

Constructing Pastoral China in Li Ziqi's Intangible Cultural Heritage and Traditional Craft Videos

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ABSTRACT

Although rural images and female microcelebrity of Li Ziqi have been investigated, investigation on the connection between craft processes and domestic uses demands detailed textual study. This article examines the value of “traditional making” in the creation of an idealised image of “Pastoral China” in five Douyin videos. It takes a descriptive and interpretive approach to visual text analysis to link observations with cultural analysis, based on Stuart Hall's constructionist model of representation. The operational framework is based on the selection, emphasis, organisation and exclusion. The corpus encompasses heritage activities and traditional crafts, but does not assume that all activities are formally recognized as a heritage project. Rural environment is characterized by skilled production which is identified as a bridge between rural environment and valued outcomes. The repetition of the carving foregrounds practical knowledge, while the changes of the domestic space and the silk-quilt production relate competence with the provision of the household. The relationships provide evidence of the resourcefulness and cultural continuity of the rural. They reveal ambivalence in the productive activity of women and the focus on domestic roles. The interpretation of exclusion is not as the disappearance of modern production conditions, but as the limits of the craft-centred account. The contribution is the bounded explanation of the use of useful objects in organising a desirable rural cultural image. Audience effects and economic self-sufficiency are not ascertained. Popularity based selection, the five videos scope and the lack of a time-coded transcript reduces the generalisability and sequence level auditability.

Keywords: *Li Ziqi, intangible cultural heritage, pastoral China, visual representation, traditional craftsmanship.*

INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage involves living practices, knowledge and skills recognised by the communities that maintain them. The UNESCO Convention includes traditional craftsmanship within this definition and emphasises transmission and continuing recreation (UNESCO, 2003). A video showing an attractive handmade object therefore does not, by itself, establish either its heritage status or the conditions of its transmission. For communication research, the important question is how particular practices become recognisable as heritage through their public representation. The present study addresses this question through a small corpus of craft-centred videos by Li Ziqi on Douyin.

Li Ziqi is a Chinese video creator known for rural life, food preparation and handicraft videos. Her case connects two established research concerns: social-media influence as a mediated relationship between creators and users (Arfan et al., 2023), and the construction

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of an appealing countryside through a female protagonist (Chen et al., 2025). Jiao et al. (2022) examine her rural imagery as a virtual destination on YouTube. These studies establish the relevance of her work without treating popularity as proof of authenticity. The present case is selected because countryside settings, skilled production and domestic purposes occur together, allowing analysis of how their relationships make a particular rural way of life culturally desirable.

This article takes “Pastoral China” as an analytical term for an idealised image of rural culture. It draws on research which sees the pastoral image in Li Ziqi's work as a mediated creation, informed by nostalgia, circulation and performance (Liang, 2022; Luo, 2026). It denotes the association of nature as a backdrop, material resource and manual work as a means of value and familiar supply and support as a means of continuity and caring within the selected texts. “China” situates this representation culturally, it doesn't make one creator a representative of a homogeneous nation. Pastoral is the term used for the desired organisation of the video world, not necessarily the harmony or self-sufficiency of rural communities. The rural setting alone is not evidence: the analysis asks how settings, activities and purposes become mutually reinforcing.

Natural and domestic areas, material objects, craft activities, position of the female protagonist and relations of use and care are examined. Food and clothing is not an independent survey of food or costume, but is a part of the relationships in which they are involved. Spoken language, music, comments of the audience, platform recommendation systems are not systematically analysed. The main evidence is about visual sequences and their narrative connections, while on-screen text and video titles offer contextual information.

a. Research Gap

Rural spectacle (Li, 2020), Li Ziqi's cultural narratives and audience interpretation (Li et al., 2023), female microcelebrity (Chen et al., 2025), and the performance of a digital pastoral (Luo, 2026) have all been discussed. The question here is how craft processes and purposes given to their products are connected. This five-video Douyin corpus: how and where does the material transformation get between skilled work and a desirable way of living? This means focusing on the distinction between decorative success and domestic change, as well as traditional product creation, and not presupposing that all craft videos convey the same pastoral message.

The study adds a Hall's (1997) constructionist perspective on a particular application. It identifies what is shown in a video, the relationship between activities and objects, and the cultural interpretation of the relationship. It is contributing to an understanding of how making can be used to make a pastoral image come to life – a useful object links competence to everyday provision. The tension between female productive agency and concentrated domestic responsibility is also taken into account. Engagement is a measure of the sampling frame, not necessarily audience acceptance of interpretation.

b. Research Questions

RQ1: What are the visual elements that make up the images of Pastoral China within the five chosen heritage related and traditional craft videos?

