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Research on the Identification of the Digital Nostalgia Community of Overseas Chinese[1] - Taking the Spreading of "Chinese New Year" Short Videos as an Example

Yiran Zhou[1]*,Ying Chen[2]
1,2 School of Humanities and Social Science, Guangling College of Yangzhou University, China
***Corresponding author E-mail:1340733483@qq.com**

Abstract:
In the digital era, social media platforms provide overseas Chinese communities with a stage for self-expression and emotional interaction, transforming traditional nostalgia into an externalized digital form. This paper focuses on the platform-based expression of digital nostalgia among overseas Chinese, specifically through the presentation of "Chinese New Year" short videos. Through textual analysis, the study examines the characteristics of these videos in terms of narrative elements, symbol usage, and emotional expression. The analysis reveals that "Chinese New Year" short videos possess characteristics such as the freshness of narrative element collisions, the immersive feeling of audio-visual symbols fusion, and the creation of emotional value through a common "language". Additionally, the study conduct in-depth interviews with eleven vloggers studying or working overseas to analyze the practical significance of the emotional community formed through the platform-based expression of digital nostalgia for individual self-identification, group identification, and cultural identification. The paper argues that the formation of a digital nostalgia community is beneficial for individual identification, the development of group belonging, and the deeper aggregation of community for the Chinese nation. What's more, overseas Chinese are playing increasingly important roles in the global communication of Chinese culture, and they will exert more significance on China's international communication in the upcoming future.

Keywords:
Overseas Chinese, Digital Nostalgia, Short Videos, Community for the Chinese nation

1 Introduction

In the context of globalization, population mobility has become more convenient and frequent, making "being away from home" a common phenomenon. With the acceleration of technological progress and social change, individuals are increasingly detached from familiar environments and placed in unfamiliar geograph-

1 For the convenience of writing, the term "overseas Chinese" used in this article does not strictly refer to Chinese who hold foreign nationalities. It includes but is not limited to, Chinese citizens studying or working abroad, overseas Chinese compatriots, and other such groups.

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ical and cultural contexts. For individuals, the "place" where they grow up largely shapes their personality, behavior, and living habits, holding unique emotional value. Upon leaving their usual living environment and entering a new, unfamiliar space, individuals often experience a sense of longing for the former living environment and the people, events, and things within it, which is known as nostalgia.

In the era when media technology was not yet advanced, nostalgia was conveyed through written words, such as letters, poems, and literary works, expressing the deep-seated longing and concern within people's hearts. As depicted by Guangzhong Yu in Nostalgia, it is a stamp, a ship ticket, embodying the lingering emotions of wanderers towards their hometowns. Entering the digital age, the ways people communicate and interact have evolved with technological advancements. The emergence of social media platforms has provided a space for the expression of nostalgia, prompting it to transform into a digital form.

Unlike traditional nostalgia, digital nostalgia exhibits new characteristics of platform-based expression and communication. Creators generate content based on their interests and ideas, engaging in personalized expression, making this emotion more "visible" across a broader scope and to a greater extent. Meanwhile, interactive behaviors among users, such as likes and comments, can enhance individuals' sense of belonging and recognition, alleviating the discomfort individuals may feel in unfamiliar cultural environments to some extent. Especially in the current era where short video communication is prevailing, digital nostalgia is more often presented in the form of short videos, becoming more intuitive and vivid.

2 Literature Review

Regarding the emergence of the new emotional phenomenon of digital nostalgia, scholars such as Minzhi Wang have studied the platform logic, technical embedding, and emotional mechanisms of digital nostalgia from the perspective of media embedding, deeply exploring the value of emotional practice and social interaction in the digital media age.[1] The study proposes that digital nostalgia is the platform-based migration of emotional circulation. Therefore, this paper focuses on the emotional community formed by overseas Chinese through the platform-based presentation of digital nostalgia, namely the digital nostalgia community. In terms of the content expression of nostalgia, scholars believe that people hope to gain the meaning of life and heal psychological trauma through traditional festivals, thereby alleviating nostalgia and reconstructing a "sense of place".[2] Based on this, this paper concretizes digital nostalgia into the spread of "Chinese New Year" short videos. In terms of short video spreading, scholars such as Tubao Wang have studied the short video reports of overseas celebrations of Chinese traditional festivals, pointing out that they help overseas Chinese enhance cultural confidence, strengthen the influence of Chinese culture, and promote local multicultural development, while also indicating the problems existing in such short video reports and their possibilities for promoting the overseas spread of Chinese culture. [3]

