

Research Article

Participatory Video Recording of Cross-Border Ethnic Cultural Dialogue: Project Design of Zhuang Rock Paintings and Tianqin Rituals on the China-Vietnam Border

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Abstract

This study presents a participatory video design for documenting and disseminating Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals along the China-Vietnam border. Responding to the dual pressures of modernization and fragmented cross-border exchange, the project integrates visual anthropology, cross-cultural communication, and community-based heritage safeguarding. Methodologically, we combine community storyboard workshops, on-site participatory filming, and iterative rough-cut screenings with mixed-methods evaluation. Qualitative data (participant observation and semi-structured interviews) will be thematically coded, while quantitative data (pre/post surveys using a 5-point scale) will assess shifts in cultural knowledge, pride, and intent to participate in safeguarding. The eight-month workflow proceeds through four phases: preliminary research and access; co-design and filming; post-production with multilingual subtitles (Chinese/Vietnamese/English) and cultural-sensitivity review; and multi-platform dissemination plus effect evaluation. Expected outputs include a 30-40-minute documentary, 3-5 short social media videos, no fewer than five offline screenings on both sides of the border, and an online reach of approximately 10,000 views in three months. Anticipated impacts are (i) activation of community agency and intergenerational transmission, (ii) strengthened cross-border dialogue through co-creation and bilingual/multilingual circulation, and (iii) a replicable design toolkit for other cross-border ethnocultural contexts. By centering local voices throughout production and evaluation, the project aims to deliver culturally sensitive, ethically grounded, and practically scalable visual documentation that supports sustained heritage vitality across borders.

Keywords

Participatory Imaging, Cross-Border Cultural Dialogue, Ethnographic Documentary, Research Design

1. Introduction

This study's novelty lies in integrating participatory video with cross-border community engagement. Unlike conventional ethnographic documentation, it applies AI-assisted translation and multi-platform distribution to achieve both cultural preservation and public participation. The contribution also lies in constructing a replicable workflow connecting

community-based video practice with UNESCO's ICH framework, filling a gap in cross-border visual heritage dissemination research.

The Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals in the China-Vietnam border region are unique and important components of the diverse cultural spectrum of the Chinese nation.

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The rock paintings, with their unique symbolic systems and artistic styles, carry the historical memories and spiritual beliefs of ancient Zhuang society; Tianqin rituals, integrating music, dance, narrative, and religious rituals, embody the Zhuang people's close connection with nature, the universe, and their ancestors. These cultural heritages not only hold significant historical and aesthetic value but also serve as a shared spiritual bond between ethnic groups across borders. However, with the acceleration of modernization and shifting patterns of cross-border communication, these traditional cultural forms face multiple challenges: declining awareness and participation among younger generations; oral transmission struggles to survive in rapidly changing social structures; and cultural exchange between ethnic groups across borders is constrained by factors such as geography, language, and policy. This situation not only threatens cultural continuity but also weakens its influence and vitality in contemporary society. [3-5]

Participatory Visual Documentation, a key method in visual anthropology and cross-cultural communication research, emphasizes engaging community members throughout the entire process of video production, from topic selection, filming, storytelling, and dissemination, with local voices leading or contributing to the decision-making process. This approach not only helps produce more authentic and culturally sensitive video works, but also fosters a sense of cultural agency within the community and promotes intergenerational and cross-border cultural dialogue. [7, 9, 10, 14, 15]

