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Where the Red Line Falls: A Layered Account of Legitimate Technological Intervention in Intangible Cultural Heritage Documentary

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Abstract

Generative technologies complicate the distinction between recorded evidence and illustrative synthesis in intangible cultural heritage (ICH) documentary. This article proposes a provisional, context-sensitive editorial decision framework based on a qualitative re-examination of seven documentary case descriptions and the production records of a Tianqin prototype reported in Wu (2026). The parent study screened 52 works, shortlisted 23 and selected seven for theoretical comparison, including one Pakistan-based external comparator. The cross-case intervention bands are source-reported interpretive categories without independently available shot-time logs; they cannot establish a universal 30% threshold. For the prototype, separate records report 120 seconds of AI-generated footage in 724.8 seconds (16.56%) and a broader 152-second technical-intervention inventory in 720 seconds (21.1%). The figures have different definitions and stated runtimes and do not themselves demonstrate two distinct completed film edits. The parent study documents two dissemination platforms; proposed shorter platform editions were not evaluated as completed alternatives. Aggregate questionnaire responses from 60 self-selected prototype viewers and comments from six experts provide limited contextual evidence, not causal effects or community-wide consensus. The framework recommends documenting cultural permissions, technical alterations, disclosure, film-version identifiers and the filmed evidentiary core. Its contribution is an auditable decision aid requiring further validation, not a fixed numerical rule.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, documentary ethics, generative AI, technological disclosure, cultural sensitivity, China–Vietnam border

1. Introduction

Documentary has always rested on an implied guarantee: that what appears on screen was, in some defensible sense, observed. That guarantee has never been simple — selection, framing and editing already shape what a viewer takes to be real — but it has been robust enough to distinguish documentary from fiction and to give the form its evidentiary authority (Nichols, 2017; Winston, 2000). Generative and enhancement technologies strain that guarantee in a new way. When a sequence can be synthesised rather than filmed, restored beyond recovery, or extended past what any camera recorded, the boundary between documentation and fabrication stops being a matter of degree in editing and becomes a question about the status of an image as recorded evidence or constructed representation (Nash, Hight, & Summerhayes, 2014).

For intangible cultural heritage (ICH), the stakes are particularly consequential. Documentary footage may provide a durable record of a ritual, craft or musical tradition, and may help communicate a community's heritage across cultural and national boundaries (Lenzerini, 2011; UNESCO, 2003). If synthetic imagery is mistaken for observed evidence, the resulting misrepresentation may enter archival and scholarly accounts of a living practice. Nevertheless, a categorical prohibition on technological intervention would overlook potential benefits: enhancement may improve the accessibility of deteriorated recordings, visualisation may clarify unfamiliar cultural contexts, and carefully labelled reconstruction may illustrate events for which no footage survives. The practical question is therefore which forms of intervention are appropriate, for which cultural material, and under what conditions of documentation, consent and disclosure.

Existing guidance emphasises cultural integrity but does not always specify how producers should document the boundary between recorded evidence and technological assistance in an edit. This article therefore examines what the available evidence can support from the seven cases recorded in the source doctoral thesis and from the prototype's timecoded production material. It asks which editorial decisions can be documented and reviewed, without interpreting a source-reported intervention percentage as proof of audience effects or a universal ethical ceiling.

The analysis distinguishes three evidence levels: descriptive case classifications inherited from the parent thesis, more detailed production documentation for the Tianqin prototype, and limited descriptive responses recorded for viewers and experts who evaluated that prototype. These evidence types are not interchangeable. The film-register and reception data for several external cases remain insufficient for independent replication, while platform-specific short editions discussed in the thesis are future adaptation proposals. The contribution is therefore a traceable editorial decision procedure rather than a validated cross-cultural rule.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Documentary Authenticity as a Negotiated Claim

Documentary authority does not depend on an entirely unedited relationship with reality. Winston (2000) described the evidentiary claim of documentary as partly rhetorical, supported by convention as well as fidelity. Nichols (2017) explained how selection and arrangement shape documentary representation, while Bruzzi (2006) understood documentary as a negotiation among filmmaker, subject and reality. Within this account, authenticity can be considered a contextual relationship between an image and its referent, rather than an intrinsic, binary property. The relevant ethical questions concern whether editorial interventions are warranted, adequately explained and intelligible to viewers.