RQ2: How do selection, emphasis, organisation and exclusion link these elements together to make a coherent rural representation?

RQ3: What are the values and tensions that are highlighted in this representation, especially related to craftsmanship, female labour and domestic care?

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Heritage Visibility and the Cultural Meaning

Liu et al. (2024) create a scale of the image of heritage based on tourists' perception, and Xu et al. (2024) apply online review analysis to explore perceived heritage values. Li et al. (2025) explore the conservation intentions from the perspectives of authenticity, cultural experience and place attachment. Other studies address adoption of digital heritage (Ye et al., 2025) and the relationship between digital experience and dissemination (Yi et al., 2025). These approaches require evidence about users' experiences or responses. They cannot directly establish the meanings of Li Ziqi's visual texts. Zhang and Xu's (2024) interview-based account of cultural heritage digital reading further illustrates the importance of distinguishing audience experience from the content being encountered.

Wang et al. (2024) examine Douyin through stakeholder frames, authority and viewer responses, while Chen et al. (2026) focus on public cultural responses to bamboo-weaving heritage on the same platform. These studies make it inappropriate to describe existing work as concerned only with visibility. He and Wen (2024) address the digital development of heritage crafts, bringing design and cultural production into view. The present article narrows the scale from broader development, platform relations and public response to relationships within five texts by one creator. This permits close attention to how work, environments and domestic purposes are connected, while relinquishing claims about the platform as a whole.

He et al. (2026) analyse 471 traditional-craft videos from 26 Douyin creators and relate narrative features to audience interactions. Cen et al. (2024) examine Cantonese opera dissemination on Bilibili, and Cao (2025) studies musical heritage promotion through TikTok short videos. These studies concern cultural forms and communication questions that differ from the present craft-centred interpretation. Li and Hashim's (2023) comparison of Yunting and Ximalaya FM similarly demonstrates the importance of specifying the medium and production context when studying traditional culture. This article therefore does not transfer findings about engagement or audio platforms to the visual meanings of Li Ziqi's videos.

Rosales-Viray and Viray (2024) examine media engagement and identity among the Aeta Ambala, while Vargas Meza et al. (2023) distinguish Ainu-related YouTube videos by the involvement of Ainu people in production. Vidaurre-Rojas et al. (2024) approach cultural dissemination through municipal organisation and coordination with community interests. Yan et al. (2025), drawing on stakeholder interviews about Shu brocade, emphasise cultural integrity and the transmission of skills in evaluating digital dissemination. An attractive demonstration may render a technique visible without documenting apprenticeship, community recognition or the organisation of production. The present study examines how a creator represents craft; it cannot substitute for evidence of those wider processes.

The appearance of a tool, material or traditional procedure is the starting point for interpretation. The questions are how the video connects that practice to its surroundings, who is positioned as capable of performing it, and what gives the completed object value. The distinction between visibility, textual meaning and social transmission prevents a successful-looking craft sequence from becoming evidence of safeguarding by itself.

b. Rural Imagery and Female Microcelebrity

Li's (2020) account of rural spectacle questions whether increased visibility resolves urban–rural inequalities. Liang (2022), focusing on Li Ziqi's food vlogging, connects pastoral desire with consumer culture and the involvement of market and state institutions. Both place attractive rural images within contemporary social relations rather than outside modernity. Jiao et al. (2022) approach the rural idyll through the virtual destination constructed around Li Ziqi's YouTube videos and their audiences. The present study shares their concern with mediated rurality but shifts attention to craft processes and domestic purposes in selected Douyin texts. Its evidence concerns how making is represented, rather than tourist experience or the production economy.

Chen et al. (2025) examine female microcelebrities through body performance and idyllic imagination, including Li Ziqi. Their work makes gender central to understanding rural representation and prevents the presence of a capable woman from being treated as a new discovery. The present analysis asks how practical competence relates to the destination of the products and the organisation of domestic space. A technically accomplished protagonist may become culturally meaningful through what her work provides as well as through her visibility. This makes the relation between productive agency and household responsibility an interpretive question to be examined in particular videos.

Li et al. (2023) analyse both textual coding and audience decoding on Li Ziqi's YouTube channel. Luo (2026) examines environmental narrative, nostalgia and commodified rurality. These accounts already explain how rural images acquire cultural meaning; the present article does not claim that text-centred research is absent. Instead, it examines a narrower relationship between materials, work and domestic use. It poses questions about the connection this relationship may have with the rural resourcefulness and why the conditions are that skills remain less developed. Interpretation is not necessarily connected to any shown effect on viewers.