Furthermore, the identification of overseas Chinese is an important topic discussed in academia. "Identification" is a concept that exists in different disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, and sociology. [4] Early identification theory research was mainly based on the philosophical paradigm and was usually translated into "tongyixing" or "shenfen" in Chinese. Essentially, it is the subject's identification, which is "a person's awareness of the social categories or groups to which they belong". As stated by American scholar Hun-

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tington, " 'Identity' means a person's or a group's self-awareness; it is the product of self-awareness: what special qualities do I or we have that make me different from you, or us different from them, that is, who am I". Scholars such as Kai Yang have surveyed the relationship between the use of overseas social media by Chinese overseas students and their motherland national identification, concluding that overseas Chinese students use overseas social media less and generally have a high degree of motherland national identification. [5] Hang Yin found that the use of online homeland media can reinforce the identification of migrant netizens as "authentic Chinese".[6]

In summary, there has been no in-depth exploration of the identification of the digital nostalgia community among overseas Chinese from the perspective of identification theory. Based on this, the paper takes "Chinese New Year" short videos as the entry point and proposes the following questions: What are the characteristics of the platform-based presentation of digital nostalgia? What impact does the digital nostalgia community have on the identity recognition of overseas Chinese?

3 Research Methods

This paper employs two research methods: textual analysis and in-depth interviews. By analyzing short videos related to overseas celebrations of the Chinese New Year on short video platforms such as RedNote (namely Xiaohongshu) and Douyin, including the analysis of shooting techniques, shot sizes, video themes, comments, etc., the characteristics of "Chinese New Year" short videos are studied.

The interview questions are mainly divided into three parts. The first part mainly involves the basic situation of the interviewee, including their occupation, the duration of living or working overseas, the country they stay, etc. The second part reduces the research questions to interview questions, including their ways of alleviating nostalgia, the motives for shooting "Chinese New Year" short videos, and personal feelings, effects, etc. The third part delves deeper based on the answers of the interviewees, such as the specific situation of celebrating the Chinese New Year in the local area. This study selects eleven short video content creators studying or working overseas for semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviewees differ in age, occupation, country of residence, and duration of staying overseas. The interviews are mainly conducted through telephone interviews or WeChat text interviews. The basic information of the interviewees is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Interviewees' Basic Information

Number	Creation Platform	Gender	Country of Residence	Occupation	Duration Overseas
C01	Bilibili	Male	United Kingdom	Student	Two years
C02	Douyin	Male	United States	Student	Three years
C03	Douyin	Male	Australia	Student	Three years
C04	Douyin	Male	United Kingdom	Overseas Dispatched Teacher	One and a half years
C05	Douyin	Male	United Kingdom	Student	One year
C06	RedNote	Female	France	Student	Three years

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C07	RedNote	Female	Germany	Student	Two years
C08	RedNote	Male	France	Student	One year
C09	RedNote	Female	United Kingdom	Student	Eight years
C10	RedNote	Male	United Kingdom	Finance Industry Worker	Twelve years
C11	RedNote	Female	Spain	Travel Planner	Five years

4 "Chinese New Year" Short Videos: The Platform-Based Presentation of Digital Nostalgia

The rapid rise of short video social media platforms has created stage for the self-expression and presentation of overseas Chinese. Users film activities of celebrating the Chinese New Year overseas, edit and produce them, and finally output them in the form of short videos on social media platforms, attracting a large number of netizens to watch. Based on the analysis of "Chinese New Year" short videos on RedNote and Douyin, it can be found that the release time of "Chinese New Year" short videos is concentrated in the past two years and the communicators are mostly younger age groups represented by overseas students. In terms of narrative elements, symbol usage, and emotional expression, these videos have different characteristics.

4.1 The Freshness of Narrative Element Collision

In "Chinese New Year" short videos, the main shooting content is often the Spring Festival street parade activities. The Spring Festival street parades in various countries are often concentrated on some famous streets. For example, the dragon and lion dance parade celebration activities in Paris taking place on the Champs-Élysées. Displaying Chinese elements on streets full of overseas elements, the collision of the two makes the videos more attractive. At the same time, the participation of many overseas people in the performance makes the content of the short videos richer. Foreigners performing martial arts, dragon dance and other programs bring a sense of freshness to Chinese audiences. In a "Chinese New Year" short video released on Douyin, foreigners performed a lion dance on the streets of Australia. Since the performance of the Northern Lion is also relatively rare in domestic lion dance performances, it has aroused netizen discussions. One of the popular comments said, "I didn't expect to see the Northern Lion overseas", which fully proves the extensive spread of Chinese culture. In many short videos, banners and lanterns celebrating the New Year are hung on the streets overseas. This organic collision makes Chinese culture better output, and both the creators and viewers feel a strong sense of cultural confidence.