Based on this, this paper proposes a participatory video documentation project focused on Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals along the China-Vietnam border. Through systematic research planning and video implementation, this project aims to achieve the following goals: cultural documentation and preservation: faithfully documenting cultural practices and related knowledge systems using video media; cross-border cultural exchange: enhancing understanding and interaction between relevant communities in China and Vietnam through multilingual and multi-platform video dissemination; and academic and practical contributions: providing a replicable project design and methodological reference for research in visual anthropology, cultural heritage preservation, and cross-cultural communication. It should be noted that this paper is a research design paper, focusing on the project's theoretical basis, methodological framework, implementation plan, and expected outcomes. Field photography and data collection have not yet begun. Through this design, we hope to lay a solid foundation for future field research and output, and provide a model for the documentation and dissemination of similar cross-border ethnic cultures.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Recent studies (2020-2023) highlight digital and participatory shifts in visual anthropology. Researchers emphasize hybrid visual methods, co-creation, and ethical collaboration with indigenous communities, aligning with UNESCO's participatory safeguarding principles. Digital ethnography and AI-assisted visual documentation are emerging as new trends, expanding cultural accessibility and audience engagement. These advances provide essential theoretical grounding for this study.

2.1. Visual Anthropology and Participatory Imaging

Visual anthropology, a key branch of anthropology, emphasizes the recording, analysis, and presentation of cultural practices through imaging. Its core methodologies emphasize authenticity, contextualization, and reflexivity. Early visual anthropology works were often captured and interpreted one-way by researchers, often overlooking the subjectivity of the filmed groups. In recent years, numerous scholars have proposed the concept of participatory imaging, which emphasizes engaging community members in all aspects of filmmaking, allowing local voices to dominate the selection, narrative, filming, and editing of images. This approach not only enhances the cultural accuracy and emotional resonance of images but also, through the very process of participation, fosters a community's cultural self-identity and drive for inheritance.

For the Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals along the China-Vietnam border, participatory imaging methods can help avoid the biases of a single external perspective, ensuring that the resulting images truly reflect the local cultural context and community identity. Furthermore, the collaborative process of image production itself is a practical venue for cultural exchange and inheritance.

2.2. Cross-cultural Communication and Audience Participation

Intercultural communication theory, focusing on high-context and low-context cultural theories, examines the interactive mechanisms between different cultural groups in information exchange and meaning construction. "Cultural integration" theory, which provides a perspective for analyzing the differences in communication styles between Chinese and Vietnamese cultures, emphasizes how media technology facilitates the flow and re-creation of cultural content across multiple platforms and regions. In this process, audiences are no longer passive recipients but active participants and content re-producers. [6]

In the image dissemination phase of this study, social media and video platforms serve not only as distribution channels for

films but also as crucial spaces for audience discussion, feedback, and secondary creation. This multi-dimensional interaction helps break the single, linear model of cultural output and foster a two-way, or even multi-directional, cross-border cultural dialogue mechanism.

2.3. Cultural Heritage Protection and Community Participation

According to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), communities, groups, and individuals are the principal actors in the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and safeguarding actions should respect their values and lifestyles. The proposed concept of "heritage as performance" further emphasizes that the vitality of cultural heritage lies in its practical process, not static preservation. Participatory imaging is not only a means of documentation but also a process of preservation. It can not only record rituals, skills, and oral traditions, but also inspire community members to actively participate in preservation efforts. Through the dissemination of images, it can expand the audience and increase social support. This approach is particularly important for cross-border ethnic cultures, as cultural practices are often distributed across multiple political borders. Only through cross-border cooperation and joint documentation can holistic protection and inheritance be achieved. [1, 2, 8, 16]

2.4. Research Gaps and Contributions of This Study

While participatory video has extensive application in community cultural documentation and education, systematic research on cross-border ethnic culture, particularly visual documentation and multi-platform dissemination strategies involving both Chinese and Vietnamese communities, remains lacking. Existing literature often discusses visual documentation, cross-border exchange, and cultural preservation separately, lacking a comprehensive project design and evaluation framework that integrates all three. This study builds upon this foundation: applying participatory video methods to cross-border ethnic cultural documentation and dissemination; integrating visual anthropology, cross-cultural communication, and cultural heritage preservation theories; incorporating audience participation and interactive feedback mechanisms into video production and dissemination; and developing a replicable and scalable model for cross-border cultural video documentation and dissemination.