Generative technology intensifies rather than creates these questions. Whereas conventional editing primarily rearranges or alters recorded material, synthetic production can introduce images for which no corresponding event was filmed (Nash et al., 2014). Such material may be used illustratively, but its non-observational status should be disclosed wherever viewers might otherwise mistake it for a factual record. Established discussions of documentary ethics offer an important foundation, although the application of those principles to generative workflows remains under development (Aufderheide, Jaszi, & Chandra, 2009).

2.2 Mediatization and the Pressure Toward Spectacle

One influence on the use of technological intervention in heritage documentary is the mediatization of cultural production. Hjarvard (2013) argued that media institutions have conventions to which other social domains respond. Platform distribution may intensify incentives for pace, visual density and spectacle (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014). Practices whose significance depends on extended observation or local context may not fit these conventions readily. Production teams may therefore turn to visual enhancement, atmospheric synthesis and reconstructed sequences, creating a potential tension between accessibility and cultural accuracy.

MacCannell's (1973) account of staged authenticity provides one way to analyse this tension. When practices are removed from their social contexts and reframed for external audiences, representations may acquire the appearance of authenticity without adequately conveying their situated meanings. Generative tools can facilitate such reframing by reducing the practical cost of constructing scenes. This argument suggests the value of an editorial review process that evaluates not only how much material has been altered but also why the alteration was made and how it is represented to viewers.

2.3 Layered Cultural Sensitivity

Not all heritage materials present the same representational risks. Building on scholarship that emphasises living heritage and situated meaning (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Smith, 2006; UNESCO, 2003), this article adopts a three-layer analytical typology: belief-ritual material, including restricted or sacred practice; life-social material, including everyday and orally transmitted practice; and expression-communication material, including outward-facing performance and public presentation. The categories help identify questions that an editor should ask; they are not an established universal ranking of cultural values or a substitute for the guidance of the people concerned.

The typology suggests that the same treatment may have different ethical implications depending on whether it depicts restricted ritual action, everyday practice or acknowledged artistic adaptation. This is an interpretive proposition, not an empirically verified hierarchy. Its usefulness is explored by comparing the accounts in the selected film corpus and by examining the editorial record of the prototype.

2.4 The Social Shaping of Production Technology

A purely technical boundary would overlook the social and cultural contexts in which documentary claims are assessed. The social construction of technology perspective foregrounds the roles of practitioners, institutions, production teams and viewers (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). Accordingly, the legitimacy of an intervention is better understood as a contextual decision requiring explanation and, where appropriate, consultation with cultural practitioners, rather than as a property conferred by a software tool or a numerical percentage.

2.5 The Gap This Article Addresses

The literature offers a useful ethical vocabulary but still leaves producers facing practical decisions about what to generate, what to disclose and what must remain observable. This article develops a provisional response by comparing source-reported cases and examining the prototype's production records and limited evaluations. The proposed protocol is intended for documentation and future testing, not as a validated regulatory standard.

3. Method

3.1 Design

This study undertakes a qualitative, theory-guided re-examination of seven illustrative documentary cases and one instrumental production case (Yin, 2018). The case selection and original cross-case profiles are drawn from Wu (2026, Chapter 4); the Tianqin prototype's production records, descriptive questionnaire results and expert evaluations are drawn from Chapter 5 and related appendices. This article does not report an additional round of case selection, interviews, audience recruitment or film-version testing. Its purpose is to identify conclusions warranted by the existing evidence and propose a provisional procedure for documenting editorial decisions. The self-selected questionnaire of prototype viewers (n = 60) cannot establish how audiences perceived any of the seven comparison films.