Zou (2023) connects rural shortvideo performance with encounters between rural creators and urban viewers and the limits of such encounters. Such work supports scrutiny of idealisation without making every countryside image evidence of a single political intention. In the present analysis, cultural specificity makes the videos available as images of China, but does not establish how viewers interpret them nationally. Similarly, household provision can suggest care without proving a particular family relationship or automatically establishing empowerment. These distinctions allow a critical reading of gender and national imagery within Hall's framework, without adding a second overarching theory or making claims about the creator's private life.

c. Positioning the Present Study

The literature establishes distinctions that organise this study: heritage visibility differs from safeguarding, represented rural life differs from social conditions, and textual meaning differs from audience response. The specific analytical object is the connection between making a craft object and making a cultural image. Earlier research explains pastoral desire, femininity, cultural narratives and rural performance. This article brings those concerns to a comparison of the purposes assigned to production: aesthetic achievement, household transformation and provision. Their similarities support an account of rural resourcefulness, while their differences test how far domestic care can be treated as a common meaning.

Comparing different craft themes within one creator's work allows recurring relationships and their limits to be examined together. The intended contribution is therefore an explicit account of how material transformation can support a desirable rural cultural image, particularly when productive competence becomes useful in everyday life. It is a case-specific interpretation, rather than a claim to discover pastoral representation or establish its prevalence across Douyin.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

a. Representation and the Scope of Textual Interpretation

Hall's constructionist approach treats representation as the production of meaning through signifying systems rather than a transparent copy of an already meaningful world (Hall, 1997). The analysis is not whether all the scenes are factually concocted or objectively true. It raises questions about the intelligibility of images as a specific representation of rural culture when selected. The actual activities can be captured in visual materials, and the organisation of these can give rise to a selective cultural interpretation.

An object's presence provides descriptive evidence and an argument about relations provides its cultural significance. A crafted item can be a technical feat, a sales product, a gift, or a household item. The analysis process focuses on identifying the observable content and on the textual organisation and the cultural inference, which is the question that the particular video asks: "Which relationship does the video establish?"

The term "encoding" is used here to describe the organisation of the meaning of completed texts rather than to suggest access to the choices of the creator or to a conscious ideology. A preferred reading is not a reading that is supported by the number of viewers who agree on it, but is rather a reading that is supported by the text itself. The study is still in the realm of representation analysis, and the audience are not considered dominant, negotiated or oppositional readers.

b. Creation of Four Analytical Dimensions

Selection, emphasis, organisation and exclusion are analytical dimensions of this study developed from Hall's constructionist position rather than being a four-part model proposed by Hall. Identifying the visible repertoire addresses RQ1. Examining prominence and relationships addresses RQ2. Considering the account's boundaries helps interpret the values and tensions in RQ3. Achmad et al. (2025) illustrate a qualitative visual approach to interpreting media artefacts as carriers of shared social meanings, rather than serving as the source of these four categories. The dimensions thus organise questions asked of the texts and connect observations with cultural inferences. They are interpretive tools, not a validated measurement scale.

Selection concerns the repertoire made visible: settings, people, objects and practices. Emphasis concerns their relative prominence through sustained attention, recurrence or narrative importance. Organisation concerns how elements are connected through sequence, spatial placement or relationships between making and use. Exclusion concerns the boundaries of the account, including matters not developed within the narrative. The dimensions can overlap. A sequence may include a craft activity, emphasise a particular stage and connect it to a domestic purpose at the same time.

Special care must be taken with exclusion. To prove systematic omission/intentional concealment, an object must be missing in both shots. What is the question that is explained with regards to the conditions being presented in the texts that are selected? Using modern equipment, market exchange, or difficulty, if it exists, can qualify an idyllic reading. This dimension cannot set aside by definition any evidence that contradicts the interpretation.

c. Gender and the Interpretive Proposition

Gender issues are explicitly addressed within the scope of analysis. It involves the roles of the protagonist represented in skilled production, decision making and domestic care. It is explored especially within organisation, the analysis of which raises the question of the relation between productive action and relationships and beneficiaries. The analysis differentiates a productive female role from evidence of care of a specific individual. While the former can be explored in craft activity the latter must be the result of an identifiable relationship and not inferred from the creator's life.

The interpretive proposition is that rural resourcefulness can be culturally desirable through settings, craft processes and domestic purposes. This reading may be qualified by the focus on wage relations, commercial distribution, institutional provision or external production. Domestic relationships must likewise be located in particular works.