4.2 The Immersive Feeling of Audio-Visual Symbol Fusion

The creators of "Chinese New Year" short videos cleverly use audio-visual symbols to make the short videos more attractive and infectious. In terms of cover design, many creators use couplets, lion and dragon dance as covers, or present in the form of collages to attract other users to click and watch the videos. In the selection of shot sizes, panoramic and close-up shots are mainly used to achieve good effects. What's more, the titles on the cover are mainly in bright colors such as red and yellow, which are in line with the festive atmosphere and attract users' attention. For example, titles like "How to Spend the Spring Festival in Canada"

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and "Yingge Dance in the UK" directly clarify the content and highlight the theme of the video. In terms of sound selection, creators often use cheerful Chinese songs, such as "Love Each Other" as background music, or directly use the sounds of gongs, drums, and firecrackers, etc. at the same period, to create a joyful and festive atmosphere. In addition, short videos not only present traditional cultural symbols such as dragon dance, lion dance, Spring Festival couplets, martial arts, and Hanfu as the main focus, but also integrate emerging cultural symbols such as the Yingge dance. The clever fusion of audio-visual symbols mobilizes the viewers' entire sensory perception, giving them a strong sense of presence.

4.3 The Emotional Value Contained in the Common "Language"

"Chinese New Year" short videos use a lightweight and easily understood common "language", which even overseas Chinese who grow up in foreign environments can understand the emotional value contained therein. As interviewee C01 pointed out: The use of videos is more effective, allowing viewers to intuitively feel the atmosphere of the scene and has a higher acceptance. In terms of content, most "Chinese New Year" short videos are themed around the parade activities of spending the Chinese New Year overseas, accompanied by text explanations such as "Spending the Spring Festival Overseas for the First Time" and "The Ritual Sense of the New Year Flavor", integrating the emotions of the creators themselves. There are also creators who film the scenes of watching the Spring Festival Gala and caption "Feeling the Value of Congratulating Global Chinese Happy New Year for the First Time" to express nostalgia and resonate with users in the comment area. For Chinese people with the same cultural background, they can more deeply interpret the profound meaning contained in the videos. Especially for overseas Chinese in unfamiliar environments, they interact and communicate with the publishers and other users in the comment area, jointly dissipating their homesickness.

5 Practical Significance: The Multi-Dimensional Value of the Digital Nostalgia Community

Society is now advancing into deep mediation, with technological logic becoming an important driving force behind the phenomenon of digital nostalgia. Thanks to the development of media technology, the voices of overseas Chinese are becoming increasingly loud on a global scale. The 54th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by CNNIC shows that as of June 2024, the scale of short video users reached 1.05 billion, including many overseas Chinese. Taking RedNote and Douyin as examples, the number and activity of overseas Chinese users are constantly increasing, becoming an important channel for overseas Chinese to express themselves and share their lives.

As for the motivation of shooting, most interviewees mentioned that they were surprised by the festive atmosphere overseas. Since China is vast and has a variety of local cultures, some interviewees even felt different regional characteristics from their hometowns abroad. For example, interviewee C09 mentioned: Just like the Chaoshan Yingge dance that went viral this year, I haven't seen it in China, but I saw the live version on the streets of London. Interviewee C08 also mentioned that many overseas Chinese from different provinces and cities would display their local and ethnic characteristics. On a deeper level, this is the profound cultural consciousness and confidence of overseas Chinese. In the digital age, driven by a strong sense of responsi-

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bility and mission, overseas Chinese fully use the power of the Internet to display their talents and promote Chinese culture overseas.

Based on this, the platform-based expression of digital nostalgia has led to the formation of a digital nostalgia community among overseas Chinese based on emotional connections. The formation of the digital nostalgia community is of great significance for the self-identification and group identification of overseas Chinese, and is also conducive to the building of community for the Chinese nation.