3.2 Case Selection

The parent thesis reports searches conducted from June to October 2024 across international and Chinese streaming platforms, official broadcasters, international heritage archives, documentary-festival archives and academic databases (Wu, 2026, Section 4.2.2). It describes 52 screened works, 23 retained for final theoretical sampling and seven selected for maximum variation and comparison, including one deviant case. Table 4.15 lists eligibility conditions concerning ICH relevance, documentary form, accessibility of a full work, contemporary release and availability of dissemination indicators, along with reasons for exclusion. These are the source researcher's reported screening procedures; the original search log, complete film-specific URLs and dated platform exports were not supplied for independent auditing of this article.

The seven selections cover different production approaches rather than a single geographic frame. The thesis lists a Then ceremony record, Indus Blues, a Jing single-string programme, a Dong Grand Song vlog, a CCTV-9 ICH series, an arts-university adaptation and a provincial television competition (Wu, 2026, Table 4.16). Indus Blues concerns Pakistan and is retained only as a deliberately external comparison (DAFilms, n.d.). The titles, release years and outlets attached to the remaining entries are reported source labels rather than an independently verified catalogue of seven films. Table 1 makes this provenance and remaining uncertainty explicit.

3.3 Coding Framework

The parent thesis used seven variables to compare its selected films: ethical constraints, narrative entry, emotional anchoring, technological proportion, contextual support, audience segmentation and two-way interaction (Wu, 2026, Tables 4.16–4.17). The present article synthesises those descriptions into five explanatory fields: ethical framing, intervention type or band, contextual presentation, available reception-related descriptions and concerns about cultural representation. For the purposes of this discussion, enhancement refers to alterations to recorded image or sound, reconstruction to a re-creation informed by contextual sources, and generation to imagery or sound not directly recorded from the depicted action. These working definitions do not establish that the original cases were recoded consistently according to these categories. The intervention bands in Table 1 remain qualitative estimates reported in the thesis; complete shot-level records are not available for all seven films.

Although the thesis specifies case inclusion and exclusion criteria and presents a comparative matrix, its text does not provide a complete retrievable film registry with an original-language title, episode identifier, producer, stable link, duration and dated measurement export for every selected work. Case 2 is a deliberate out-of-region comparator: the thesis labels Indus Blues as a 2017 film, whereas the accessible DAFilms catalogue identifies a Pakistani film of the same title directed by Jawad Sharif and dated 2018 (DAFilms, n.d.). The discrepancy is reported rather than resolved without primary documentation; other incomplete identifiers are likewise acknowledged. The present re-analysis does not calculate inter-coder agreement or claim independently repeated timing measurements.

The thesis reports approximate viewing figures, interaction measures and interpretations of reception for several films. However, the material supplied for this re-examination does not include independently auditable, date-stamped platform exports or attributable third-party comments for every case. Accordingly, these figures are not presented as verified outcomes in this article. Descriptions such as 'distortion', 'authority' and 'backlash' are identified as interpretations unless a traceable primary source is available. An intervention band alone cannot demonstrate that the practitioners or audiences of a particular tradition supported or opposed a film.

3.4 The Production Case

The instrumental production case concerns The Beauty of Relics—Tianqin Chapter (Wu, 2026, Chapter 5 and Appendices H and P). Table 5.6 and Appendix P-2 report 120 seconds of Jimeng-assisted generated imagery within 724.8 seconds of running time (16.56%): 64 seconds of migration/historical illustration, 36 seconds of legend visualisation and 20 seconds of other supporting imagery. Appendix H separately reports 152 seconds of broader technological intervention over a stated 720-second film (21.1%). Its six named summary categories total 144 seconds; an additional eight-second QR-code overlay is shown in the timecoded checklist and may account for the difference, but the thesis does not provide a final crosswalk confirming identical counting rules. The two percentages therefore refer to distinct documented accounting scopes and slightly different denominators, not demonstrated separate finished film versions.