METHODOLOGY

a. Design and Case Boundaries

The study uses qualitative visual textual analysis of five videos published through Li Ziqi's Douyin account. It examines finished media texts through Hall's constructionist approach, combining within-video interpretation with comparison across the selected works. Achmad et al. (2025) provide a recent example of analysing visual media as cultural artefacts in context. Content and reception require distinct evidence: Anshar et al. (2024), for example, separately examine YouTube messages and audience reception. The present design addresses the textual side only. It does not include interviews with the creator, audience research or an assessment of actual heritage safeguarding.

The corpus includes heritage-related practices and traditional craft activities because these were the substantive inclusion criteria. An activity is not classified as intangible cultural heritage merely because it looks old or handmade. In particular, the woodshed-to-wardrobe video echoes the study's emphasis on craftsmanship and domestic production, and does not demonstrate a formally recognised heritage project. This distinction is maintained in the title and conclusions with the label of all heritage and traditional craft videos.

b. Sampling and the Five Chosen Videos are Displayed.

The sampling record is based on a collection cut-off date of 1 August 2026. Qualifying works included publications of traditional crafts, manufacturing processes or labour practices about intangible cultural heritage via Li Ziqi's Douyin account. From the above mentioned eligible frame, five works were chosen on the basis of maximum like count observed at collection. The video identifiers, translated titles, dates, durations and engagement statistics from this sample have been preserved in Table 1. These are historical sampling values and not current engagement statistics.

Table 1: Selected videos and recorded sampling metadata

ID	Video title and craft theme	Release date	Length	Recorded likes
V1	"Carved Lacquer with Hidden Flowers, Carved Patterns of Purple Qi Rising in the East" Lacquer craftsmanship	2024-11-12	14:00	12,513,000
V2	"To Everyone Who Knows My Name" Textile and decorative craft work	2024-11-13	12:27	11,665,000
V3	"Turning the woodshed into a wardrobe" Bamboo and wood work and domestic transformation	2024-11-12	14:34	7,027,000
V4	"It's Cold Again—Let's Review How to Make Silk Quilts" Silk-quilt production	2020-12-07	06:48	2,560,000
V5	"It's almost winter. Here's the method for making donkey-hide gelatin." Ejiao preparation	2019-10-31	05:00	2,270,000

Note: English titles are translation titles that have been used to identify the sampled works. Like counts are those on 1 August 2026 at the time of collection. Craft themes are not formal heritage certifications, but refer to the scope of inclusion.

High like counts indicate visible exemplars in the account's output instead of exemplary texts or accounts of cultural consensus. Likes are different to views and unique audience size. The different releases dates do not provide the same exposure time to the videos, and the design does not control for effects of topic and recommendation. The selection supports close comparison of texts with high recorded engagement, without treating popularity as a cause or proof of their cultural meanings.

The sample holds the creator and platform constant while varying the craft subject. Lacquer, textile and decorative work, domestic transformation, quilt-making and ejiao preparation allow comparison between aesthetic achievement and practical provision. The practices are not technically equivalent and need not share the same relationship to heritage institutions. Variation in their purposes helps test the scope of the pastoral interpretation.

The five-video corpus is a bounded purposive case, selected through the stated rule rather than iterative sampling until saturation. Its adequacy is argued in relation to the focused question: the same creator and platform allow comparison across different craft materials and purposes within 52 minutes and 49 seconds of recorded content. Recurring relationships support interpretation within this corpus, but do not demonstrate that additional videos would produce no new meanings. The study therefore makes no claim to theoretical saturation or statistical generalisability. Lower-engagement works, other creators and a broader range of practices may organise labour, family and modernity differently.

c. Visual Meaning Units and Coding Process

A visual meaning unit is a shot or connected sequence organised around an identifiable activity or relationship relevant to the research questions. Its boundary is semantic rather than a fixed number of seconds. Changes in activity, setting, participants or narrative purpose can mark a new unit. A camera cut need not create a boundary when the same operation continues. Conversely, a shift from making to the use of an object may change the unit's

meaning within one space. Repeated carving in V1 illustrates an activity-based focus; the relation between making and wardrobe function in V3 illustrates the distinction between productive action and domestic purpose. These examples distinguish units by their analytical role rather than a fixed duration.

Descriptive attention covers natural and domestic environments, materials, artefacts, productive actions and the protagonist's roles. Family relationships are distinguished from the more general domestic function of a product. A quilt can have a household purpose without establishing that it is given to a particular relative. Modern or commercial elements are relevant when assessing the limits of an interpretation of self-sufficiency. Spoken language, music and audience comments are outside the systematic analysis. Titles identify the selected works and provide contextual information; they are not a substitute for all observations about their visual content.