5.1 Self-Identification: Common Emotions Promote Personalized Narratives

Modern society manufacture nostalgia, and the consequence of modernity is that people "cannot achieve the continuity of life stories in fragmented time, but rather a kind of diffuseness and fragmentation". When individuals detach from the "place" where they have lived long-term and enter a new environment, this sense of rupture becomes more pronounced. Therefore, individuals attempt to seek their own value, thereby achieving self-identity. Digital nostalgia communities gather many individuals with similar demands and experiences, providing individuals with a sense of self-identity while also stimulating individuals to pursue differences in homogeneity. Specifically, although the community is connected based on common emotions, the specific expressions of different individuals vary. As a result, social media platforms continuously see differentiated Chinese New Year celebration activities from different countries. For example, short videos such as "Celebrating Chinese New Year in Singapore", "Melbourne Spring Festival", and "Chinese New Year in Malaysia", even though the themes expressed are unified, the different personalities of the creators and the different actual situations will form diverse content. In addition, multiple interviewees such as C01, C04, and C06 mentioned that the positive comments and feedback they received for their videos also encouraged them to continue to spread short videos,that further strengthen their self-identity.

5.2 Group Identity: Virtual Interaction Enhances Group Cohesion

Emotions are relational, that is, the basis of the generation of emotions is social interaction. Platforms such as RedNote and Douyin, as important media for overseas Chinese to maintain contact with their motherland, give overseas Chinese the right to freely use the symbols of social communication they are familiar with for interaction and self-expression. In our communications with video creators, we learned that when they posted videos about "Chinese New Year", they received a large number of comments and likes, including from domestic netizens and overseas netizens. According to the interaction ritual chain theory, frequent interactions within the group make the group connection tighter, prompting the comment area of the video to form a virtual emotional space of the digital nostalgia community. For example, in the short video about "Chinese New Year" by interviewee C10, which showcased the magnificent scene of the Yingge Dance, many overseas Chinese netizens wrote in the comment area, "Let the Yingge Dance become popular all over the world" and "I am really happy to see the Yingge Dance being passed down", sharing common emotions and enhancing the sense of identity within the group.

5.3 Cultural Identity: Unique Symbols Enhance National Pride

Being away from home makes overseas Chinese value their cultural roots more. Interviewee C09 said: Being abroad, because everyone is far from home, we actually pay more attention to Chinese festivals. The

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digital nostalgia community, through explicit and highly visible emotional expressions, uses the unique symbols of Chinese culture to deeply interpret the historical memory, national spirit, and contemporary connotations contained therein, and embeds cultural identity into the actions of each individual. President Xi Jinping pointed out that cultural identity is the deepest level of identity, the root of ethnic unity, and the soul of ethnic harmony. Interviewee C04 said: In the process of filming, I deeply felt the overseas Chinese's deep affection for their motherland and their high degree of identification with traditional culture. At the same time, it also made me more appreciate the unique charm of Chinese culture and the unity spirit of overseas Chinese. This feeling makes me feel very proud and warm. It fully reflects that the daily expression of digital nostalgia can enhance individuals' national pride and cultural identity. Not only that, but viewers can also deepen their understanding of Chinese culture and cultural confidence, breaking through their fixed perceptions. For example, interviewee C04 said: Many netizens commented that the scenes in the video made them feel the strong festive atmosphere and the warmth of Chinese culture, enhancing their sense of cultural identity and pride. Therefore, the digital nostalgia community can strengthen individuals' cultural identity, thereby promoting the building of community for the Chinese nation on a larger scale and to a higher degree.

6 Conclusion

At present, China is at a critical juncture in advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and it is imperative to strengthen the consciousness of the Chinese nation community among overseas Chinese. China and the world have undergone the great changes unseen in a century, the open and inclusive mindset of overseas Chinese, as well as their global vision, provide new possibilities for global communication of Chinese culture. Mr. Wang Gengwu, an Australian-born Chinese historian, pointed out that "Overseas Chinese play a significant role in understanding societies around the world". Social media platforms break through the limitations of time and space, closely connecting people from all over the world and also becoming a new medium for overseas Chinese to express their nostalgia. Through these platforms, overseas Chinese maintain connections with their motherland and spread the charm of Chinese culture globally. This new form of nostalgia has opened up a new path for global communication of Chinese culture - a folk cultural transmission led by overseas Chinese. They present the true face of Chinese culture through personalized expressions and life experiences, from a civilian perspective, allowing more people to experience and feel the unique charm of Chinese culture.

Under the new era, overseas Chinese will continue to act as important communicators of Chinese culture, promoting its global spread and enhancing its influence through various means and channels. The community consciousness based on the inclusiveness and peacefulness of Chinese civilization not only reflects the continuous enhancement of China's cultural confidence but also further promotes in-depth exchanges and integration between China and countries around the world, achieving the ideal of "Everybody cherishes his or her own culture, and if we respect and treasure other's culture, the world will be a harmonious one".

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