The status of distribution and editing must also be distinguished. The parent thesis reports dissemination of an approximately 12-minute Tianqin film on Bilibili in January 2026 and on WeChat Channels on 18 February 2026 (Wu, 2026, Section 5.2.4). Its recommendations to retain a longer Bilibili edit, develop a 3–5-minute WeChat version and produce additional short-form adaptations are proposals in Section 5.3.2. The source does not document a controlled evaluation of completed alternative versions. Consequently, differences in platform analytics cannot be attributed to an experimentally tested effect of editing length or format.

3.5 Complementary Prototype Feedback

The available parent-study records include an existing 15-item online survey (n = 60) and semi-structured expert evaluations (n = 6) of the Tianqin prototype (Wu, 2026, Tables 5.11 and 5.14). Four existing questionnaire items addressing cultural respect, acceptability of technology, the real/virtual boundary and transparency are presented descriptively, without new hypothesis testing. Respondents were recruited through WeChat groups and related channels, and the wider thesis identifies substantial selection bias relative to platform viewers who did not complete the film. The source data cannot be used to determine the views of audiences of the seven external films or of all relevant cultural groups.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The parent doctoral research was approved by the Mahasarakham University Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (Approval No. 610-575/2025; Wu, 2026, Appendix A). The authors confirm that participants received information sheets and consent forms explaining the study and the use of collected information in academic research reporting. For interview-based research reporting, photographs were presented with faces obscured. Identifiable photographs and documentary footage were subject to separate information and consent for their intended use; the consent procedures also recognised cultural restrictions, the right to stop filming, and an opportunity to review footage before release (Wu, 2026, Appendix B). The authors further confirm that permission was obtained for audio and music used for educational, non-commercial purposes. Such permission is not described here as unrestricted authorization for commercial exploitation or other forms of reuse. The seven-film comparison draws on previously released material, and the present article reports only selected aggregate questionnaire values from the existing Tianqin prototype evaluation. No additional participants were recruited for this article and no individually identifying questionnaire data are reported. The ethical approval is not presented as validation of the numerical intervention estimates or as authorization beyond the approved research scope.

4. Results

4.1 The Belief-ritual Layer: Intervention as Near-Prohibition

At the belief-ritual layer, the thesis assigns Case 1 the label 'Tay Then Ceremony' (2019, UNESCO) and characterises the filmed material as archival documentation. UNESCO's 2019 inscription confirms the cultural recognition of Then practices, not the release identity, running time or technology percentage of the particular film in the thesis (UNESCO, 2019). Its reported intervention band of less than 5% is consequently retained as an interpretive source label. Case 2, Indus Blues, is an externally identifiable film about musicians in Pakistan; DAFilms lists it as a 2018 documentary, whereas Table 4.16 in the thesis gives 2017 (DAFilms, n.d.; Wu, 2026). Its 15–20% intervention band is not independently timed. These cases serve to contrast source-described editorial orientations, not to prove differences in audience reception or the legitimacy of specific percentages.

4.2 The Life-Social Layer: Intervention as Negotiation

The source thesis labels Case 3 as 'Jing Ethnic Single-string Guzheng' (2023, CGTN) and Case 4 as 'Dong Grand Song Vlog Series' (2022, Bilibili). It contrasts a formal broadcast-oriented presentation with a participatory online format (Wu, 2026, Table 4.16). However, the exact release or episode URLs, original shot inventories and dated engagement exports are not available for this re-analysis. Their stated 20–25% and 10–15% intervention bands therefore remain interpretive source descriptions. They illustrate different source-described editorial approaches; they do not demonstrate that one format caused greater cultural understanding, participation or social benefit.

4.3 The Expression-communication Layer: Intervention and the Red Line

At the expression-communication layer, the thesis identifies Case 5 as 'CCTV ICH Series' (2020, CCTV-9), Case 6 as 'Song of the Single String' (2019, an arts-university source) and Case 7 as 'Sound of Heaven' (2019, provincial television). The respective intervention bands of 25–30%, approximately 20% and 35–40% appear in the original case comparison (Wu, 2026, Table 4.16). The thesis contrasts educational presentation, acknowledged stage adaptation and commercial staging. Because case-specific timing logs and attributable external criticism are not available for independent verification, this article treats those differences as qualitative descriptions of production orientation rather than as evidence of measured public disapproval or a causal 30% threshold for cultural distortion.

