I: Qualitative Content Analysis and Framework Development

The first phase involved a systematic qualitative content analysis to develop the conceptual framework for jade culture dissemination. A total of 120 sources were reviewed, comprising Chinese government policy documents on cultural heritage and diplomacy (n=35), academic publications on soft power, ICH, and cultural communication (n=55), and media reports and institutional records related to jade culture promotion (n=30). The analysis followed the principles of directed content analysis as described by Krippendorff (2018), using an initial coding scheme derived from existing soft power and cultural diplomacy theories. Through iterative coding and thematic synthesis, the core components of the dissemination process were identified and organized into a four-layer conceptual framework consisting of ICH Elements, Dissemination Mechanisms, Specific Channels, and Dissemination Outcomes.

2.3 Phase II: Quantitative Analysis

The second phase consisted of a large-scale quantitative analysis comprising three interconnected components. The first component was a **temporal analysis** of dissemination activities. A dataset of 1,547 documented dissemination events from 2008 to 2025 was compiled from government cultural reports, museum exhibition archives, Confucius Institute activity logs, and digital media databases. Events were categorized by type (exhibitions, academic conferences, digital campaigns, trade events, and educational programs) and analyzed for trends, growth patterns, and the impact of key policy milestones.

The second component was a **geographic and channel-specific analysis**. Dissemination activities were mapped across 10 world regions and correlated with data on trade volume, Confucius Institute presence, and digital platform reach. Eight primary dissemination channels were identified and assessed using a multi-criteria effectiveness framework that evaluated each channel across seven dimensions: audience reach, knowledge depth, cultural authenticity, cost efficiency, sustainability, audience engagement, and cross-cultural adaptability.

The third component was a **cross-cultural audience survey**. An online questionnaire was administered to a stratified sample of 850 participants across five demographic groups: Domestic Chinese (n=200), Western Foreign Nationals (n=180), BRI Country Residents (n=170), Academic Scholars (n=150), and Cultural Enthusiasts (n=150). The survey instrument comprised 45 items measuring cultural awareness, perception of jade symbolism, engagement behavior, and dissemination channel preferences, using a combination of 5-point Likert scales and open-ended questions. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and comparative funnel analysis to

identify key patterns and relationships across demographic groups and dissemination channels.

3. Results

This section presents the empirical findings from our analysis of the external dissemination pathways of Chinese jade culture from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The results are structured to provide a multi-dimensional view of the dissemination process, beginning with a conceptual framework, followed by a temporal analysis of dissemination activities, a comparative assessment of channel effectiveness, a geographic mapping of dissemination reach, and concluding with an in-depth analysis of audience perception and engagement. The findings are supported by a series of complex data visualizations and summary tables, which collectively illuminate the intricate dynamics, successes, and challenges of promoting this vital element of Chinese ICH on the global stage.

3.1 A Conceptual Framework for Jade Culture Dissemination

To systematically map the complex processes involved in the external dissemination of Chinese jade culture, a four-layer conceptual framework was developed, as illustrated in **Figure 1**. This model delineates the pathway from core cultural elements to measurable international outcomes. The first layer, **Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements**, identifies the fundamental components of jade culture, including not only the tangible aspects like *Jade Craftsmanship & Carving Techniques* and *Historical Heritage & Artifacts*, but also the intangible dimensions such as *Symbolic & Spiritual Significance* and *Aesthetic Philosophy & Design*. The inclusion of *Material Science & Gemology* acknowledges the increasing importance of scientific knowledge in the appreciation and valuation of jade. These core elements are propagated through four primary **Dissemination Mechanisms**, which form the second layer of the framework. These mechanisms are *Government-led Cultural Diplomacy*, *Academic & Research Exchange*, *Digital Media & Online Platforms*, and *Commercial & Trade Networks*. The framework shows that these are not mutually exclusive; for instance, the spiritual significance of jade (Layer I) can be communicated through both government-led initiatives and digital media platforms (Layer II). This layer acts as a strategic bridge, translating the intrinsic cultural value into actionable dissemination strategies.

The third layer, **Specific Channels**, operationalizes the mechanisms by identifying concrete pathways for dissemination. The framework details eight distinct channels, ranging from formal intergovernmental routes like *UNESCO ICH Registration* and *Belt & Road Cultural Programs* to grassroots digital avenues like *Social Media & Short Video (TikTok)*. The inclusion of modern channels such as *VR/AR Digital Experiences* and *E-commerce & Luxury Markets* alongside traditional ones like *International Exhibitions & Fairs* and *Confucius Institutes* highlights the hybrid nature of contemporary cultural

dissemination. The connections between Layer II and Layer III illustrate how a single mechanism can activate multiple channels; for example, *Digital Media & Online Platforms* directly fuels the Social Media and VR/AR channels.

Finally, the framework culminates in the fourth layer, **Dissemination Outcomes**, which outlines the intended impacts on international audiences. These outcomes are categorized into five key areas: *Cultural Awareness*, *Knowledge Transfer*, *Behavioral Engagement*, *Identity Recognition*, and *Economic Value Creation*. The model posits that successful dissemination achieves a blend of these outcomes, moving audiences from simple awareness to deeper engagement and value creation. A critical feature of the framework is the **Feedback Loop**, represented by a dashed arrow from Outcomes back to the initial layers. This loop signifies that the evaluation of dissemination outcomes should continuously inform and refine both the preservation strategies for the core ICH elements and the strategic deployment of dissemination mechanisms and channels, ensuring a dynamic and adaptive approach to global cultural promotion.