The analysis proceeded through repeated viewing, written coding notes and comparison of the five texts. Three stages organised the procedure. First, descriptive observations identified settings, people, objects and activities, retaining their association with each video. Second, those observations were considered through selection, emphasis, organisation and exclusion, as defined in Table 2. Third, interpretations were compared within each work and across the corpus. For example, V1's carving supports a reading of skilled effort, whereas V3's domestic transformation and V4's quilt-making support a comparison of household purposes. Recurrence was considered across at least two works before a relationship was discussed as a cross-video pattern; examples confined to one work remain case-specific.

Table 2: Operational definitions of the analytical dimensions

Dimension	Observational focus	Interpretive rule and limit	Link
Selection	Settings, actors, materials and practices	Identify what is visibly included. Do not infer a value solely from presence.	RQ1
Emphasis	Recurrence, sustained attention and narrative importance	Explain relative prominence within the video; do not equate one close-up with a corpus-wide pattern.	RQ2
Organisation	Sequence, spatial relations, productive roles, beneficiaries and care	Trace how making connects with use. Include female competence and family relations only where observable.	RQ2 and RQ3
Exclusion	Limited development of production conditions and competing meanings	Assess the whole text and retain counterexamples. Absence alone does not establish deliberate concealment.	RQ2 and RQ3

The dimensions overlap because a single activity can select a material practice, give labour prominence and connect it with an outcome. Coding therefore does not equate the occurrence of an element with proof of a theme. A natural setting alone cannot establish harmony, and the presence of a woman alone cannot establish empowerment. The analytical question concerns the relation between such features. Cross-video comparison identifies support and variation; it does not turn the interpretations into statistical findings or imply equal prominence in all five works.

d. Credibility and Interpretive Limits

Repeated viewing, coded notes and cross-video comparison provide the basis for interpretive consistency. Their context in the video was taken into account and recurring relations were contrasted between works. To make the reasoning visible, Table 3 differentiates activity described and cultural meaning inferred. These procedures help to ensure consistency, but they do not remove researcher judgement. Independent double coding or Inter rater reliability score is not reported. Its credibility depends on how well the examples corroborate the interpretation that is expressed and how well alternative readings and constraints are made visible.

The strength of evidence differs across dimensions. Descriptions of making and domestic function provide positive examples, whereas claims about exclusion require more caution. The available analysis does not supply an exhaustive inventory of modern tools, commercial exchanges or difficulties. Exclusion is therefore interpreted as the limited explanatory scope of the craft-centred account, rather than a demonstrated absence of all such elements. This distinction prevents the evidence for a productive activity from being used to make an unsupported claim about everything outside it.

Alternative readings are considered alongside the pastoral interpretation. Concentration on individual making may reflect the genre of a craft demonstration. Domestic production may suggest care without documenting a particular family exchange. These possibilities qualify the inference rather than automatically invalidating it. The analysis asks what each example can support and where its meaning depends on wider context. A time-coded record and comparison with less visible works would strengthen future examination of these interpretations.

e. Evidence Presentation and Ethical Scope

Examples are identified by video ID and the activity or object under discussion. The evidence is presented as qualitative description rather than a time-coded transcript or measurement of shot duration. Precise sequence timings and independent re-coding are not available in the documented analysis, which limits sequence-level auditability. The findings therefore focus on identifiable craft activities and domestic functions, without adding claims about camera movement, editing rhythm or particular family exchanges.

The study examines publicly available creative works and engagement information recorded for sampling. It does not collect private communications or analyse identifiable viewers' comments. No video stills are reproduced. Its claims concern cultural representation rather than the creator's private intentions, individual audience attitudes or the medical effectiveness of products.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

a. Selection of Nature and Domestic Space

Across the corpus, the recorded visual repertoire includes natural environments, courtyards, workspaces, craft materials and productive activity. Their analytical role is more specific than providing an attractive background. Rural resources and spaces are connected to work, while the outcomes make that environment intelligible as a place for everyday life. The important distinction is between the presence of countryside scenery and a relationship that presents the countryside as productive and habitable. This reading does not require every video to contain identical landscape features or every material to be locally sourced.

V3 provides a concrete example through the transformation of a woodshed into a wardrobe. Bamboo and wood work connect an existing space with a changed household function. The video's title identifies this transformation, while the craft activity makes adaptation the focus of the account. The representational relationship is between a space that can be worked on, the protagonist's competence and a practical outcome. V3 thus contributes a domestic dimension to the pastoral image, even though the study does not designate the whole activity as a formally recognised heritage project.