Table 1. Case descriptions and intervention bands as reported in the doctoral source

Case / thesis work label	Source-reported layer	Production orientation	Band in thesis*	Source-based reading	Audit limitation
1. Tay 'Then' Ceremony (2019; UNESCO label)	BR	Archival	<5%	Ritual documentation	Film URL/duration unverified
2. Indus Blues (thesis: 2017; catalogue: 2018)	BR	Independent; Pakistan comparator	15–20%	Collaborative framing	Intervention timing unverified
3. Jing Ethnic Single-string Guzheng (2023; CGTN)	LS	Broadcast	20–25%	Institutional narrative	Episode/shot log unverified
4. Dong Grand Song Vlog Series (2022; Bilibili)	LS	Participatory vlog	10–15%	Grassroots framing	Episode/metrics unverified
5. CCTV ICH Series (2020; CCTV-9)	EC	Institutional TV	25–30%	Educational presentation	Episode/shot timing unverified
6. Song of the Single String (2019; arts university)	EC	Academic stage adaptation	~20%	Adaptation acknowledged	Work/disclosure log unverified
7. Sound of Heaven (2019; provincial TV)	EC	Commercial programme	35–40%	Staging raises interpretive questions	Episode/criticism unverified

Note. BR = belief-ritual; LS = life-social; EC = expression-communication. Titles, dates, outlets and intervention bands are reported in Wu (2026, Table 4.16), not independently verified. Case 2 is a Pakistan-based comparator whose thesis date (2017) differs from the DAFilms catalogue entry (2018). The bands do not establish an ethical cutoff or a measured audience effect.

4.4 Why the Reported Bands Do Not Establish a Numerical Threshold

The seven cases were selected to illustrate variation, not to estimate a universal intervention limit. In the three expression-communication examples, source-reported intervention bands differ alongside production format, context, disclosure practices and cultural representation. The comparison cannot isolate whether the amount of altered footage, its evidentiary role or some other factor explains the interpretation of distortion in the parent study. The contrast around 30% is therefore treated as an exploratory indication for closer editorial scrutiny within this particular corpus, not as a validated safety threshold, an allowable quota or evidence of a causal effect. More defensible decisions concern cultural restrictions, preservation of filmed practice, provenance of altered material and clear disclosure of synthetic imagery.

4.5 From Source-reported Percentages to an Auditable Production Process

The Tianqin production record allows more specific description of intervention types than the seven comparison cases. The AI-shot inventory reports 120 seconds of generated imagery within a 724.8-second film (16.56%), whereas Appendix H reports 152 seconds of broader technological intervention within a stated 720-second film (21.1%) (Wu, 2026, Table 5.6 and Appendices H and P-2). The latter category includes graphic, processing and interactive treatments, and the two records have different stated runtimes. An eight-second QR-code overlay appears in the timecoded checklist and may explain why the six named summary categories total 144 rather than 152 seconds; however, the final calculation has not been independently reconciled against an edit-decision list. These records support a proposed workflow that retains filmed cultural practice as evidence and discloses synthetic contextual material. They do not demonstrate that two different final edits were tested or that viewers endorsed either proportion as an ethical limit.

A transparent production protocol should identify each edited sequence by film version, timecode, intervention type, duration, source material, disclosure method and relevant cultural clearance. In the present source, a version-aware audit would first check the edit decision list against the 724.8-second AI ledger and 720-second broader-intervention checklist before any single technical 'percentage' is reported. The protocol prioritizes directly recorded ritual, skill and testimony as documentary evidence, while allowing clearly identified synthetic context where culturally appropriate. This is an implementable documentation proposal rather than evidence of a tested universal rule.