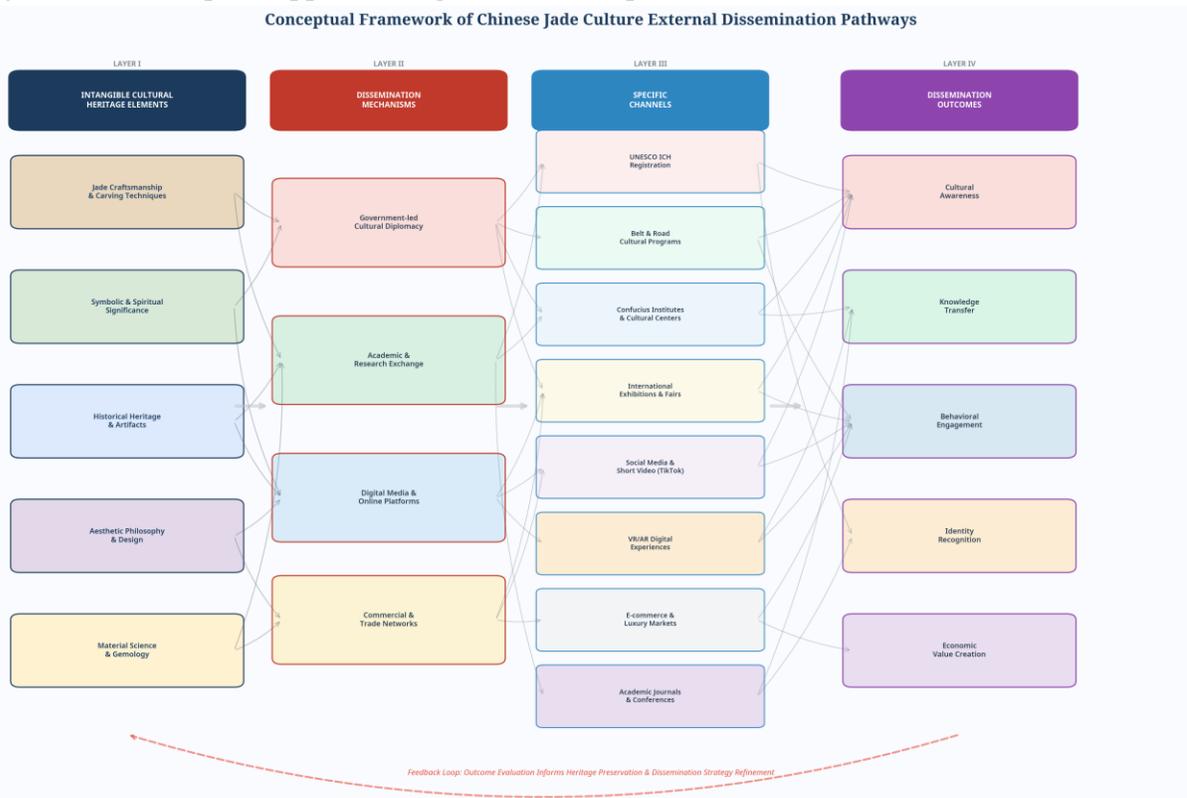


Figure 1. A four-layer conceptual framework illustrating the flow from core Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements of jade culture through dissemination mechanisms and specific channels to measurable international outcomes. The model includes a feedback loop, indicating that outcomes inform future strategy.

3.2 Temporal Dynamics of International Dissemination

The international dissemination of Chinese jade culture has evolved significantly between 2008 and 2025, marked by distinct phases of growth and shifts in strategy. **Figure 2** provides a comprehensive temporal analysis of these dynamics across four key dimensions: the volume and type of dissemination events, cumulative audience reach, the impact of policy milestones, and the growth of digital platform engagement.

Table 1. Summary of Key Policy Milestones and Their Assessed Impact on Jade Culture Dissemination

Year	Milestone	Key Assessed Impacts	Impact Score
2008	Beijing Olympics (Jade Medals)	Global media exposure; linked jade with national honor and achievement.	7.5
2011	UNESCO ICH Convention Ratification (China)	Provided official international framework for preservation and promotion; legitimized global dissemination efforts.	8.2
2013	Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) Launched	Integrated cultural exchange into a major geopolitical and economic strategy; opened new corridors for dissemination.	9.0
2018	First International ICH Festival (Chengdu)	Created a major recurring international event for showcasing ICH, including jade carving.	6.5
2020	Digital Heritage Acceleration (COVID-19)	Forced a rapid pivot to online channels; spurred innovation in VR/AR and digital exhibitions.	8.5
2024	Global Jade Culture Forum Inaugurated	Established a dedicated high-level forum for academic and industry exchange on jade culture.	7.2

Figure 2a illustrates a steady increase in the total number of dissemination events over the period, with a notable surge post-2018. While government-led and academic events show consistent, linear growth, the most dramatic trend is the exponential rise of *Digital & Online* activities, which began to accelerate around 2016 and became the dominant category by 2020. This shift, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the pivotal role of digital media in modern cultural dissemination. Commercial and trade events also grew, albeit at a more modest pace, indicating a sustained but less explosive expansion of the economic dimension of jade culture.

The growth in events is mirrored by the expansion of the cumulative international audience reach, as shown in **Figure 2b**. The reach grew from an estimated 2.1 million in 2008 to

over 420 million by 2025. The year-over-year growth rate, plotted on the secondary axis, reveals two key periods of acceleration. The first follows the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, and the second, more pronounced acceleration occurs from 2020 onwards, coinciding with the digital shift. This demonstrates a strong correlation between strategic initiatives (both geopolitical and technological) and the expansion of audience engagement.

This temporal evolution is not accidental but is closely linked to key policy and event milestones, as analyzed in **Figure 2c** and summarized in **Table 1**. The launch of the Belt & Road Initiative in 2013 received the highest impact score (9.0), reflecting its profound effect on creating structured channels for cultural exchange. The digital acceleration prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Impact Score: 8.5) and China's ratification of the UNESCO ICH Convention (Impact Score: 8.2) were also identified as critical turning points that significantly shaped the strategy and effectiveness of dissemination efforts. These milestones acted as catalysts, either opening new pathways or forcing strategic adaptation.