V4 provides a different connection through silk-quilt production. The outcome concerns bedding and warmth rather than the conversion of a space. Use alongside V3, to connect productive knowledge to specific domestic functions. This contrast is significant—the cultural reading would not be possible if the same material or technique were repeated. It requires competent making being relevant to living. The rural is shown as useful by the protagonists' use of materials and objects, and the economic sources of all inputs are not evident.

Natural resources connect craft to an environment, domestic purposes do the same for the results. Their relationship relates to the suggested image of rural resourcefulness. In contrast to a measure of household self-sufficiency or a measure of all rural production, this is a culturally valued making-and-living relation that Pastoral China calls this.

b. Focus on Expertise of Doing Things by Hand

The repetition of carving in V1 relates to labour of the lacquer surface and the future patterned object. But more than an appearance, the craft is legible through deliberate action. This connection is the basis for the interpretation of skilled effort: the object has a history of making in the account, and competence is part of the object's culture. There is no need to measure the length of a shot to determine whether it is a description of the product or an account centred on production. But no numerical claims are made using the word “repeated”, and no inferences are drawn from the edited footage of the duration of the labour.

V2 offers a comparison by means of meticulous hand work in textile and decorative manufacturing. The materials and techniques are different from lacquer carving, and it is a cultural comparison of the intentional making, not a technical comparison. V1 emphasizes the repetition of work on a patterned surface; V2 prioritizes fine production in the story of textile and decorative success. In both instances it is the ability to produce the object that is the key to its meaning. In contrast, claims of domestic care necessitate a relationship between work and purpose that is different from that shown in these examples and more directly address the skilled-production aspect of Pastoral China.

V4 and V5 link the production to products with recognisable results: a silk quilt and *ejiao*. They have been changing materials, making the comparison beyond a decorative feat to household objects and traditional preparation. They accompany V1, working with a recurring relation between work and completion. V5 is included for its production activity and cultural framing; the analysis does not state anything about any therapeutic effectiveness.

Process-centred representation shows effort and knowledge as sources of value and practical ability as a source of meaningful outcomes. Idealisation does not have to be effortless work – repetitive and demanding activity may be idealised in that it is precisely what it is, demanding and repetitive, and yet it is the idealisation of the activity that makes it desirable because of the accomplishment. The interpretation has to do with this relation between effort and outcome and that the broader conditions that enable competence are less well described.

Nevertheless the visibility of work provides a selective production history. A successful activity does not mean that the learning process itself and the role of all the players involved and the economics of production are secured. In this sense, the notion of skill's cultural salience should thus be separated from the evidence of individualism or from lack of failure. This qualification renders effort compatible with the idealisation: the work is hard, demanding and yet its successful conclusion imparts to the represented rural world a sense of order and sufficiency.

c. Organisation of Female Competence and Domestic Provision

In the central productive role, Li Ziqi engages in activities that change the material and living space. This is where gender becomes relevant, in this organisation of action, the female protagonist wields practical authority. The interpretation is done not at the end of the findings, but in accordance with the concern of the framework that is productive role and purpose that is set for the results of their products.

V3 and V4 make a link between competence and domestic provision in different outcomes. Wardrobe transformation: the question of how to organize house space; quilt-making: bedding. These examples make the protagonist's instrumental competence relate to a habitable world. Domestic purpose confers an ethical potential on the activity that is not limited to technical demonstration: a skilful product is an object that can be interpreted as useful for daily life. The evidence is sufficient to identify this correlation between work and use but does not identify a specific individual or intergenerational transfer.

Care is translated at this level of provision. For an object to carry household living, it can take on significance beyond technical display; usefulness does not necessarily indicate affection, nor document family transmission. The interpretation will depend on the purpose given for skilled making. It also distinguishes the examples: V3 and V4 provide more distinct domestic connections than do V1's carving or V2's decorative production. Care therefore comes in not through the idea that everything a female actor produces is necessarily care, but through the way in which the action and responsibility is organised.

This association also permits a critical reading. A highly capable woman can embody practical agency while concentrating productive and domestic responsibility in one figure. Competence and responsibility coexist, rather than yielding a simple judgement of empowerment or subordination. The text does not establish labour arrangements outside the frame or women viewers' responses. The tension concerns the role made desirable within the narrative.

d. Exclusion as a Limit of the Account

Exclusion concerns how fully the craft narrative explains wider production conditions. Attractive scenery or one unmentioned issue cannot prove that modernity has been removed from a video. The analysis therefore treats exclusion as the limit of a craft-centred explanation, without asserting a documented absence of all machines, markets, difficulties or other participants.

