

How Digital Media Reconstructs Cultural Identity: An Analysis Based on the Inheritors of Horqin Embroidery

Rensaihan Wu¹

¹ School of Mongolian Studies, Inner Mongolia University, Mongolia

Correspondence: Rensaihan Wu, School of Mongolian Studies, Inner Mongolia University, Mongolia.

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the parallel development of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) protection and digital dissemination, this study takes the national-level ICH of Horqin embroidery as a case to focus on the mechanisms through which digital media reconstructs the cultural identity of the Mongol ethnic group. From a journalism and communication studies perspective, this research conducts an empirical analysis based on in-depth interviews with 12 Horqin embroidery inheritors and related groups across different generations. It reveals the dynamic pathways by which exposure to digital information shapes cultural identity through the activation of collective memory and the modulation of nostalgic sentiments. The study finds that the use of digital media exhibits significant generational differentiation: the youth are primarily characterized by visual consumption and reflective nostalgia, whereas the middle-aged and elderly groups rely on traditional craftsmanship and restorative nostalgia to maintain cultural authenticity. Digital platforms reconfigure the value judgment system for women through a tripartite mechanism of "skill mediatization, evaluation standardization, and subject transformation." The ritualized practice of collective memory becomes a living carrier for cultural identity. At the same time, the construction of a "mimetic community of inheritors" balances the conflict between commercial logic and cultural preservation. This study introduces the concept of the "mimetic community of inheritors" for the first time to explain how digital media reconstructs the field of cultural transmission through virtual communities. It also proposes strategies such as a "deep dissemination" mechanism and intergenerational collaborative workshops, offering methodological references for the digital protection of ICH. This research fills a gap in micro-empirical studies on ICH transmission in the digital era. It provides a communicological perspective that sheds light on pathways for the creative transformation of fine traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: Digital Information Exposure, Cultural Identity, Collective Memory, Nostalgia, Horqin Embroidery

1. Introduction

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a vital component of fine traditional Chinese culture and a living testament to the continuous inheritance of Chinese civilization. In 2021, Horqin embroidery (as part of Mongol embroidery—Tüsheet Wang Banner embroidery) from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was included in the fifth batch of the National Representative ICH Projects List (Expanded) with the approval of the State Council [1]. Throughout its long history of survival and development, Horqin embroidery has continuously absorbed and preserved the essence and characteristics of its ethnic culture, becoming an important member of the Chinese embroidery family.

As a traditional culture unique to the Mongol people, Horqin embroidery embodies historical memory, cultural genes, and aesthetic concepts. Should it be lost, it would lead to a rupture in cultural memory, weaken the identity of the younger generation, diminish the diversity of Chinese art, and erode the cohesion of the grassland cultural community, potentially even hindering the evolution of civilization itself. Consequently, in recent years, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has passed proposals such as the "Recommendation on Aiding Rural Revitalization with ICH" [2] and the "Proposal on the Industrial Development of Mongol Embroidery"[3], implementing measures like embroidery training workshops and strengthened copyright protection to advance the preservation of Horqin embroidery.

Currently, domestic academia has conducted extensive and fruitful research on the four famous Chinese embroideries: Su, Xiang, Shu, and Yue embroidery. However, research on lesser-known minority embroideries, such as Mongol embroidery, remains relatively scarce. Specifically concerning Horqin embroidery, existing studies primarily focus on analyzing the characteristics of its patterns and motifs, its historical evolutionary

trajectory, its application on carriers like garments and books, and its inherent cultural value. Scholars such as Luo Binyu et al. have analyzed the patterns of Mongol embroidery, systematically examining its history, pattern features, craft techniques, symbolic meanings, and compositional forms to extract elements, integrate them with modern fashion design concepts, and use fabric re-creation techniques for innovative ethnic clothing design [4]. Wang Shangnan, focusing on the inheritance and protection of Mongol attire in the Horqin region, has employed multidisciplinary research methods to provide a detailed exegesis on the cultural background, form, and features of this attire [5]. However, existing research often offers only general discussions on the developmental status, evolutionary history, or patterns of Horqin embroidery. It seldom addresses the ethnic culture symbolized by the embroidery and fails to analyze it in conjunction with its inheritors. This overlooks the profound psychological and emotional impacts of Horqin embroidery on the cultural identity, collective memory, and even nostalgic sentiments of the Mongol ethnic group, and lacks further investigation into the specific mechanisms and pathways of this influence.

Furthermore, from a disciplinary perspective, research on Horqin embroidery is predominantly concentrated in artistic fields like art and design, and applied disciplines such as handicraft and light industries. Research in other related fields, such as journalism and communication studies, is comparatively weak, leaving significant room for further inquiry. Within the domain of communication studies, research on ICH embroidery is mostly review-based, lacking verification through empirical data, and rarely exploring the psychological perceptions and emotional evolution of the ICH inheritors of Horqin embroidery.