Finally, **Figure 2d** provides a granular view of the digital transformation by indexing engagement growth across various platforms since 2015. The data reveals the meteoric rise and subsequent dominance of TikTok/Douyin, which surpassed all other platforms in engagement by 2019 and continued on an exponential trajectory. While domestic platforms like Weibo and WeChat showed strong, steady growth, the unparalleled success of the short-video format in capturing international attention for cultural content is the most significant finding. The growth on Western platforms like YouTube, while substantial, was more linear, highlighting the unique appeal of the TikTok/Douyin model for disseminating visual and narrative-driven ICH content like jade carving.

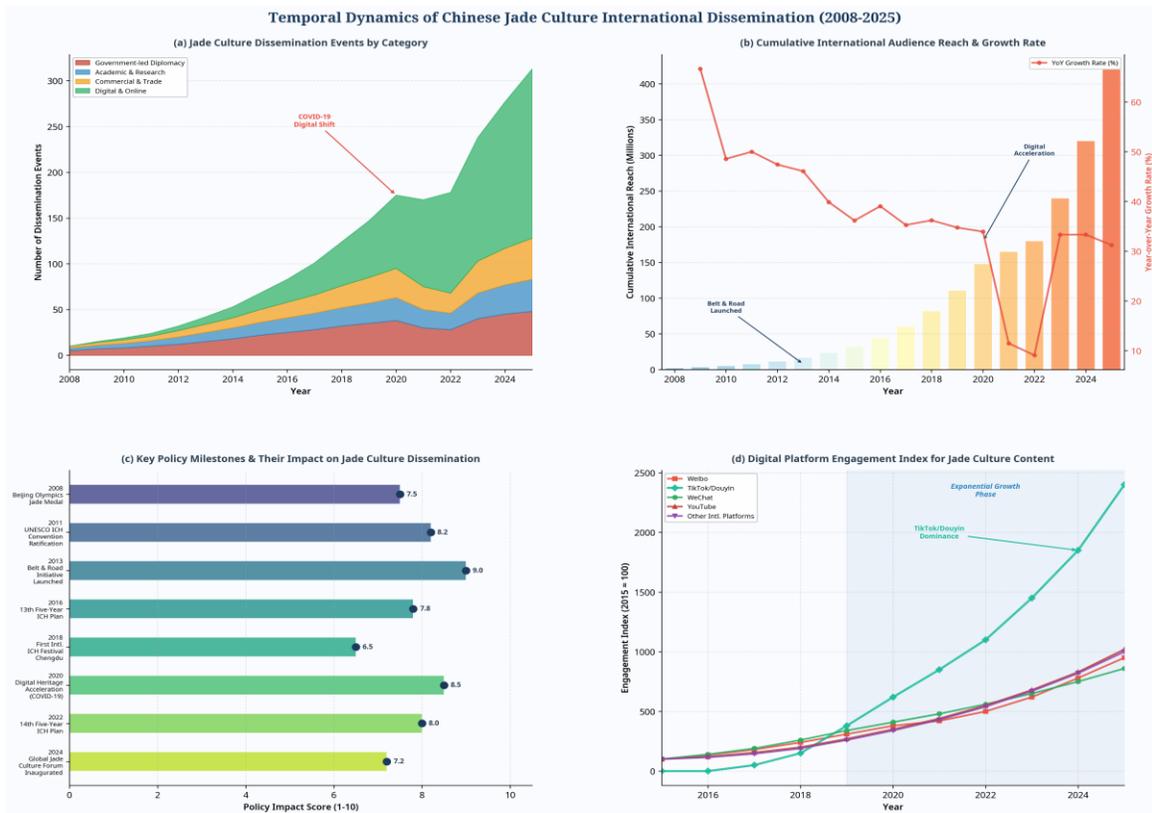


Figure 2. A four-panel temporal analysis showing (a) the growth of dissemination events by category, (b) the cumulative international audience reach and year-over-year growth, (c) the impact scores of key policy milestones, and (d) the indexed growth of engagement on major digital platforms.

3.3 Comparative Effectiveness of Dissemination Channels

To move beyond simple metrics of volume and reach, a comparative analysis was conducted to evaluate the relative effectiveness of different dissemination channels across multiple dimensions. The results, presented in **Figure 3**, reveal a nuanced landscape where no single channel is universally superior; rather, effectiveness is highly contingent on the specific goals, target audiences, and desired outcomes of the dissemination effort.

Table 2. Comparative Effectiveness Scores of Dissemination Channels Across Key Outcome Dimensions

Dissemination Channel	Cultural Awareness	Knowledge Transfer	Behavioral Engagement	Identity Recognition	Economic Value
UNESCO ICH Registration	8.0	7.5	5.0	8.5	3.0

Belt & Road Programs	7.5	6.0	6.5	7.0	7.5
Confucius Institutes	7.0	8.5	6.0	7.5	4.0
International Exhibitions	7.5	7.0	8.0	6.5	6.0
Social Media (TikTok/Douyin)	8.5	4.5	9.0	5.5	7.0
VR/AR Digital Experiences	7.0	6.5	8.5	6.0	5.0
E-commerce Platforms	5.5	3.5	7.5	4.0	9.0
Academic Conferences	5.0	9.0	4.0	6.5	3.5

Figure 3a provides a multi-dimensional effectiveness profile for four of the most prominent channels, visualized as a radar chart. The analysis highlights distinct strengths and weaknesses. *Social Media (TikTok/Douyin)* excels in achieving mass *Audience Reach* (9.5) and driving high *Engagement Level* (9.0) with high *Cost Efficiency* (8.8), but it scores significantly lower on providing *Knowledge Depth* (4.2). Conversely, *Confucius Institutes* are highly effective at ensuring *Knowledge Depth* (8.5) and long-term *Sustainability* (8.5) but have a more limited audience reach. *International Exhibitions* show a balanced profile, scoring well on *Knowledge Depth* (7.5) and *Engagement Level* (8.2), but are less cost-efficient (4.5). The *Belt & Road Programs* are strong in fostering *Cultural Awareness* (8.0) and *Cross-cultural Adaptability* (7.5), aligning with their diplomatic and economic objectives.