The relevant comparison is between the explanatory role of visible making and the wider conditions needed to sustain it. V3 organises a domestic transformation around practical work, while V4 connects production with a useful household object. These relations make resourcefulness intelligible within each account. They do not, by themselves, explain training, income, the supply of materials or technical support. Narrative self-sufficiency

names this concentration on the relation between a capable maker and an achieved outcome. It does not describe the economic independence of the represented household.

A modern tool might be able to coexist with this reading; a period of sustained attention could qualify it in the case of purchased labour or commercial distribution. Another answer for selectivity is genre, as a craft demonstration is more confined in its purpose than a documentary about rural institutions. The analysis considers the implications of that focus without treating it as deception or claiming that all counterexamples have been surveyed.

e. Comparison Across the Five Videos

Table 3 compares the evidence across the five works. V1 and V2 contribute most directly to skilled making; V3 and V4 connect competence with domestic purposes; V5 extends the comparison to traditional product preparation. Their different roles in the argument prevent an example from becoming an unsupported claim about every video.

Table 3: Video-specific examples and bounded interpretations

Video	Focal content described in the analysis	Interpretive connection and limit
V1	Repeated manual carving in lacquer craftsmanship; the patterned object is understood through the work of making it.	Emphasis links the object with skilled effort and practical knowledge. This is not a measurement of shot frequency or full production time.
V2	Precise manual work in textile and decorative production, compared with V1 at the level of skilled making.	Different techniques can support a related image of accomplishment. This example does not independently establish domestic care or formal heritage status.
V3	Bamboo and wood work associated with transforming a woodshed into a wardrobe.	Organisation links productive competence with a changed household function. Resourcefulness is interpreted through use, without claiming economic independence.
V4	Transformation of materials in silk-quilt production, with bedding as the domestic outcome.	Making is connected with household provision and warmth. The interpretation does not require a named family recipient.
V5	Traditional preparation of ejiao from raw materials into a recognisable product.	The process gives the product a history of skilled preparation. No therapeutic benefit or particular beneficiary is inferred.

Note: The table summarises the activity-level examples discussed in Findings and Interpretation. It is an analytical comparison rather than a time-coded transcript; it does not report shot counts or a complete inventory of omissions.

The comparison connects productive settings, skilled activity and useful outcomes as an image of rural resourcefulness. This gives Pastoral China its analytical content: making an object can help construct a desirable way of life. The relationship must be expressed in some definite activity or definite purpose rather than just from the trees or tools or the female figure alone.

Variation also limits the synthesis. Decorative achievement and household provision are separate, with the domestic interpretation most clearly being based on V3 and V4. The corpus does not contain an "invariant formula" but connected relationships.

DISCUSSION

a. Craft Processes as a Means of Cultural Representation

The analytical value is that a craft process is defined as a relationship between materials, action and social purpose. A purely descriptive account refers to the products made. The current interpretation poses the question: how is making evidence of a valued rural way of life? Productive activity combined with an intelligible domestic purpose can represent resourcefulness and continuity through technical knowledge. This is the study's case-specific application of representation theory: The cultural significance does not rely on the meaning of a tool or finished object, but on the way they are arranged.

The authors of Jiao et al. (2022) focused on a virtual rural location, while Li et al. (2023) explored the relationship between cultural storytelling and audience decoding. Here, the relation between making and use is examined within the texts themselves. V3 and V4 show why practical outcomes matter: a changed living space and bedding make competence relevant to household continuity. By contrast, V1 and V2 more directly support a reading of aesthetic and technical achievement. These differences specify how a pastoral image can be organised through production without assuming a uniform meaning across all five works.

For heritage communication, the distinction is between representing skilled knowledge and demonstrating its transmission. Wang et al. (2024) draw attention to authority and stakeholder relations on Douyin; Yan et al. (2025) emphasise stakeholder participation in evaluating digital dissemination. The present findings identify how one protagonist can become the visible centre of competence. They leave open how institutions, collaborators and communities sustain that competence. This is a limit of the representational account, rather than evidence that collective knowledge has disappeared or that safeguarding has failed.

b. Agency and Responsibility in the Female Protagonist

The female protagonist's productive role can support a reading of technical agency, while the connection between products and household use can support a reading of care. A capable maker may challenge a decorative image of femininity, but an apparently self-contained account of provision can also leave the distribution of labour unexamined. These interpretations need not cancel each other. The same textual organisation can make competence visible while normalising a demanding combination of responsibilities.