The psychological perceptions and emotional evolution of Horqin embroidery inheritors positively affect its transmission in multiple aspects, including skill continuity, cultural identity, innovative drive, and social connections. Firstly, this process strengthens the inheritors' cultural identity. As their understanding of Horqin embroidery deepens, inheritors develop a strong sense of cultural belonging. This not only leads them to cherish and love this ICH more but also inspires a sense of responsibility and mission to pass it on, motivating them to proactively learn the skills and transmit them to the next generation. Secondly, their emotional evolution enhances their motivation for innovation. During the inheritance process, inheritors develop a profound emotional connection to the embroidery, prompting them to consider how to adapt it to modern society while preserving its traditional essence. They begin to experiment with new design concepts, materials, and technologies, creating works that possess both conventional charm and contemporary aesthetic appeal. Lastly, these psychological perceptions and emotional shifts strengthen the connections between inheritors and various sectors of society.

While existing studies have made certain contributions in the fields of collective memory, nostalgia, and cultural identity, they exhibit significant limitations in disciplinary perspective and research approach. Research on cultural identity has largely remained at the macro-level analysis of communication mechanisms within traditional media environments, lacking sufficient empirical exploration of how digital information micro-reconstructs ethnic identity and activates collective memory. This has led to a lag in the localized application of communication theory in the field of ICH protection, leaving practical pathways without solid academic support. Although research on collective memory has touched upon its construction process, it has overlooked the dynamic reshaping role of cultural media in transforming the agency of the memory subjects, excessively relying on macro-ritual analysis while lacking micro-level investigation into specific cultural practices and the subjective needs of the groups involved. An insufficient integration of qualitative and quantitative research has constrained the depth of its conclusions. Research on nostalgia has often been confined to macro-theoretical frameworks, failing to delve into the mechanisms of emotional construction for specific groups in the digital context, nor has it fully revealed the interactive relationship between nostalgia and cultural identity and its practical value in ICH protection. This systemic gap indicates that existing research has failed to capture the complexity of cultural transmission in the digital age, making it difficult to respond to the real-world demand for the creative transformation of traditional culture. Therefore, this study employs the in-depth interview method to analyze the pathways through which digital information shapes the cultural identity of Horqin embroidery inheritors, thereby filling the micro-empirical void and offering methodological insights for the inheritance and innovation of fine traditional Chinese culture in the digital space.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Identity of the Mongol People

Existing researchers, when examining cultural identity, define it as a process wherein individuals and groups, through discernment and selection in social interaction, psychologically and behaviorally affiliate themselves and others with a specific collective. The cultural identity in this study refers to the identity of the Mongol ethnic group,

using Horqin embroidery as the medium to investigate the psychological dynamics of its inheritors and related individuals.

Domestic research on Mongol cultural identity has primarily focused on two areas: its theoretical value, including its intrinsic structure and meaning, and its practical value in various academic fields. Existing studies have explored the structure and connotation of cultural identity, indicating that ethnic cultural identity is a socio-psychological process through which individuals acquire, maintain, and innovate their own ethnic culture, and is a necessary phenomenon in cultural change and integration [6]. In the field of ethnic minority studies, scholar Tan Chunyue investigated the cultural identity of Mongol students in the context of the Genghis Khan sacrificial rites, clarifying the relationship between cultural identity, cultural identity education, and the rites themselves. The study argues that the Genghis Khan rites constitute an educational activity possessing the educational connotation and function of cultural identity [7]. Zhang Baocheng studied the ethnic and national identity of the Barga Mongols in Hulunbuir, providing effective measures for achieving harmony and unity between "ethnic identity" and "national identity" among various ethnic groups [8].

However, from a communicological perspective, a significant research gap exists: existing scholarship has largely focused on macro-level descriptions of Mongol cultural transmission mechanisms within traditional media environments. In contrast, empirical research at the micro-level—specifically on how digital information reconstructs ethnic identity and activates collective memory—remains insufficient. This disciplinary limitation has not only led to a lag in the localized application of communication theory in the field of ICH protection but has also left the practical pathways for Mongol cultural transmission in the digital age without a solid theoretical underpinning. Therefore, this study, situated at the intersection of communication studies and ethnology, employs in-depth interviews to analyze the mechanisms by which digital information shapes the cultural identity of Horqin embroidery inheritors. This approach aims not only to fill the empirical gap in the study of Mongol cultural transmission but also to offer methodological insights for the creative transformation of fine traditional Chinese culture in the digital space.