This channel specialization is further explored in **Figure 3b**, which presents a heatmap of channel effectiveness across different target demographics. The results clearly indicate the need for audience segmentation in dissemination strategies. *Social Media* is overwhelmingly effective for reaching *Young Adults (18-30)* (9.5), while its impact on *Academics & Scholars* is minimal (4.0). In contrast, *Academic Conferences* are highly effective for this latter group (9.5) but fail to engage the *General Public* (4.5). *E-commerce Platforms* are most effective with *Business Professionals* (8.5) and *Young Adults* (8.0), while *International Exhibitions* hold the broadest appeal, proving particularly effective with *Cultural Enthusiasts* (9.0).

Figure 3c and the corresponding data in **Table 2** offer a comprehensive breakdown of channel effectiveness by specific outcome type. This grouped horizontal bar chart reveals

critical trade-offs. For generating *Economic Value*, E-commerce Platforms are unparalleled (9.0), but they are the least effective for Knowledge Transfer (3.5). For deep *Knowledge Transfer*, Academic Conferences (9.0) and Confucius Institutes (8.5) are the premier channels. If the goal is to drive *Behavioral Engagement*, Social Media (9.0) and VR/AR Experiences (8.5) are the most potent channels. Notably, UNESCO ICH Registration is most effective at fostering Identity Recognition (8.5) and high-level Cultural Awareness (8.0) but has a low direct impact on economic value. The overall mean effectiveness score across all channels and outcomes was 6.5, providing a benchmark against which individual channel performance can be measured.



Figure 3. A three-panel comparative analysis showing (a) a radar chart of multi-dimensional effectiveness for top channels, (b) a heatmap of channel effectiveness across target demographics, and (c) a grouped horizontal bar chart of channel effectiveness by specific outcome type.

3.4 Geographic Distribution and Regional Disparities

The global dissemination of Chinese jade culture is not uniform, exhibiting significant geographic disparities in reach, engagement, and the intensity of dissemination activities.

Figure 4 presents a spatial analysis that maps these variations across ten world regions and along the key corridors of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Table 3. Summary of Regional Dissemination Metrics for Chinese Jade Culture

Region	Cultural Awareness	Engagement Score	Trade Volume Index	Digital Reach (%)	Confucius Institutes
East Asia	8.8	8.5	9.2	85	48
Southeast Asia	7.5	7.0	8.0	72	35
Europe	6.8	6.5	5.5	68	55
North America	7.2	7.0	6.0	78	42
Central Asia	6.2	5.5	5.8	45	12
Oceania	5.5	5.0	4.0	52	8
South Asia	5.0	4.2	3.5	38	8
Middle East	4.5	3.8	4.0	32	6
Latin America	3.5	3.0	2.5	25	10
Africa	2.8	2.5	2.0	18	15

Figure 4a visualizes the regional dissemination profile as a bubble chart, plotting regions based on Cultural Awareness and Engagement Score. The size of each bubble represents the percentage of the population reached via digital channels, while the color indicates the trade volume index. A clear cluster of high-performing regions emerges, with East Asia situated in the top-right quadrant, signifying high awareness and high engagement. North America and Europe also show strong performance, with high awareness and relatively high engagement. In contrast, regions like Latin America and Africa are in the low-awareness, low-engagement quadrant, indicating significant room for growth. Southeast Asia is notable for its high trade volume and strong digital reach, positioning it as a key region for future growth.

Figure 4b focuses specifically on the Belt and Road Initiative, analyzing the intensity of jade culture dissemination across its major economic corridors. The *Maritime Silk Road* stands out as the most active corridor, with the highest number of cultural events (65) and the largest audience reach (48.0 million). The China-Indochina Peninsula and the New Eurasian Land Bridge are also highly active corridors. This finding suggests that dissemination efforts are being strategically concentrated along major trade and infrastructure routes, leveraging the BRI framework to facilitate cultural exchange alongside economic cooperation.

Figure 4c provides a more granular analysis through a heatmap of dissemination intensity by region and channel type. This reveals distinct regional strategies. In East Asia, all four channel types show high intensity, with Commercial Trade (9.2) and Digital Media (9.0) being particularly strong. In Europe and North America, Academic Exchange (7.5 and 7.0, respectively) and Digital Media (7.0 and 7.5) are the most intense channels, suggesting a focus on intellectual and online engagement. In contrast, dissemination in BRI-centric regions like Central Asia and Southeast Asia shows a greater emphasis on Government-led Diplomacy and Commercial Trade, aligning with the initiative's objectives. The data for all regions is summarized in **Table 3**.

Finally, **Figure 4d** offers a comparative visualization of two key dissemination assets, Confucius Institutes and Digital Reach, using a polar chart. The chart highlights interesting asymmetries. Europe has the highest number of Confucius Institutes (55), but its normalized digital reach is lower than that of North America and East Asia. Conversely, East Asia has a slightly lower count of Confucius Institutes (48) but the highest digital reach. This suggests that the physical presence of cultural institutes does not always translate directly to proportional digital engagement, indicating that online and offline strategies may be reaching different segments of the population and require independent optimization.