3. Methodology

The data workflow includes four main steps: (1) community consultation and storyboard design, (2) participatory filming and on-site observation, (3) collaborative rough-cut

review and thematic coding using NVivo, and (4) dissemination, feedback, and evaluation. This cyclical design ensures that the community remains central throughout production, data interpretation, and dissemination, forming a closed loop of co-creation and knowledge exchange.

3.1. Research Methods and Design

This study employed a participatory imaging method, combining qualitative and quantitative research tools, to design a cross-border cultural documentation and dissemination project for Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals along the China-Vietnam border. The methodological design focused on feasibility, replicability, and cross-cultural adaptability, encompassing a comprehensive process from preliminary research to outcome evaluation.

3.2. Research Phases and Timeline

The project is expected to last for 8 months and is divided into four phases (see Appendix C for details):

Preliminary research (Months 1-2), document and data compilation: Collection of academic literature, video materials, and policy documents on Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals from China and Vietnam.

Preliminary field interviews: Conduct in-depth interviews with cultural inheritors, local cultural departments, community elders, and cross-border scholars to understand the current status of culture and the need for protection.

Filming feasibility assessment: determine the filming location, time node, cross-border access and filming permits. **Participatory filming (Month 3-5),**

Community Storyboard Design: Invite community members, inheritors, and research teams to jointly develop shooting plans and storyboards to ensure the authenticity and respect of cultural presentation.

On-site filming: covering rock painting sites, Tianqin sacrificial rituals, related life scenes and oral history.

Image recording form: a combination of static images (photos), dynamic images (videos), audio and text descriptions.

Post-production (Months 6-7), Rough Cut Review: Organize screenings within the community to gather feedback on content, structure, and subtitles.

Multilingual version: Produce subtitles in Chinese, Vietnamese, and English to facilitate cross-border dissemination.

Cultural sensitivity control: blur or delete content related to religion or taboos as necessary.

Dissemination and Evaluation (August), Offline Screenings: Held in community cultural centers, schools, museums, and academic conferences.

Online release: Multi-channel dissemination through domestic and international video platforms and social media (such as Bilibili, YouTube, and Facebook).

Effect evaluation: Conduct questionnaire surveys (Likert scale) before and after the film viewing, and conduct in-depth interviews to analyze changes in cultural cognition and attitudes.

3.3. Participant Recruitment and Sampling Strategy

Recruitment targets: Cultural inheritors (Tianqin artists, rock painting interpreters, craftsmen, etc.); local youth and students (as the core group of future cultural inheritance).

Cultural institution staff and cross-border scholars.

Recruitment channels: recommendations from village committees and community cultural organizations; academic cooperation networks; invitations to cross-border cultural festivals and exhibitions.

Sampling method: Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the sample covered different ages, genders, and cultural roles.

Target sample size: 15-20 core participants;

3.4. Data Collection Methods

To achieve the research objectives, this project uses three types of data collection methods:

Participant observation: Researchers participate in cultural activities and daily life, recording procedural details and non-verbal information, using observation record forms (including date, location, event description, and cultural significance).

Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for an outline) were conducted using a combination of fixed and open-ended questions. The interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were fully audio-recorded and transcribed.

Questionnaire: (See Appendix B for a draft) This survey measures cultural cognition and attitudes at two time points: before and after viewing the film. A 5-point Likert scale was used to facilitate statistical analysis. [11]

3.5. Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to code the interview and observation data. Qualitative analysis software (such as NVivo) was used to establish a coding system to ensure transparency. Themes were identified, such as cultural practices, cross-border exchanges, and community engagement. [12]

Quantitative Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics were used to analyze changes in cultural cognition and attitudes before and after viewing the film (mean, standard deviation, percentage). If possible, paired sample t-tests or nonparametric tests were used to assess significant differences.

3.6. Ethics and Intellectual Property

Informed consent: Written or verbal consent was obtained before filming and data collection, and the purpose of the study, scope of use, risks, and benefits were explained to the participants.

Privacy protection: Use pseudonyms in image publishing and paper writing to anonymize sensitive information.