2.2 *The Shaping of Collective Memory through Horqin Embroidery*

In the early 20th century, Maurice Halbwachs, in *On Collective Memory*, first proposed that collective memory is the process and result of shared pasts among members of a specific social group. It is a social construct that expanded the study of memory from a predominantly individual perspective to a collective one. Collective memory is based on specific groups and is gradually constructed through historical accumulation, with its construction process aimed at strengthening group cohesion [9]. The concept of the "collective" in this paper encompasses the various actors engaged in the practice of Horqin embroidery, including its inheritors and other related Mongol individuals. The transmission of Mongol collective memory relies on carriers such as ritualistic performance and cultural landscapes, which constitute cultural spaces containing social relations, power, and cultural-symbolic metaphors. Horqin embroidery is a crucial cultural medium in the construction of Mongol collective memory, and its narrative content, forms, and practices are continuously reshaped through the agency of memory subjects.

Firstly, in research concerning the theoretical summary and interpretation of collective memory, some scholars have pointed to future directions. Scholar Chen Zhenhua noted that the popularization of network technology has altered the construction mechanisms of collective memory, thus future research in this area needs to emphasize quantitative methods using big data to serve the practical construction of collective memory [10]. In terms of the practical application of collective memory theory, particularly in studies of ethnic minorities, scholar Jiang Jiaxin used fieldwork to explore the construction of collective memory through the Yi Torch Festival rituals, thereby analyzing the process by which collective memory forms ethnic identity [11]. Regarding research on collective memory construction in specific group events, scholar Chen Beibei examined the construction pathways of collective memory of the COVID-19 pandemic through two lines of inquiry—commemorative rituals and bodily practices—to construct a collective memory of the pandemic to strengthen the life consciousness of social members [12].

While existing research offers insightful observations, it also has shortcomings. Firstly, although the process of collective memory construction is mentioned, there is little focus on the dynamic reshaping of cultural media (such as Horqin embroidery) through the agency of memory subjects. Secondly, studies on the collective memory of ethnic minorities often focus on macro-level rituals, lacking in-depth analysis of the micro-level factors that influence it. Furthermore, when analyzing specific cultural practices, there is a lack of multi-dimensional, multi-level, in-depth preliminary interviews, which limits the depth and breadth of the research conclusions.

This study uses Horqin embroidery as a point of entry to analyze its process as a cultural medium for the construction of the inheritors' collective memory. By examining the narrative content, forms, and reshaping of

embroidery patterns and artistic practices, it reveals the dynamic influence of a cultural medium on the construction of collective memory. The research focuses on information exposure and the cultural-symbolic metaphors of embroidery in this process, analyzing the roles and interactions of different groups (inheritors, individuals with deep engagement) in memory construction to reveal the impact of information exposure on the formation and dissemination of collective memory. Concurrently, it employs in-depth interviews to conduct a multi-dimensional analysis of the embroidery's cultural practice, collecting and analyzing multi-source data to obtain comprehensive and profound research conclusions.

2.3 The Nostalgic Sentiments of Horqin Embroidery Inheritors

Nostalgia is a common emotional experience of modernity and a frequent cultural phenomenon in human social life. Through nostalgia, people achieve emotional resonance, evoke collective memory, and are thereby prompted to compare the differences between the present and the past, reshaping various emotional experiences of both. In this study, nostalgia is defined as a complex emotional experience originating from the recollection and reconstruction of past experiences, cultural memories, and identity by individuals or groups. In the digital age, this emotion is activated, shared, and disseminated through media technologies, becoming a crucial link connecting individual and collective memory, as well as real and virtual spaces. Nostalgia is not merely a simple reminiscence of good times past but a constructive process of cultural identity, involving individuals' interaction, sharing, and re-creation on digital platforms, thereby forming an emotional community with contemporary characteristics and cultural connotations.

The scope of domestic research on nostalgia has continuously expanded across various disciplines, with studies primarily falling into two categories: the mechanisms of nostalgia's construction and its outcomes, and the practice and application of media in nostalgia.

On one hand, the focus is on the construction mechanisms and results of nostalgia. Pointing to future directions, scholars Ji Li and Xia Yuqing, adopting a postmodern perspective on nostalgia theory, have indicated that the spiritual predicaments of individuals in modern society create a need to experience and express nostalgia, which various digital platforms then leverage to produce and consume nostalgic emotions and scenes [13]. Meanwhile, other studies, using Lefebvre's spatial theory as a theoretical lens and nostalgia as a point of entry, have analyzed the relationship between nostalgia and space. They explore the production of nostalgia within the three spatial dimensions—the perceived, the conceived, and the lived—to interpret the contemporary significance of the nostalgic wave in the social media era [14].