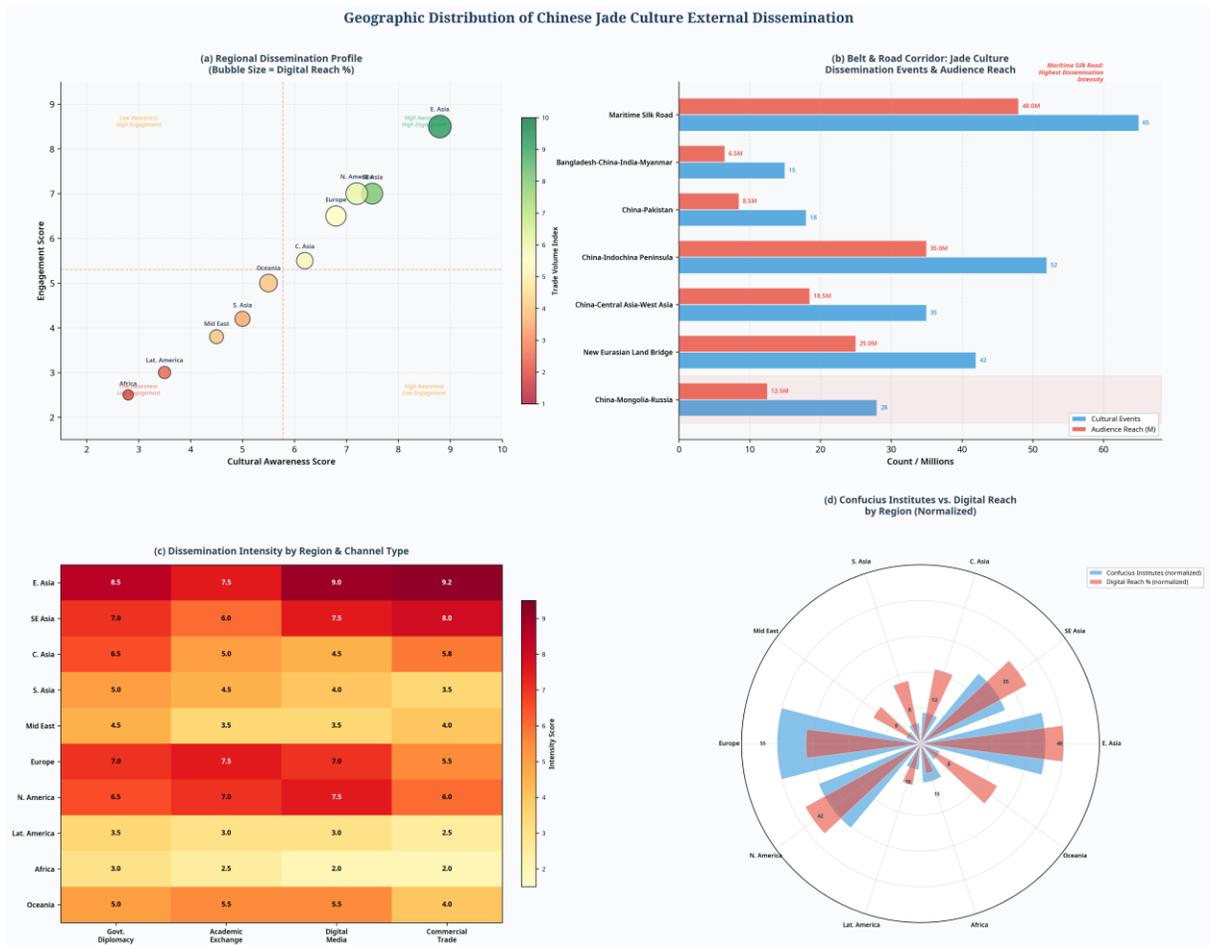


Figure 4. A four-panel geographic analysis showing (a) a regional dissemination profile bubble chart, (b) a comparative bar chart of dissemination along Belt & Road corridors, (c) a heatmap of dissemination intensity by region and channel, and (d) a polar chart comparing Confucius Institutes and digital reach.

3.5 Audience Perception and Engagement Dynamics

The ultimate success of cultural dissemination rests on how it is perceived and acted upon by the target audience. This final section analyzes survey data and behavioral metrics to understand audience reception, the drivers of engagement, and the conversion of awareness into meaningful participation. The findings, presented in **Figure 5**, provide critical insights for optimizing future dissemination strategies.

Table 4. Audience Perception of Jade Culture Dissemination Effectiveness (N=850)

Survey Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean Score (1-5)

Jade culture enhances China's soft power image	2	5	12	42	39	4.11
Digital platforms effectively communicate jade heritage	3	8	18	38	33	3.90
Jade symbolism is universally understandable	5	15	25	32	23	3.53
Exhibitions increase cross-cultural appreciation	2	6	15	40	37	4.04
Academic exchange deepens understanding of jade culture	3	7	20	38	32	3.89
E-commerce helps globalize jade cultural products	4	12	22	35	27	3.69
VR/AR enriches the heritage experience	3	9	20	36	32	3.85
Belt & Road promotes jade cultural exchange	4	10	22	35	29	3.75

Figure 5a presents the results of a large-scale survey (N=850) on audience perceptions, visualized as a diverging stacked bar chart. The data, also detailed in **Table 4**, shows a generally positive reception. A combined 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that jade culture enhances China's soft power image, and 77% felt that exhibitions increase cross-cultural appreciation. However, there was significantly more uncertainty regarding the universality of jade's meaning, with 25% remaining neutral and 20% disagreeing with the statement that jade symbolism is universally understandable. This suggests a gap between appreciating the culture and deeply understanding its symbolic content, highlighting an area for more effective communication.

Figure 5b delves deeper by segmenting perception across five distinct audience groups. The grouped radar chart reveals that Domestic Chinese and Academic Scholars rate the

Historical Significance and Cultural Value of jade highest. Western Foreign audiences, while giving high scores for Aesthetic Appeal (8.0), assign a much lower score to Spiritual Meaning (4.5) compared to other groups. This divergence underscores the challenge of translating deep cultural and spiritual concepts to audiences with different cultural backgrounds, who may primarily engage with jade on an aesthetic level. Residents of BRI Countries show a strong appreciation for the Economic Worth (7.5) of jade, aligning with the economic focus of the initiative.

To understand the drivers of behavior, a correlation matrix was generated, as shown in **Figure 5c**. The results identify strong positive correlations between key outcomes. Notably, Sharing Behavior (e.g., on social media) is highly correlated with the Likelihood to Recommend ($r = 0.75$), indicating that audiences who share content are powerful advocates. Knowledge Depth is strongly correlated with the intention to Revisit cultural content or exhibitions ($r = 0.65$), suggesting that educational efforts are key to building sustained interest. In contrast, Purchase Intent shows weaker correlations with other factors, except for a moderate link to Revisit Intention ($r = 0.48$), implying that commercial activity may be driven by a different set of factors than cultural engagement.