4.6 Limited Descriptive Feedback on the Prototype

A 15-item online questionnaire was completed by 60 self-selected prototype viewers recruited through WeChat groups and related channels (Wu, 2026, Section 5.2.2 and Table 5.11). Table 2 presents four five-point items addressing respect for cultural practitioners, acceptance of technology, the real–virtual boundary, and labelling-related trust. These are descriptive agreement ratings, not evidence that labelling caused trust to increase. Recruitment through interested networks and early departures recorded in the platform data constrain generalisation to casual viewers and audiences of the seven comparison films.

Table 2. Descriptive responses to prototype technology and ethics items

Questionnaire item summary (n = 60)	**Mean / 5**	**Interpretation boundary**
Q10. Respect for Tianqin culture and practitioners	4.83	Agreement only; not cultural-bearer consensus
Q11. Acceptance of technology	4.70	Descriptive rating within this sample
Q12. Appropriateness of the real–virtual boundary	4.77	Perceived appropriateness; not an audit of footage
Q13. Labelling and trust	4.73	Agreement with statement; no causal trust effect

Note. Item descriptions are abbreviated for display; means are from Wu (2026, Table 5.11). All responses are from self-selected questionnaire participants. No population estimate, significance test or causal effect is implied.

Six interdisciplinary experts evaluated the Tianqin prototype in the parent research (Wu, 2026, Section 5.2.3 and Table 5.14). The source summary reports favourable assessments of the attention paid to practitioners and transparent labelling, alongside recommendations for further engagement with cultural inheritors. These expert judgements provide a limited professional perspective on implementation; they do not constitute representative community consent or cross-cultural audience validation.

4.7 Worked Application: A Cautious Editorial Decision

Consider a production without a filmed record of a culturally restricted ritual action. Substituting a photorealistic synthetic performance and presenting it as observed fact would produce an unsupported evidentiary claim. A more transparent option, subject to the relevant bearers' consent, is to retain the available live-action record and use a clearly marked map, narration or non-photorealistic visualisation to explain context. This is a hypothetical editorial scenario derived from the proposed protocol, not an eighth observed case.

A producer could document both editorial options in a shot-level record, noting the origin of the visual evidence, any reconstruction or generation, the anticipated edit version, the disclosure label and cultural restrictions. Cases 6 and 7 in the source thesis are relevant as comparative illustrations of acknowledged artistic adaptation and entertainment staging, but their quantitative bands and reception-related characterizations remain insufficiently verified. The worked scenario demonstrates how to reason through a production decision; it is not an eighth observed film or a tested audience response.

5. Discussion

5.1 A graded Standard in Place of an Absolute Norm

An undifferentiated authenticity norm gives filmmakers limited practical guidance, but the present data do not justify numerical permissions for different cultural groups. The three-layer typology is better used to prompt questions about restricted material, contextual framing and collaboration with cultural bearers. Apparent differences in the source-reported percentage bands are illustrative only. Ethical boundaries remain sensitive to the function of the footage and the consent conditions of the community represented.

5.2 Disclosure, Not Abstention, as the Operative Principle

The case interpretations and prototype documentation suggest that disclosure is an important safeguard but is not sufficient, by itself, to establish ethical legitimacy. The descriptive questionnaire indicates that self-selected prototype respondents generally agreed with statements about technological acceptability and labelling; it does not demonstrate that disclosure caused an increase in trust (Wu, 2026, Table 5.11). Broader discussions of AI-mediated communication and credibility cues provide relevant conceptual context but do not independently validate the framework proposed here (Hancock et al., 2020; Sundar, 2008). Documentary producers should also seek appropriate cultural permissions, preserve contextual accuracy and identify which sequences carry evidentiary claims. The proposed contribution is a transparent account of techniques and editorial decisions, rather than a general prohibition or a universally safe intervention ratio.