Furthermore, other scholars have focused on the practice and application of media in nostalgia. This has yielded significant research outcomes. Scholar Liu Yusi has pointed out that research on technological nostalgia should shift from a "matter of fact" to a "matter of concern" perspective, promoting its role in constructing a common future for humanity in the spatio-temporal dimension [15]. Scholar Wang Run has situated media and nostalgia research within the broader category of media memory studies, tracing the origin of the "nostalgia" concept, its emotional representations, and its social reproduction process, thereby expanding the paradigm of media memory research [16]. Scholars Deng Xiujun and Li Yaying selected the cassette tape affinity group on the Douban platform as their research subject, employing netnography to investigate the operational mechanism of the group's technological nostalgia from the perspective of the interaction between technological nostalgia and media memory [17].

Existing research has focused chiefly on general nostalgic phenomena, lacking in-depth study of specific groups in the context of digital information exposure. Although some scholars have proposed theoretical frameworks for the construction of nostalgia, these often remain at the macro-level and are not integrated with specific cultural practices, leading to a disconnect between theory and practice. Moreover, existing research has paid little attention to the influence of nostalgia on the cultural identity of specific groups. In the context of ICH protection and transmission, exploring this influence mechanism and its pathways is of greater practical necessity.

This study focuses on the inheritors of Horqin embroidery to explore the impact of digital information exposure on their nostalgic sentiments and how this emotion, in turn, affects Mongol cultural identity. The research combines nostalgia theory with the practice of Horqin embroidery to reveal the mechanisms of nostalgia construction and the formation process of cultural identity in the context of digital information exposure. Concurrently, it emphasizes the specific pathways and mechanisms through which nostalgia, mediated by digital information exposure, influences Mongol cultural identity, thereby providing theoretical support for the protection and transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

2.4 Research Questions

1. How does exposure to digital media information affect the Mongol inheritors of Horqin embroidery? What role does digital information play in contemporary Mongol cultural identity, collective memory, and nostalgia?
2. How does the digital dissemination of Horqin embroidery activate the ethnic group's collective memory and influence cultural identity?
3. How does nostalgia coexist with the commercialization of Horqin embroidery in the digital age and influence ethnic identity? In the process of digital dissemination, how does nostalgia connect traditional craftsmanship with modern society and balance the contradictions between commercialization and emotional alienation?

3. Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Research Focus and Participants

Horqin embroidery is a renowned school of Mongol embroidery, distinguished by its unique style from the Horqin region of eastern Inner Mongolia. Since the Yuan Dynasty, it has been hailed as a "treasure of the ethnic culture." Embroidery has traditionally been an essential skill for girls on the grasslands. In the Horqin region, folk embroidery is not merely a hobby for women. Still, it has often become their profession, representing a key component of the collective memory of the Mongol ethnic group. This paper, employing the method of in-depth interviews, engages with 12 embroiderers and other individuals involved with Horqin embroidery to explore its influence on the developmental process of Mongol cultural identity and the pathways of collective memory construction.

This study focuses on mainstream social media applications (such as WeChat, TikTok, and Kuaishou), aiming to investigate the impact of digital information on the cultural identity of Horqin embroidery inheritors during the cultural transmission process. A strategy combining purposive sampling and snowball sampling was employed. A recruitment notice was posted on WeChat Moments from January to February 2025, which led to the initial screening and selection of five eligible Horqin embroidery inheritors. Subsequently, through referrals from these interviewees, the sample was expanded to include nine professional practitioners. The final sample consisted of 12 participants, comprising three university students (ages 18-23), four new-generation middle-aged inheritors (ages 35-50), and five older-generation inheritors (ages 55-75). All participants met the following criteria: (1) possessed knowledge of and had in-depth contact with Horqin embroidery; (2) were themselves inheritors of Horqin embroidery or had family members who were, thus possessing a foundational understanding of it; (3) had experience encountering content related to Horqin embroidery on social media platforms; and (4) were able to articulate their personal experiences with Horqin embroidery clearly.

In-depth interviews were conducted via three different modalities. For the three younger participants, face-to-face interviews were conducted and recorded in their entirety, averaging approximately 20 minutes each. For the nine professional practitioners, WeChat voice calls and text messages were used, with each session averaging approximately 40 minutes.

All interviews were structured around three core dimensions: The first part covered demographic information, including the participant's name, age, profession, and the nature of their connection to and experiences with Horqin embroidery. The second part explored the participants' engagement with ICH-related information through digital media. The third part delved into the participants' experiences and perceived differences regarding cultural identity, collective memory, and nostalgic sentiments before and after engaging with digital content about Horqin embroidery, as well as their views on and interpretations of related online behaviors and the psychological changes they observed in themselves.