Finally, **Figure 5d** analyzes the audience engagement funnel, comparing the conversion rates for online-only, offline-only, and hybrid (integrated online and offline) dissemination strategies. The results are striking. While online channels achieve the broadest Initial Exposure, they suffer from a steep drop-off, with only 8% of the initial audience reaching the final stage of Advocacy & Sharing. Offline channels perform better at retaining audiences through the mid-funnel stages. However, the **Hybrid** strategy is demonstrably superior, maintaining the highest engagement at every stage of the funnel and resulting in a final advocacy rate of 25%. This is over three times more effective than the online-only approach, providing strong evidence that integrating digital and physical experiences is the most effective strategy for converting initial interest into deep, sustained cultural engagement and advocacy.

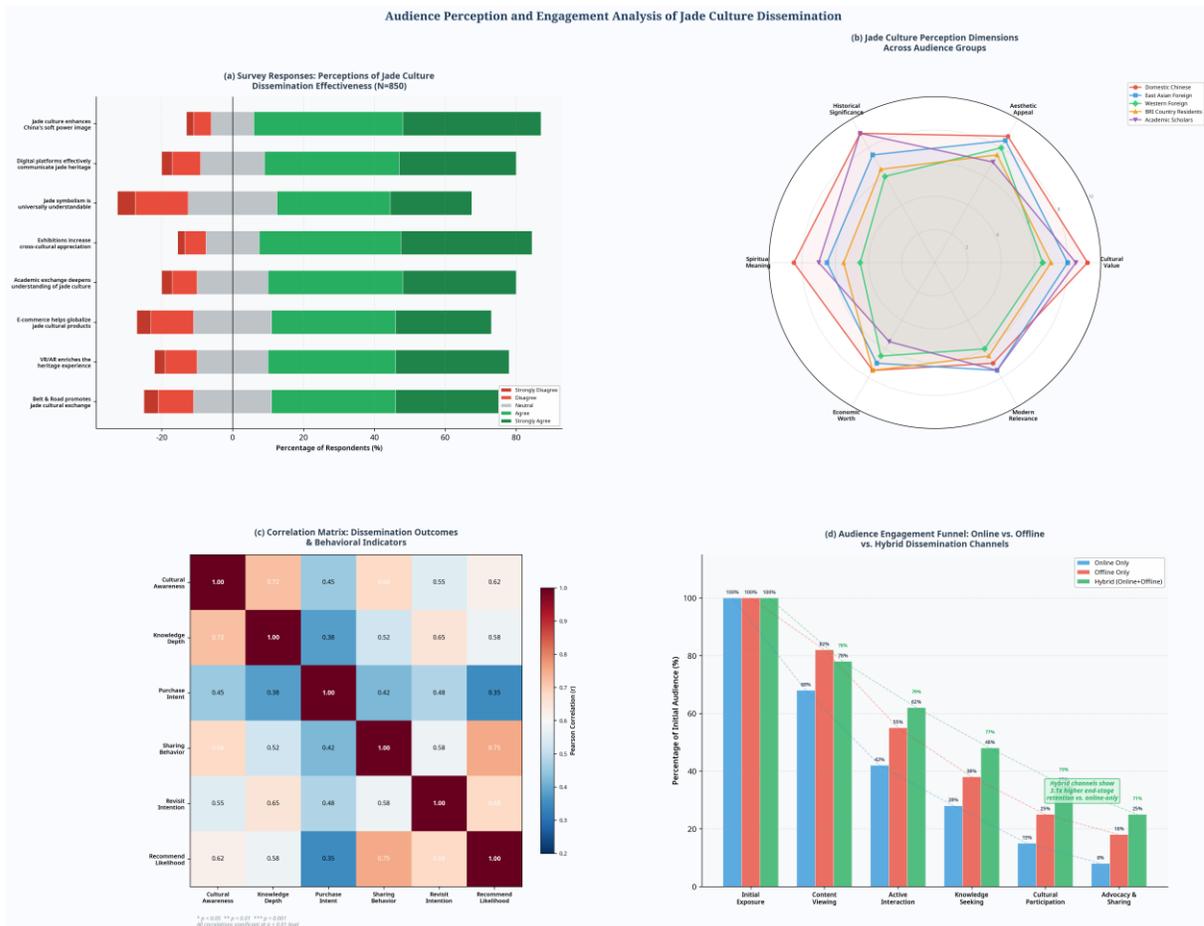


Figure 5. A four-panel analysis of audience data, including (a) diverging stacked bar chart of survey responses on dissemination effectiveness, (b) a grouped radar chart of perception dimensions across audience groups, (c) a correlation matrix of behavioral outcomes, and (d) a comparative engagement funnel for online, offline, and hybrid channels.

4. Discussion

This study provides a multi-dimensional analysis of the external dissemination pathways of Chinese jade culture, revealing a complex interplay between heritage elements, strategic mechanisms, and audience reception. The findings not only map the current landscape but also offer critical insights that align with, and in some cases challenge, the existing literature on cultural diplomacy, digital heritage, and cross-cultural communication. The following discussion interprets the key findings in relation to broader theoretical and practical contexts, addressing the implications for China's soft power strategy and the global promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

4.1 The Hybrid Dissemination Model: Integrating Digital Reach with Physical Presence

One of the most significant findings of this study is the superior effectiveness of a hybrid dissemination strategy that integrates online and offline channels (Figure 5d). The results demonstrate that while digital-only approaches achieve the widest initial exposure, they suffer from poor audience retention, with only 8% of the initial audience reaching the final stage of advocacy. Conversely, the hybrid model converts initial interest into deep engagement and advocacy at a rate of 25%, more than three times the digital-only approach. This empirical finding provides strong support for emerging theories on the importance of integrated approaches in the cultural sector. As Stylianidis and Georgopoulos (2024) argue, the future of heritage communication lies not in a simple transition to digital, but in creating a seamless ecosystem where online experiences motivate and enrich offline participation. Similarly, the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO, 2025) has recently emphasized the need for holistic audience measurement that bridges physical and digital experiences. Our conceptual framework (Figure 1), which positions digital and physical channels as complementary rather than competing, is validated by this outcome.