5.3 The Evidentiary Core as the True Boundary

The most defensible working distinction concerns the function of an image. An edited or generated segment may illustrate context, but it should not silently replace footage that purports to document an actual ritual act, craft skill or statement. The seven-case comparison is consistent with this concern without proving it in a causal sense. Retaining recorded practice as the evidentiary core and describing synthetic support is therefore offered as an auditable production principle for further empirical assessment.

5.4 Practical Implications

A practical decision sequence is to identify any restricted heritage elements with relevant practitioners; preserve the available recorded evidence; categorise enhancements, reconstructions and generation separately; link each intervention to an identified film cut and timecode; document any cultural or rights permissions; and specify how a viewer can recognize non-observational material. A source-reported percentage may flag an edit for closer scrutiny, but ethical judgment must remain tied to the cultural meaning and evidentiary role of the sequence. The source study's proposed 3–5-minute WeChat edition and other shorter platform cuts should be treated as future design options until an actual edited version and corresponding evaluation record exist.

For reproducible review, an editorial log should record: (1) original footage or audio and cultural permissions; (2) the type and purpose of alteration; (3) source file and exact timeline or edit-decision-list identifier; (4) the version and total running time used as the percentage denominator; (5) duration and overlap rules for technological categories; and (6) the on-screen disclosure decision. This six-field checklist is a proposed refinement of the Tianqin records, not an evaluation instrument shown to have been validated across independent productions.

5.5 Limitations

This analysis has several limitations. First, the seven-film corpus was purposively selected and is not representative; although the source selection process is described, complete release identifiers and original, date-stamped engagement exports are unavailable for every case. Second, the comparative intervention bands are interpretations reported in the thesis, without independently available shot-level records or intercoder agreement estimates. Third, Indus Blues is an external comparator from Pakistan, and its release year differs between the thesis and the independent catalogue. Fourth, the prototype's 120/724.8-second AI-shot record and 152/720-second broader-intervention checklist have different definitions and stated runtimes; a possible eight-second QR-code contribution to the latter total still requires confirmation against the final editing timeline. Fifth, the parent study documents two distribution platforms but does not establish that the proposed 3–5-minute WeChat version or other short editions were produced and formally evaluated. Neither a causal 30% threshold nor a universally applicable cultural hierarchy can be inferred from these materials.

The supplementary prototype questionnaire (n = 60) is self-selected, reports agreement ratings rather than results from an experiment, and does not represent viewers of the external films. Expert feedback (n = 6) is likewise limited and cannot substitute for systematic evaluation by affected cultural bearers. Future work should verify the original seven-case registry, replicate shot-time coding with independent reviewers, obtain community-led assessments, and experimentally examine recognition of AI labels and the effect of different disclosure practices on audience interpretation.

6. Conclusion

This article re-examines a seven-case comparison in a doctoral thesis alongside production records for a Tianqin documentary prototype to propose an auditable editorial decision process for ICH documentary. The reported selection of 52 screened works, 23 shortlisted works and seven purposively selected cases explains the corpus but does not independently verify its film-specific intervention bands. An external Pakistan-based comparison and incomplete release identifiers further limit cross-case interpretation. The prototype records distinguish 16.56% AI-generated imagery from a separate 21.1% measure of broader technological intervention, with different accounting categories and runtimes; they do not establish that two alternative film edits were tested. Proposed shorter platform versions are design recommendations rather than evaluated outcomes. Questionnaire and expert feedback relate only to the prototype. The contribution is therefore a provisional production framework that prioritises cultural permissions, source and edit provenance, disclosure of generated material and filmed practice as the evidentiary core. Independent source verification and wider community-led evaluation are necessary before generalising these proposals or endorsing any percentage-based threshold.

Use of artificial intelligence

Artificial-intelligence tools were used during manuscript preparation to support language and structural editing. The authors retain responsibility for the study design, source materials, interpretations and final manuscript. The AI-generated sequences discussed in the article were documented objects of the parent research; no questionnaire responses or study findings were newly generated by AI for this article. References were checked for consistency between the text and the bibliography, although documentary identifiers and selected source metadata still require independent confirmation.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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