Informed consent was obtained before each interview, clearly outlining the scope of data use and the terms of privacy protection. Given that the primary language for most Horqin embroidery inheritors is Mongolian, the interviews were translated, resulting in approximately 18,000 Chinese characters of transcribed text. After data collection was complete, the researcher conducted a meticulous reading and analysis of the translated transcripts, extracting core topics and key concepts discussed by the participants. This was followed by phenomenological analysis, conceptual refinement, and theoretical induction. Through this rigorous process of analysis and discussion, the core findings of the study were formulated.

Table 1. Basic Information of Interviewees

ID	Gender	Age	Frequency of Digital Exposure	Information Platforms	Content Preferences	Interview Duration	Interview Method
S1	Female	49	Low	WeChat Channels	Embroidery techniques for garments; application of traditional patterns to new products; embroidery methods.	1h 15min	WeChat voice, text
S2	Female	70	Low	Kuaishou, WeChat	Embroidery patterns.	1h 30min	WeChat voice, text
S3	Female	46	Low	WeChat Moments	Embroidery patterns.	20min	WeChat voice, text
S4	Female	40	High	Kuaishou, Douyin	Clothing styles, embroidery patterns.	55min	WeChat voice, text
S5	Female	72	High	WeChat	Displays of embroidered works.	57min	WeChat voice, text
S6	Female	66	High	Douyin, Kuaishou, WeChat Channels	Traditional Horqin embroidery patterns; interviews with inheritors.	36min	WeChat voice, text
S7	Female	38	High	Douyin, WeChat Channels	All content related to Horqin embroidery.	32min	WeChat voice, text
S8	Female	68	Low	WeChat Channels	Application of traditional/old patterns to new products; embroidery methods.	36min	WeChat voice, text
S9	Female	74	Low	Kuaishou	Application of traditional/old patterns to new products; embroidery methods.	34min	WeChat voice, text
S10	Female	22	Low	Douyin, Xiaohongshu	Outfit transitions; influencer posts (fashion/dance) featuring the embroidery.	20min	WeChat voice call
S11	Female	23	Low	Douyin, Xiaohongshu	Outfit transitions; influencer posts (fashion/dance) featuring the embroidery.	20min	WeChat voice call
S12	Female	28	Low	Douyin, Xiaohongshu	Outfit transitions; influencer posts (fashion/dance) featuring the embroidery.	20min	WeChat voice call

4. Findings

4.1 Intergenerational Differences and Group Differentiation in Digital Information Exposure

Social media platforms play a crucial role in the public's access to information. Currently, Horqin embroidery is subject to a significant phenomenon of age stratification, wherein different age cohorts exhibit distinct preferences for information acquisition channels, leading to notable intergenerational differentiation.

The youth cohort (ages 19-40) primarily uses Douyin and Xiaohongshu as their primary information channels (e.g., S10, S11, S12). Their focus is on highly visual content, such as "outfit transition videos" and "videos from 'face-value' dance influencers" wearing Horqin embroidery. They engage in a form of symbolic consumption, treating the embroidery as a "cultural signifier" (as S10 noted, her motivation was to "wear a Mongol robe to display cultural confidence"). The "15-second logic" of short-video platforms simplifies complex pattern histories into

mere tags, causing young creators to easily fall into the trap of "symbolic collage" [18]. The "short, simple, and fast" nature of these videos has a significant negative impact on university students. To garner traffic, some short videos fabricate false information and promote utilitarian values. Under the sway of the logic of capital, this can mislead their value judgments, leading to tendencies of historical nihilism and a vulgarization of moral and aesthetic standards [19]. Furthermore, the platforms' alienating algorithmic recommendation mechanisms exacerbate the trend towards "visual spectacle," deviating from the core purpose of cultural interpretation. Through personalized services, they also intensify the "information cocoon" effect, trapping individuals in an "echo chamber" [20], which leads to a decline in the quality of information in the public sphere and an erosion of traditional ethics.

"I feel that wearing Horqin embroidery garments is also a form of inheritance." (S10)

The middle-aged and elderly cohort (ages 46 and above) relies on WeChat Channels and Kuaishou for passive information reception, preferring content such as "traditional patterns" and "embroidery technique tutorials." For them, digital tools serve merely as an ancillary medium, and their frequency of use is lower than that of the younger group. Simultaneously, a conflict exists between traditional cultural transmission and modern consumerism. Younger entrepreneurs, represented by S4, pursue a commercialized approach to transmitting traditional culture by developing a market and transforming traditional handicrafts into commodities. This approach has met with resistance from the older generation. For instance, S3, a master artisan, refuses to accept bulk orders, believing that commercial transactions dissolve the spiritual core of the traditional craft. This difference in values between the two generations highlights the dilemma of balancing cultural preservation with commercial development. Regarding familial transmission, the post-2000s generation's interest in traditional embroidery often remains at a superficial, observational level, lacking the motivation to learn.