Copyright and Use: The final version of the film will be shared with the community, and permission will be obtained from participants and the community before public release. Research results will be published on academic platforms under the CC BY-NC (Attribution-Non-Commercial) license. [13]

Cultural sensitivity: Strictly adhere to local taboos and cultural norms, and present religious and ritual scenes with respect.

3.7. Project Feasibility and Risk Response

Feasibility: There is already a foundation for academic cooperation between China and Vietnam; support from local cultural institutions; the research team has experience in ethnographic research and video production.

Potential risks and countermeasures:

Border policy changes: handle cross-border procedures in advance, set up alternative filming locations, flexibly adjust filming times based on weather and natural conditions, insufficient community participation, strengthen early communication and trust building, and provide appropriate cultural feedback.

4. Expected Outcomes

This project aims to achieve the multiple goals of cultural preservation, cross-border exchange, and academic contribution through participatory video recording and multi-platform dissemination. Expected outcomes include the following four aspects:

4.1. Community Participation and Cultural Activation

Participation scale: The core filming and interview participants are about 15-20 people, including cultural inheritors, youth groups, cultural workers and cross-border scholars; the film viewing and questionnaire participants are expected to be about 200 people.

Cultural Activation: Through participation in storyboard design, filming and feedback, we stimulate community members' interest and pride in Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals, and enhance their awareness of intergenerational inheritance.

Capacity building: Some community members will learn basic shooting and recording skills in video production, laying

the foundation for subsequent independent cultural recording.

4.2. Video Works and Communication Achievements

Video Work: Produce a 30-40 minute multilingual (Chinese, Vietnamese, and English) ethnographic documentary film, including footage of rock paintings, Tianqin ritual scenes, oral histories, and cross-border communication.

Supporting materials: Edit and produce 3-5 short video clips (3-5 minutes each) for social media dissemination and teaching use.

Distribution scope: The film is expected to reach approximately 10,000 online views within 3 months of its release, with no less than 5 offline screenings (covering communities, cultural institutions and academic conferences in both China and Vietnam).

4.3. Cultural Awareness and Attitude Improvement

Cognitive improvement: Through questionnaire measurement before and after watching the film, it is expected that the audience's cognitive level of the historical background and cultural significance of rock paintings and Tianqin sacrifices will be significantly improved.

Attitude change: It is expected that the audience will experience positive changes in cultural pride, interest in cross-border exchanges, and willingness to participate in protection.

Cross-border dialogue: Promote interaction and discussion between Chinese and Vietnamese audiences during screenings and feedback sessions, creating conditions for subsequent cooperation.

4.4. Academic and Methodological Contributions

Methodological framework: Summarize and formulate a participatory imaging research design suitable for cross-border ethnic cultural documentation, including community participation mechanisms, ethical norms, and multi-platform communication strategies.

Academic output: 1-2 conference papers (domestic and international); 1 academic journal paper (visual anthropology, cultural heritage research); 1 teaching case and method manual (for use in the field of cultural protection and dissemination).

Replicability: The project framework can be transplanted into the video recording and dissemination practices of other cross-border ethnic cultures, providing a reference for similar research.

4.5. Long-term Impact (Expected)

Cultural Heritage: Communities will leverage project ex-

perience and skills to independently document their culture through video. **Cross-border Cooperation:** Establish a long-term collaboration mechanism between Chinese and Vietnamese academic and cultural institutions to promote subsequent cultural exchange projects. **Public Education:** Through online dissemination and the use of educational resources, we will enhance public awareness and awareness of cross-border ethnic cultures.

5. Discussion

Integrating the project with UNESCO's ICH safeguarding framework underscores the ethical and procedural alignment of participatory video with heritage preservation. By emphasizing community ownership, transnational collaboration, and shared benefit, this design concretely applies the 2003 Convention's principles of community-led safeguarding. It demonstrates how participatory media can serve as both documentation and dynamic practice for ICH revitalization.

This research design proposes a cross-border ethnic cultural documentation program that integrates participatory imaging methods, cross-cultural communication strategies, and community engagement mechanisms. Using Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals along the China-Vietnam border as case studies, the project aims to promote cultural preservation and cross-border exchange. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, this design offers the following valuable insights.

