
Original Research Article

Research on the impact of online English forums on the dissemination of China's philosophical concepts among international youth

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of deep integration between globalization and digital technology, English online forums have emerged as crucial platforms for international youth to engage with Chinese philosophical concepts. This paper takes the cross-cultural dissemination of Confucian "Ren" (benevolence) and Daoist "Dao" (the Way) as case studies, employing textual analysis, user behavior tracking, and a theoretical framework of cross-cultural communication to reveal how forums facilitate the transformation of Chinese philosophy from "cultural symbols" to "practices in daily life." The study finds that the interactive, decentralized nature, and multimedia integration capabilities of forums significantly enhance international youth's cognitive depth and emotional identification with Chinese philosophy, albeit facing challenges such as cultural misinterpretation and struggles for discourse power.

Keywords: English online forums; Chinese philosophy; international youth; cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

In the era of Globalization 4.0, the international dissemination of Chinese philosophical concepts confronts dual challenges: On one hand, the Western-centric discourse system continues to dominate the international public opinion sphere; on the other, the media consumption habits of Generation Z (born between 1995-2010), digital natives, have undergone fundamental shifts. English online forums, as core arenas for global youth knowledge sharing, offer new opportunities for Chinese philosophy to breach cultural barriers with their decentralized, instantaneous, and interactive features.

Taking Reddit's philosophy section, Quora's Chinese philosophy topic group, and Discord philosophy communities as examples, discussions on "Confucianism" and "Daoism" have witnessed an average annual growth rate of 47% from 2023 to 2025, with participating countries expanding from traditional Sinophone regions to emerging areas like Latin America and Africa. This dissemination phenomenon not only rewrites the historical trajectory of Chinese philosophy's westward transmission but also gives rise to "Digital Hermeneutics" as a new research field.

2. Literature review

2.1. Paradigm shift in the international dissemination of Chinese philosophy

Traditional research has focused on academic translations of classical texts (e.g., Roger Ames' philosophical translation of *The Analects*), but recent scholars have begun to emphasize the impact of media technology on dissemination effectiveness. Zhao Yue proposed the "Empathy Turn" theory, highlighting the realization of cultural identity through emotional resonance; Hu Zhengrong pointed out that international communication necessitates constructing a "multi-subject supply" system, which aligns closely with the User-Generated Content (UGC) model of forums.

2.2. Research on dissemination mechanisms in online forums

The Media Environment School argues that the "hypertext" characteristic of digital platforms shifts meaning production from an author-centered to a reader-centered model. In Reddit's "AskPhilosophy" subreddit, users drive conceptual grounding through "contextualized questions" (e.g., "How can Confucianism address workplace

burnout?"), significantly enhancing concept comprehensibility.

2.3. Specificity of generational communication

Generation Z exhibits cognitive traits such as "visual priority" and "gamified learning." In Discord philosophy communities, users adapt chapters from The Dao De Jing into role-playing game scripts, achieving conceptual internalization through "Daoist Immortal Cultivation Simulators." This approach breaks through traditional lecture models, creating a new "Play-to-Learn" paradigm.

3. Research methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach:

Big Data Analysis: Scraping 12,736 relevant posts from Reddit, Quora, and Discord between January 2023 and June 2025, employing LDA topic modeling to extract high-frequency concepts.

In-depth Interviews: Conducting semi-structured interviews with 32 active forum users from 12 countries, focusing on their paths to concept understanding.

Participatory Observation: Researchers joined three philosophy communities as "DaoistScholar," continuously observing the dynamic evolution of concept discussions.

4. Research findings

4.1. Conceptual reconstruction: From "text transplantation" to "scene reconstruction"

Traditional translations of "ren" (benevolence) as "kindness" often leads Western readers to associate it with Christian charity. However, Reddit discussions reveal users reconstructing this concept through specific scenarios: In workplace contexts, they reinterpret "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself" as "Don't impose the 996 work schedule on colleagues" (user @ConfuciusBot, March 2024). In family contexts, users explain intergenerational cultural conflicts among Asian immigrants through "filial piety" (user @TaoistDad, January 2025). This contextualized translation approach increased conceptual acceptance by 62% (based on forum likes data).

4.2. Dissemination subjects: From "expert monologue" to "mass co-creation"

Forums have broken the monopoly of scholars on interpretive authority, forming a three-tier dissemination structure: Core Layer: Sinologists (e.g., Roger Ames' fan club) provide academic endorsement. Intermediary Layer: Bilingual users engage in "cultural translation." Diffusion Layer: Ordinary users create secondary content such as memes and short videos. For instance, TikTok user @LaoZiFan adapted "The highest good is like water" into a rap song, garnering over 3 million views and sparking global discussions on Daoist ecological views.

4.3. Generational interaction: From "cultural export" to "generational dialogue"

Generation Z drives conceptual innovation through "reverse teaching": African users apply Confucian "harmony in diversity" to tribal conflict mediation, creating integrated concepts like "Ubuntu-Ren"; Latin American users critique neoliberalism with Daoist "wu wei" (non-action), proposing "Daoist socialism" (user @LatinDaoist, April 2025). This intergenerational and cross-regional dialogue positions China philosophy as a spiritual source for global youth to reflect on modernity.

5. Challenges and countermeasures

5.1. Fragmented dissemination leading to conceptual alienation

The immediacy of forums tends to simplify concept explanations. For example, "Dao follows nature" is misinterpreted as a "lay-flat philosophy," triggering misreadings of Daoism.

Countermeasures include:

Developing AI-assisted interpretive tools to correct conceptual deviations in real-time. Establishing "concept guardian" roles, jointly maintained by scholars and senior users to uphold interpretive authority.

5.2. Entertainment trends undermining philosophical depth

While meme culture enhances dissemination breadth, it may dilute philosophical seriousness. Research

shows 73% of respondents believe meme-based dissemination struggles to convey the complexity of "harmony between heaven and humanity."

Solutions include:

Implementing a dual-track dissemination model with "in-depth" and "fast-food" options. Collaborating with game companies to develop narrative-driven games like Confucius: The VR Journey Through the States.

5.3. Algorithmic recommendations exacerbating information echo chambers

Forum algorithms may confine users to specific interpretive frameworks. For example, users interested in "Confucian workplace applications" rarely encounter "Daoist ecological views."

Recommendations include:

Introducing a "concept association recommendation" mechanism to actively promote complementary content. Regularly hosting "cross-school debates" to foster dialogue among different philosophical traditions.

6. Conclusion

English online forums have pioneered a new path for the international dissemination of Chinese philosophical concepts by reconstructing dissemination subjects, recreating interpretive scenes, and activating generational interactions. Their core value lies in transforming "cultural export" into "global co-construction," positioning Chinese philosophy as a resource for addressing shared human challenges. Future research should further explore the theoretical framework of "Digital Hermeneutics" and construct a "technology-humanities" collaborative dissemination system to meet the challenges of the AI era.

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