"I don't like nor am I good at sharing my work on Douyin or Kuaishou." (S2)

Furthermore, there are significant differences in usage scenarios and behavioral patterns among the research participants. For example, high-frequency users will proactively search for clothing styles and pattern innovations, utilizing livestream e-commerce to achieve a dual cycle of "heritage transmission and economic benefit." Low-frequency users, however, use digital tools merely as a channel for "skill tutorials," with the core of their cultural transmission still depending on offline communities.

4.2 The Compound Impact of Digital Exposure on Cultural Identity: The Three Dimensions of "Cognitive Reconstruction—Affective Connection—Behavioral Transformation"

The motivation for young people to disseminate content stems from immediate interactive feedback mechanisms. Through comments and co-creation, they gain emotional resonance and value validation. In a cycle of "affective experience leading to identity formation," a symbiosis of individual and collective memory is achieved. Consequently, WeChat groups and livestream rooms on WeChat Channels can form a "mimetic community of inheritors" (as S5 stated, *"The online community keeps me going"*), providing inheritors with a sense of belonging and motivation. One scholar [21] once used the metaphor of an "emotional takeaway factory" to describe the emotion production mechanism of livestreaming platforms, pointing out that hosts transform private-sphere emotions into quantifiable "emotional commodities" through continuous affective interaction. Although the new generation of inheritors relies on livestreaming platforms, their core objective is not to sell physical goods but to fulfill their mission of cultural transmission through the digital performance of embroidery skills. Audience "rewards" represent a form of identificatory consumption of cultural symbols, while the inheritors, through "digital performances" such as demonstrating stitches and explaining patterns, transform the cultural codes embedded in the embroidery—such as Mongol culture and gender ethics—into perceptible emotional value.

This practice supplements the theory of emotional labor. Whereas traditional emotional labor exchanges emotional exhaustion for economic returns, the emotional investment of embroidery inheritors constitutes the core of cultural reproduction. They construct "para-kinship relationships" in their livestream rooms, using digital media to reconfigure the transmission field of Horqin embroidery as a form of female cultural capital. The audience's imagined perception of the inheritors as "nimble-fingered and quick-witted" from watching the embroidery process is, in reality, a symbolic continuation of traditional gender values in the digital space. Affective interaction becomes the medium connecting individual memory with collective identity, driving the transformation of the inheritors' identity from "skill holders" to "cultural mediators."

"I often use WeChat Channels to share videos of our training classes and our finished embroidery work. In the comments section, many peers give us support and encouragement. This is very inspiring and motivates me more to do what I want to do." (S7)

Behavioral transformation is manifested in a shift from "survival skill" to "cultural consumption." In contemporary society, the younger Mongol generation wears Mongol robes featuring distinctive Horqin embroidery on essential occasions such as graduation seasons and wedding ceremonies. This not only reflects their pride in and identification with their ethnic culture but also demonstrates a proactive attitude towards inheriting and promoting it. The youth cohort integrates traditional embroidery with modern contexts, enabling the transformation of the Mongol robe from a "utilitarian function" to an "identity symbol." In contrast, the middle-aged and elderly generation continues to regard "marriage customs" and "survival skills" as the core contexts for transmission, steadfastly upholding the status of the traditional culture.

4.3 The Multidimensional Reconstruction of Female Value in Horqin Embroidery Driven by Digital Media: Marital Suitability, Spiritual Expression, and Aesthetic Innovation

In the traditional context, embroidery served as the primary criterion for judging a Mongol woman's marital suitability. A bride would visibly demonstrate the quality of her craftsmanship by gifting hand-embroidered items, such as tobacco pouches, boots, and purses. The quantity and aesthetic quality of these shoes and boots were directly correlated with her perceived "diligence" and "dexterity."

If a woman couldn't embroider, she would even be looked down upon, be called uncultured, and be labeled 'a woman who puts all ten fingers in her mouth' (a Mongolian proverb for a lazy and incompetent woman). (S2)

At a wedding, the more beautiful shoes and boots the bride presented, the more she would be considered nimble-fingered, quick-witted, and diligent. (S2)

Exposure to digital information reshapes this value system through the following pathways. First is the mediatized transformation of skill display. Short-video platforms have become a "digital dowry" for the new generation of women to showcase their embroidery skills. By livestreaming their embroidery process and posting details of finished products, they transcend the spatio-temporal limitations of traditional material carriers (the wedding gifts), thereby converting their skills into "social capital." Second is the algorithmization of value judgment standards. Data metrics such as "likes" and "shares" have become implicit criteria for evaluation. The younger generation tends to judge skill level based on "traffic and popularity" rather than on the oral evaluations of their elders.