The idyllic rural imagination is linked to female performance in Chen et al. (2025). The concern of the present analysis is continued through the purposes given to craft products. It asks questions about the worth of competence once it becomes standard supply and is not only considered as visibility. The use of a V3 form is the most obvious in this regard, as is a V4 form; the decorative examples illustrate why it cannot be assumed to apply to all works. The tension that this creates is the cultural role that is desirable in this text: a woman is seen as having productive authority, but at the same time having a responsibility to maintain the comfort of the home.

c. Idealisation That Cannot Be Simply Divided into Authentic/False

It doesn't have to be a question of whether or not the videos are true or false. A true craft activity can be set in a selective world, a desirable rural world. Specificity is in terms of the activity depicted and the completeness of the social account that may be drawn from it. Whilst acknowledging the potential of tension to appraise the visibility of practical

knowledge, it is also important to note that its engagement with the idea of individual accomplishment is challenging the notion of how practical knowledge can survive.

Liang (2022) locates pastoral desire in the context of contemporary market and state relationships and Luo (2026) analyzes the nostalgia and the commodified rural. Both Li (2020) and Zou (2023) raise the following question: What can mediated rural visibility solve? That is found in the present analysis to lie in a particular textual relation: practical mastery accounts for an outcome achieved more directly than the social arrangements sustaining it. This enables to understand the allure and restraint of self-sufficiency in the narrative. It does not make a statement about purposeful hiding behind the videos or a consistent political intent.

Self-sufficiency is particularly significant to qualify. It can refer to a story in which tangible issues are resolved by use of materials and technique. It does not make a person independent of markets, paid labour or technical infrastructure. While the videos are placed in a contemporary media environment through digital circulation, it is not reflected through the current data if they were caused by a specific recommendation algorithm or not. The sampling frame is determined by platform metrics. They don't address how productions are made, what audiences like or why productions are successful.

d. Implications for Research and Practice

The study provides a means for visual communication research to differentiate description from inference. Analysts can identify an element, specify how the narrative relates it to other elements, and explain why that relation supports a cultural reading. Attention to alternative interpretations helps define the scope of the reading. This approach is useful beyond this corpus as a question-generating procedure, not a validated universal coding scale. Its value depends on transparent evidence and a clear account of how the categories are used.

For heritage communication practice, process visibility and contextual visibility deserve attention together. Showing how an object is made can make skilled work legible; explaining training, collaboration and material conditions can prevent individual accomplishment from standing for the whole heritage practice. This implication is consistent with research on community participation and organised cultural dissemination (Vargas Meza et al., 2023; Vidaurre-Rojas et al., 2024). It arises from the limits of the present interpretation, rather than a tested intervention. Whether audiences learn from such contextualisation or change their behaviour would require separate reception evidence.

The present account remains constrained by one creator, five engagement-selected texts and a corpus spanning different release years. It does not support claims about change over time, causal links with popularity, all Chinese heritage genres or viewers outside China. The broad inclusion of heritage-related and traditional craft activities also limits claims about formally recognised heritage categories. Future work could compare lower-engagement videos, other creators and explicitly commercial or technologically mediated craft representations. Such comparisons would test where the proposed relationships persist and where they break down.

CONCLUSION

For RQ1, the analysis identifies natural and domestic settings, craft materials and practices, and the productive role of the female protagonist as the principal elements of the proposed pastoral representation. Domestic purpose is most clearly illustrated by V3 and V4; it is not equated with a documented exchange between particular family members. The picture that is under scrutiny is that of a rural resourcefulness that is culturally particular, not a list of

Chinese traditions or a representative description of rural society. Its content is still within the scope of the five selected texts of Douyin, and examples are determined based on video and activity rather than the specific time in the video.

For RQ2, the article distinguishes the selection of elements, their narrative prominence, their organisation into relationships and the limited development of wider production conditions. These are analytical dimensions developed for this study, not a model attributed directly to Hall. Their purpose is to make the relationship between observation and interpretation explicit. Exclusion identifies the limits of the craft-centred account. The present evidence cannot establish complete absence, intentional concealment or an exhaustive pattern of omissions.

For RQ3, the interpretation foregrounds skilled labour, practical competence and continuity through domestic use. It also identifies a tension between female agency and responsibility for care, and between visible making and the less visible conditions that sustain it. These are claims about represented values and tensions. The study does not establish audience agreement, effective safeguarding or a causal effect on national image. Its contribution is a bounded explanation of how craft-centred representation can connect the making of useful things with an idealised account of rural life.

BIODATA

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