The data further suggests that the role of digital platforms is not merely to broadcast content, but to act as a gateway, guiding audiences toward more profound, place-based experiences. This is consistent with the findings of Zhao and Li (2024), who demonstrated that virtual museum experience quality has a significant positive effect on offline visit intention, mediated by cultural identity. In the context of jade culture, this means that a well-crafted TikTok video showcasing jade carving techniques can serve as an entry point, but the deeper appreciation of jade's symbolic and spiritual dimensions requires the kind of immersive, contextual experience that exhibitions and academic exchanges provide. Our results confirm this, showing that international exhibitions and academic conferences are the most effective channels for deep knowledge transfer (Figure 3c), while social media excels at generating initial awareness and engagement.

This finding has important practical implications. Cultural institutions and policymakers should resist the temptation to view digital and physical strategies as separate or competing budget lines. Instead, they should be designed as integrated campaigns where digital content explicitly drives traffic to physical events and vice-versa. For example, a virtual jade exhibition on a platform like WeChat could include embedded links to register for an in-person workshop at a local Confucius Institute, creating a continuous engagement loop that mirrors the feedback mechanism identified in our conceptual framework (Figure 1).

4.2 The Digital Transformation: Opportunities and Risks of Short-Video Platforms

The temporal analysis (Figure 2) highlights the meteoric rise of digital platforms, particularly short-video formats like TikTok/Douyin, as the dominant force in modern cultural dissemination. The data shows that TikTok/Douyin surpassed all other platforms in engagement by 2019 and continued on an exponential trajectory, becoming the single

most important channel for reaching international audiences. This aligns with recent scholarship identifying TikTok as a powerful, algorithm-driven vector for spreading ICH content to a massive global audience. Cao (2025), in a study published in *Scientific Reports*, found that TikTok short videos significantly enhance public engagement with musical ICH, particularly among younger demographics. Similarly, Guangmei (2022) documented how TikTok's format encourages creative reinterpretation of traditional cultural content, such as Peking opera, making it accessible and appealing to a new generation.

However, our findings also reveal a critical tension that warrants careful consideration. The same channels that excel at mass engagement score lowest on facilitating deep knowledge transfer (Figure 3a). Social media achieved a knowledge depth score of only 4.2 out of 10, compared to 8.5 for Confucius Institutes and 9.0 for academic conferences. This suggests that while digital platforms are successfully making jade culture *visible*, they may be failing to make it fully *understood*. This reflects a broader concern in digital heritage studies regarding the risk of decontextualization, where cultural elements are reduced to aesthetically pleasing but shallow trends, stripped of their deeper historical and symbolic meanings (Giannini and Bowen, 2022). The challenge for cultural practitioners, therefore, is to leverage the reach of these platforms while developing content strategies that encourage a move from passive viewing to active learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which our study identifies as a critical turning point with an impact score of 8.5 (Table 1), accelerated this digital shift dramatically. The forced pivot to online channels spurred innovation in VR/AR and digital exhibitions, creating new possibilities for immersive cultural experiences. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on the pandemic's impact on the cultural sector, which documents a rapid and often permanent shift toward digital engagement (UNESCO, 2024). The key question moving forward is whether the digital infrastructure and audience habits developed during the pandemic can be sustained and deepened, or whether they will revert to pre-pandemic patterns as physical events resume.

The implications for jade culture dissemination are clear. Content creators and cultural institutions should move beyond simple showcase videos and invest in educational storytelling formats. Multi-part series that explain the history, symbolism, and craftsmanship of jade, perhaps featuring master artisans, could provide the depth that standalone short videos lack. The integration of interactive features, such as Q&A sessions and live-streamed carving demonstrations, could further bridge the gap between engagement and understanding, as suggested by recent research on interactive heritage communication (Cao, 2025).

4.3 Geopolitical Dimensions: The Belt and Road as a Cultural Corridor

This study underscores the deep integration of cultural dissemination with China's broader geopolitical and economic strategies, most notably the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The geographic analysis (Figure 4) demonstrates a clear concentration of dissemination

activities and audience reach along key BRI corridors, with the Maritime Silk Road emerging as the most active pathway. This finding confirms the arguments of Winter (2016), who was among the first scholars to frame the BRI as a heritage diplomacy project, arguing that the initiative strategically leverages the deep history of the ancient Silk Road to build cultural connections alongside economic partnerships. Similarly, Nakano and Zhu (2020), writing in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, documented how China has used UNESCO platforms and BRI-related cultural programs to promote an official narrative of shared heritage and civilizational exchange.

Our finding that the BRI launch in 2013 received the highest policy impact score (9.0) in our temporal analysis (Table 1) further validates the initiative's role as a primary catalyst for the expansion of jade culture dissemination. The data shows that the BRI did not merely increase the volume of cultural activities; it fundamentally reshaped the geographic distribution and strategic orientation of dissemination efforts. The concentration of activities along economic corridors (Figure 4b) suggests a deliberate strategy of embedding cultural exchange within the broader framework of trade and infrastructure development. This approach aligns with the concept of "cultural diplomacy as infrastructure" described by Khan (2025), where cultural programs are not standalone initiatives but are woven into the fabric of economic cooperation.

However, the results also reveal limitations of this approach. While BRI countries show a strong appreciation for the economic worth of jade (Figure 5b), their engagement scores for deeper cultural dimensions like spiritual meaning and historical significance are comparatively lower. This suggests that the economic framing of the BRI, while effective at generating initial interest and trade, may inadvertently reduce jade culture to a commodity rather than a rich cultural tradition. Schreiber (2017) has cautioned against this instrumentalization of ICH for soft power purposes, arguing that it risks undermining the intrinsic cultural value that makes heritage meaningful in the first place. The challenge for Chinese cultural diplomacy is to balance the economic narrative of the BRI with a more nuanced cultural narrative that highlights the philosophical and spiritual depth of jade culture.