Digital platforms have become a visualized field for expressing the richness of a woman's inner world. Embroidery was once the "implicit spiritual world" of Mongol women, where the richness of their thoughts was indirectly conveyed through stitches and patterns. Digital media makes this inner world explicit. This is manifested, on one hand, in the transformation of the narrative subject's identity, as women shift from being "skill executors" to "cultural narrators." On the other hand, online community interaction allows women to break through the closed nature of familial transmission, constructing an "embroidery sisterhood community" where they can share skills and transmit values.

I often share my finished embroidery and the process on WeChat Channels. This is very encouraging and gives me more motivation to pursue my goals. (S6)

When a customer posts a picture on their WeChat Moments wearing a Mongol robe I made, I'll give them a 'like'. Their posts on Moments and Douyin have also indirectly brought me many new customers.

Digital technology is driving the diversification and redefinition of female aesthetic standards. Traditional aesthetics centered on "technical mastery" and the "traditionality of patterns." Digital information exposure has propelled an aesthetic transformation. First, tools empower innovative design. Social media lowers the threshold for innovation, allowing women to fuse traditional patterns with modern elements, forming a hybrid style of "traditional DNA + contemporary expression." Digital information exposure is not simply "disrupting" or "saving" Horqin embroidery; rather, it is reconstructing the value judgment system for women and injecting new vitality into Mongol cultural identity.

I often look at the new styles of Mongol robes from popular online shops on Douyin, and then I combine those ideas with Horqin embroidery to create new designs. (S4)

4.4 The Intergenerational Transmission of Nostalgia and the Ritualized Practice of Collective Memory

Nostalgia, acting as a generational medium for cultural memory, exhibits a dual aspect in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage: it is both restorative and reflective. It not only sustains the middle-aged and elderly cohort's commitment to cultural authenticity but also catalyzes the younger generation's innovative deconstruction of tradition. Together, these two forms constitute the dynamic tension in the contemporary continuity of traditional craftsmanship. Restorative nostalgia is manifested in the "anxiety over authenticity" felt by the middle-aged and elderly group. They repair and reproduce traditional styles to maintain cultural continuity. However, due to social

upheavals like the "Cultural Revolution," the older generation's precious embroidered items were lost, creating a "hiatus in memory". This form of nostalgia is thus both a search for past cultural memory and a defense of present cultural identity. In contrast, through reflective nostalgia, the youth cohort engages in "innovative deconstruction," reinterpreting and dismantling traditional culture through modern elements like co-branded products and "outfit transition" videos, thereby transforming the craft of embroidery into a "consumable cultural IP."

My embroidered works must be passed down to my children and grandchildren; this is our family's memory. (S3)

I enjoy watching the Mongol robe transition videos that have become so popular recently. This shows the contemporary Mongol youth's willingness to inherit their traditional culture and their sense of cultural identity. (S11)

Horqin Mongol embroidery, as a carrier of collective memory, possesses a transmission mechanism that "connects time and space with needle and thread, and reconstructs identity through ritual." Its ritualized practice can be categorized into three types of contexts: life-cycle events, traditional festivals, and daily contact. First, in life-cycle events, embroidery functions as a symbolic code for life's rituals. In Horqin marriage customs, for example, embroidery serves as a metaphor for a contract. The bride embroiders a keepsake for the groom, and this connection between "object-symbol-ritual" transforms the marital contract into cultural memory. In terms of traditional festivals, the Horqin embroidery costume showcases at the opening ceremony of the Nadam Fair construct a "visual memory community." The embroidery conveys the spirit of the grasslands, and through these garments, the audience reinforces their ethnic and cultural identity. During the Spring Festival fire sacrifice, hanging embroidered *hana* (wall tapestries) perpetuates memory, providing a space for affective connection and symbolic regeneration. In daily contact, micro-contexts such as embroidery training workshops facilitate collective creation and the incubation of memory. At the Khabur Embroidery Workshop, the embroiderers sing folk songs together before class, creating a "sound-and-needle" synchronization that merges auditory memory with manual skill.