5.1. Innovation

This project incorporates a full community engagement mechanism throughout the filmmaking process, breaking the traditional ethnographic documentary model of "one-way recording by researchers and passive presentation by the community." Community members are not only filmed subjects but also co-creators of the planning and narrative. This approach enhances the cultural authenticity and emotional resonance of the film content. Furthermore, the design integrates multilingual subtitles with multi-platform distribution, expanding its reach to a wider audience across borders.

5.2. Feasibility

The project leverages existing academic exchange platforms and cultural cooperation mechanisms between China and Vietnam, providing a strong foundation for implementation. Preliminary research and cross-border coordination will provide the necessary policy and resource support for subsequent filming and dissemination. Furthermore, the research team's experience in visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking will underpin project execution.

5.3. Potential Challenges

Although the project is feasible, it may still face the following problems during implementation: policy and administrative restrictions: filming and cultural activities in border areas may be affected by policy changes; technical and resource limitations: technical support for filming equipment, subtitle production, and multi-platform dissemination needs to be fully guaranteed; cultural sensitivity and trust building: there are specific taboos and symbols in cross-border ethnic cultures, and it is necessary to ensure respect and accuracy in presentation, and establish sufficient trust before filming.

5.4. Implications for Future Research and Practice

This research design is applicable not only to Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals but also to other cross-border ethnic cultural documentation and dissemination projects. In the future, similar projects could explore more interactive dissemination methods (such as VR/AR and online interactive exhibitions) to enhance audience immersion and engagement.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

Future research will explore AI-supported participatory video analysis, interactive VR dissemination, and longitudinal evaluation of audience impact. It will also focus on policy dialogue with local governments and NGOs to embed participatory imaging into cross-border heritage management systems. Such directions will ensure sustainable and inclusive heritage safeguarding beyond this initial project.

6.1. Conclusion

This paper proposes a participatory video documentation and cross-border dissemination project focusing on Zhuang rock paintings and Tianqin rituals along the China-Vietnam border. Drawing on theories of visual anthropology, cross-cultural communication, and cultural heritage preservation, the project constructs a systematic framework encompassing preliminary research, participatory filming, post-production, and multi-platform dissemination. The project aims not only to provide authentic and sustainable video documentation of endangered cultural heritage but also to enhance public awareness and recognition of this culture through cross-border communication.

6.2. Future Work

Future research and implementation plans will include the following aspects:

Field implementation and data collection: Filming and surveys were conducted in China and Vietnam according to established methods to ensure sample diversity and repre-

sentativeness.

Data Analysis and Output: Combining qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, evaluate the actual effect of video recording on cultural cognition and attitude change, and produce academic papers and research reports;

Ongoing dissemination and public engagement: After the project is completed, the film and related materials will be continuously promoted through social media, educational platforms, and cultural exhibitions;

Model promotion and optimization: Based on the experience of this project, we will improve the process and toolkit for participatory video documentation and pilot its application in other cross-border ethnic cultures;

Deepen cross-border cooperation: Establish long-term cooperative relations with cultural institutions and academic groups in Vietnam and other countries to jointly promote cross-border cultural heritage protection and academic exchanges.

Through the above work, it is hoped that this research design will not only provide a feasible solution for cultural heritage on the China-Vietnam border, but also provide theoretical support and practical reference for the recording and dissemination of cross-border ethnic cultures on a global scale.

Abbreviations

AR	Augmented Reality
CC BY-NC	Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
NVivo	Qualitative data analysis software (Lumivero)
PV	Participatory Video
VR	Virtual Reality
WHC	World Heritage Centre

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Author Contributions

QIYI Wu: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Project Administration, Funding Acquisition

Natirath Weeranakin: Supervision, Resources, Validation, Project Administration, Writing - Review & Editing

Ratanachote Thienmongkol: Investigation, Software, Funding Acquisition, Validation, Writing - Review & Editing

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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