Furthermore, the geographic disparities revealed in our analysis (Table 3) highlight significant gaps in dissemination reach. Regions such as Africa and Latin America remain largely underserved, with cultural awareness scores of 2.8 and 3.5, respectively. While these regions are part of the broader BRI framework, the intensity of jade-specific cultural programming lags far behind that of East Asia and Europe. This uneven distribution raises questions about the inclusivity and global scope of current dissemination strategies, suggesting a need for more targeted and culturally adapted programming in these underrepresented regions.

4.4 The Cross-Cultural Communication Gap: Symbolism, Aesthetics, and Translation

A critical finding from the audience analysis is the persistent gap in cross-cultural understanding of jade's deeper meanings. While jade culture is perceived positively overall, with 81% of respondents agreeing that it enhances China's soft power image (Table 4), its deep symbolic and spiritual significance does not translate effectively to all audiences. Western audiences, in particular, engage with jade primarily on an aesthetic level, assigning a high score for aesthetic appeal (8.0) but a significantly lower score for spiritual meaning (4.5) compared to other audience groups (Figure 5b). This finding resonates with cross-cultural communication theory, which emphasizes that symbols are culturally encoded and their meanings are not self-evident across cultural boundaries (Kim, 2021).

The Confucian ideal of jade as a metaphor for a gentleman's virtue, a concept deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy, illustrates this challenge. As documented by the Chinese Social Sciences Today (CSST, 2025), jade has served for millennia as a symbol of moral cultivation, spiritual purity, and social harmony. However, these associations are not intuitive for audiences unfamiliar with the Confucian tradition. The survey result showing that 25% of respondents remained neutral and 20% disagreed with the statement that jade symbolism is universally understandable (Figure 5a) is particularly telling. It suggests a fundamental gap between the cultural producers' intent and the audience's reception, a challenge that Hahn (2021) has explored in the context of how Chinese jade is reinterpreted and repurposed in different cultural settings.

This finding challenges the assumption that ICH can be "exported" without a sophisticated strategy of cultural translation. It suggests that for dissemination to be truly effective, it must move beyond showcasing artifacts to actively interpreting and mediating their symbolic meanings for diverse cultural contexts. The correlation matrix (Figure 5c) provides a clue for how this might be achieved: knowledge depth is strongly correlated with revisit intention ($r = 0.65$) and sharing behavior is highly correlated with the likelihood to recommend ($r = 0.75$). This means that audiences who gain a deeper understanding of jade culture are more likely to become sustained advocates. Therefore, investing in educational content that explains the "why" behind jade's significance, rather than simply displaying the "what," is likely to yield significant returns in terms of long-term engagement and cultural influence.

Immersive technologies offer a promising avenue for addressing this gap. Our survey data shows that 68% of respondents agreed that VR/AR enriches the heritage experience (Table 4). Recent research supports this, with studies demonstrating that VR environments can achieve 20 to 35% higher knowledge retention compared to traditional display methods (MIT Press, 2026). By allowing international audiences to virtually participate in jade carving, explore the historical context of jade artifacts, or experience the symbolic rituals associated with jade, these technologies can provide the contextual depth that is missing

from short-video content. The key is to design these experiences not as technological novelties, but as carefully crafted educational narratives that bridge the cultural gap.

4.5 Strategic Implications and Recommendations

Collectively, the results of this study offer several strategic implications for policymakers, cultural institutions, and practitioners involved in the international dissemination of Chinese jade culture. First, a "one-size-fits-all" approach to dissemination is demonstrably ineffective. The comparative analysis (Figure 3) clearly shows that different channels have distinct strengths and weaknesses, and their effectiveness varies significantly across target demographics (Figure 3b). A portfolio approach is therefore essential, where different channels are strategically deployed to achieve specific outcomes with targeted audiences. For instance, a campaign aimed at youth awareness should prioritize social media, while one focused on building scholarly consensus should leverage academic conferences and Confucius Institutes.

Second, the power of the hybrid model must be systematically harnessed. The evidence from the engagement funnel analysis (Figure 5d) is compelling: integrated online-offline strategies are the most effective at converting initial interest into deep, sustained cultural engagement. Institutions should design campaigns where digital content explicitly drives traffic to physical events and vice-versa, creating a continuous engagement loop. This could involve, for example, using social media to promote upcoming exhibitions, offering virtual previews that incentivize physical attendance, and providing post-visit digital resources that deepen the experience. Such an approach aligns with the broader trend toward integrated cultural communication strategies advocated by leading heritage organizations (NEMO, 2025).

Third, addressing the cross-cultural communication gap is paramount. The persistent disconnect between aesthetic appreciation and symbolic understanding among non-Chinese audiences represents a significant barrier to achieving the deeper goals of cultural diplomacy, namely fostering genuine mutual understanding and respect. This requires investing in high-quality, culturally adapted content that not only displays but also explains. Storytelling, interpretive technologies like VR/AR, and collaborative projects with local cultural institutions in target countries can all contribute to bridging this gap. The Confucius Institutes, which our study identifies as the most effective channel for knowledge depth (Figure 3a), could play a central role in this effort by developing specialized jade culture curricula that go beyond language instruction to include cultural interpretation and hands-on craft experiences.

Finally, the geographic disparities identified in this study (Table 3, Figure 4) call for a more equitable and inclusive global strategy. While the concentration of efforts along BRI corridors is strategically logical, the neglect of regions like Africa and Latin America represents a missed opportunity. As these regions become increasingly connected through digital infrastructure, there is a growing potential to reach new audiences. Tailored digital

campaigns, partnerships with local universities, and the inclusion of jade culture in broader South-South cultural exchange programs could help extend the reach of Chinese jade heritage to these underserved regions, contributing to a more genuinely global appreciation of this ancient and profound cultural tradition.

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