I have participated in many kinds of events—traditional Mongol costume performance competitions, Nadam, Spring Festival sacrifices, league-city festival galas—and Horqin embroidery is always present. (S6)

When our embroidery training class starts, the teachers sing Horqin folk songs. The embroiderers express their reverence for nature and their passion for life through song, and through this outpouring of inner emotion, they find artistic inspiration. (S7)

Beyond this, the system of patterns and colors in Horqin embroidery can be considered a "living code" of Mongol nomadic culture. Different patterns and colors symbolize distinct cultural connotations, creating a unique field of collective memory for the Mongol people.

Table 2. Symbolic Meanings and Usage Scenarios of Horqin Embroidery Patterns

ID	Pattern	Symbolic Meaning	Main Usage Scenarios
1	Plant and floral patterns	Auspiciousness, wealth, elegance, purity (like a lotus rising unstained from the mud); love for the homeland and a longing for a beautiful life.	Mongol garments (on areas like horseshoe cuffs and the large front flap), boots, bowl bags, purses, saddlebags (<i>dalian</i>), etc.
2	Animal patterns	Symbolizes the totem worship of the Horqin Mongol people and their reverence for nature.	Mongol garments, boots, bowl bags, purses, saddlebags, etc.
3	Meander/fret pattern	Symbolizes strength and fortitude.	Traditional garments, yurt decorations.
4	Swastika pattern	Symbolizes the rotation of the sun and the cycle of the four seasons.	Mongol garments.
5	Cloud pattern	Symbolizes the firmament and reverence for nature; signifies good fortune, auspiciousness, and the continuity of life.	Female garments, Mongol garments.
6	Horn pattern	Symbolizes the thriving of the five domestic animals and a bountiful pastoral harvest; signifies strength and prosperity.	Traditional garments, festival performances, modern applications.

Table 3. Colors and Symbolic Meanings in Horqin Embroidery

ID	Embroidery Color	Symbolic Meaning
1	White	Purity, sincerity, beauty.
2	Blue	Wisdom, majesty, freedom; symbolizes the blue sky and the sea.
3	Yellow	Symbol of power.
4	Red, Pink	Prosperity, love, beauty, health; symbolizes the blazing sun and flames.
5	Black	Majesty, strength, simplicity.
6	Green	Simplicity, purity, harvest; symbolizes nature and the Eternal Heaven (Tengri).

The ritualized practice of Horqin Mongol embroidery demonstrates the vitality of intangible cultural heritage. It acts as both a "vessel of cultural memory" and a "workshop for memory production." Through a multitude of contexts, it integrates individual experiences into the network of collective memory, thereby promoting the continuity and innovation of that memory and preventing the cultural heritage from falling into the predicament of "museumification."

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This study employed an interdisciplinary research approach, integrating communication theory with the practice of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) protection to examine Horqin embroidery as a representative case. Through content analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, three core contradictions were identified: the fragmentation of communication formats, a rupture between inheritance and dissemination, and the alienation of the cultural value assessment system.

First, within the operational mechanisms of short-video platforms, there is a mismatch between algorithmic recommendation logic and the needs of cultural dissemination. Mainstream platforms allocate traffic based on "completion rate + interaction volume," compelling ICH inheritors to alter their communication methods and adopt fragmented formats such as "15-second quick tutorials." While this may enhance short-term dissemination effects, it does so at the expense of the completeness and depth of the traditional culture, causing the ICH to lose its original context and systematic nature. Second, while the high efficiency of short-video and new media platforms can positively impact the development and dissemination of Horqin embroidery if utilized properly, there is a rupture in the skill structure of creators. The inheritors often struggle to perform "cultural decoding and media encoding," resulting in content that remains at the level of "visual spectacle." Finally, in the era of the internet and new media, the cultural value assessment system is undergoing a process of alienation and reconstruction. When discussing the value of Horqin embroidery, we must confront the challenge of establishing evaluation criteria that respect the essence of the traditional craft, especially when operating under the dominance of the logic of capital and the attention economy. As the rule of "traffic equals value" prevails, the "temporal value" of the craft is dissolved and its "craftsmanship wisdom" is simplified, leading to a flattening of cultural understanding and an erosion of the spiritual core and historical depth of the traditional craft.

The digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage must balance "traffic-driven appeal" with "cultural guardianship." Through a four-dimensional, coordinated approach involving policy guidance, content innovation, platform empowerment, and educational support, a "deep short-video" model should be constructed, encouraging the creation of thematic mini-documentaries. "Intergenerational inheritor workshops" should be established to create online and offline communication mechanisms, regularly organizing collaborative creation sessions between older-generation inheritors and young entrepreneurs. This will help construct a communication ecosystem that is "in-depth, empathetic, and principled." Only when dissemination returns to the cultural essence can it awaken a sense of cultural identity among the youth, create sustainable livelihoods for the inheritors, and achieve a win-win outcome for both "living heritage" and "digital dissemination."

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