

Food as a medium: The framework and cross-culture implications of short videos of overseas Chinese sharing Chinese food in foreign countries

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Abstract. Focusing on foreigners' experience of Chinese food, a group of overseas Chinese released a series of short videos on social media about sharing Chinese food with their family and friends abroad. By analyzing the framework of such videos at high, medium and low levels, we find that the food narratives of overseas Chinese reflect both their main consciousness of spreading Chinese food culture and follow the basic logic of platform traffic. Therefore, elevating this cross-cultural practice to foreign communication requires them to shift from spontaneity to consciousness in cultural communication. On the other hand, we can also see the coexistence and intermingling of Chinese and foreign cultures, which reveals that we should turn to a communication view of civilizational diversity and inclusiveness, and transcend civilizational superiority with civilizational coexistence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Short food videos present the culture that originally exists in color, taste and sound in a visual way, attracting a large number of creators with their unique attitude towards life, aesthetic value and cultural connotation. Among them, overseas Chinese with dual cultural identities, by virtue of their geographical proximity, focus on foreigners' experience of Chinese food publishing a series of short videos about sharing Chinese food abroad on social media. Here, the food symbols integrated with special cultural identities have a common charm that transcends time and space and countries, and act as a medium of emotional communication, which is part of the "food" of daily life from the surface structure, but a manifestation of cultural values from the deep structure. The food sharing behavior of overseas Chinese is a kind of cross-cultural practice, reflecting the clues of Chinese food culture spreading and exchanging in heterogeneous cultures. At a time when cultural exchange and mutual appreciation between Chinese and foreign cultures are becoming more and more important, studying the construction framework of their videos helps to explore the logic behind their creation and deconstruct their practice of sharing Chinese food overseas. It can also provide new inspirations for the exchange and mutual appreciation between Chinese and foreign cultures While exploring and optimizing the communication path of Chinese cuisine culture to the outside world.

2. STUDY DESIGN

2.1 Sample selection

Through comparison, it is found that overseas Chinese mainly post their food sharing videos on domestic social media, with Bilibili being the main place. At the same time, some overseas Chinese also synchronize a small number of videos on international social media such as YouTube. In other words, the content of food sharing videos posted by overseas Chinese is consistent on both domestic and international platforms. Based on this, this study selects ten overseas Chinese accounts that operate on both Bilibili and YouTube. And based on Bilibili, after eliminating the videos that are not related to food, each of them selected the 10 videos with the highest number of views, totaling 100 videos, to analyze their overall framework and explore their internal logic.

2.2 Analytical framework

In 2000, Zang Guoren put forward the theory of low-level, medium-level and high-level frames when discussing media frames. The high-level structure refers to the abstract meaning or main idea of the event, which is expressed in the title, introduction and introductory sentence. The mid-level structure describes the main event, including the history, result, attribution and commentary of the event. The low-level structure is the language or symbols, including grammatical structure, rhetorical use and so on. Specifically, this study analyzes

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overseas Chinese food videos at three structural levels: high, medium and low, based on Zang Guoren's three-level framework theory and combined with the textual characteristics of food videos. The high level structure focuses on the theme setting and emotional tone of the videos; the middle level structure deconstructs the main characters, content selection and narrative strategies; the low level structure analyzes the footage, language symbols and rhetorical use of the videos.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 High-level framework

3.1.1 *An interculturality that transcends oneself*

From the high-level framework, the theme of the videos is mostly the daily dinner of friends and relatives, and 99% of the videos create a beautiful atmosphere of family harmony and neighborhood harmony. From the viewpoint of dining habits, the videos show a kind of "East meets West" dining scene. Unlike the Chinese "sit around, eat together" dining habits, the West pursues a "meal sharing system", that is, one person, one plate, feel free to add food. The video shows a combined "sit around, share and eat" dining scene, where a communal spoon and chopsticks are used to sit around and eat Chinese food together. In terms of cutlery, the use of Western-style knives and forks and Chinese chopsticks is the norm, and it does not disrupt the harmony of the scene. On the whole, this is a respect for the cultural differences and an acceptance of their specificities, reflecting a kind of intercultural mindset, that is, looking at things from a connected point of view, going beyond the usual "subject-object" model to pursue a "subject-subject" coexistence.^[1] Interculturality is the result of Habermas's application of intercultural thinking to culture, which encompasses mutual understanding, respect, and coexistence between cultures.^[2] The video does not deliberately highlight the differences between Chinese and foreign food habits, but puts the particularities of Chinese food in the context of dialogue and takes the common sense of human beings' pursuit of a warm and beautiful life as the basis of coexistence, thus constructing a story framework of sharing Chinese food in a harmonious and different way.

3.1.2 *Beyond the spread of food culture*

The sharing of food inevitably involves the dissemination of food culture. In the video, overseas Chinese play the dual role of food sharer and Chinese culture popularizer. Here, food as a medium of communication spreads food culture and brings about the spread of other diverse cultures at the same time. Yuqi in Finland, has repeatedly shown foreigners learning Chinese kung fu while waiting for their meals; Bingbing in Northern Europe considers cheongsam as a must-have outfit for dinner parties; and Eva in France

enjoys Chinese guzheng music after dinner. The food here has gone beyond the limits of color, sound and taste, and extended the spread of Chinese martial arts, Chinese costumes, Chinese music and other cultures linked by the act of "gathering". It is for this reason that we can not only gain meaning from the food itself, but also from the dress and behavior of the people who enjoy it, which gives us a glimpse of their attitude towards heterogeneous cultures. Food is not only an important tool to connect with individual feelings, but also carries the feelings of family and nation, thus becoming a medium for the dissemination of diverse cultures beyond food culture, thus building a narrative framework that is born out of food but beyond it.

3.2 Mid-level framework

3.2.1 *The Other's perspective in defamiliarization narration*

"Defamiliarization" originated from Russian formalism. It refers to stripping away the obvious things in a work to create a sense of freshness and curiosity for the audience, so as to enhance the level and degree of feeling for the work.^[3] Food, as a common symbol in life, tends to fall into the rut of bland narratives. However, short food videos of overseas Chinese take a unique perspective of "how foreigners evaluate Chinese food", making people feel fresh among familiar things. Statistics show that 91% of the videos have multiple scenes, going beyond individual food tasting sessions to show the process of making the food and the stories of the people behind it. In one video, Yu Qi in Finland shows her family working together to dig the soil, bury the chicken, fire it, put it out of the pit and try the meat, where the Finnish family plays the dual role of experiencing Chinese food and making it, while the audience experiences the "birth of the chicken" through the hands of others. It is through this defamiliarization presentation method that the short food videos of overseas Chinese update the audience's understanding of food, get rid of the restriction of habituation, and adopt a unique and creative way to let people get new discoveries in the things that are "familiar".

3.2.2 *Dissipation of stereotypes in attitude change*

In terms of the evaluation of food, 1% of the videos indicate that they do not like it, 5% consider the food to be average and 94% show an overall liking. In addition to the explicit attitudes of liking, the videos don't deliberately avoid general comments about individual foods. Rice noodles, white fungus, and tripe are often hard to be accepted for foreigners. From the overall presentation of the content, the evaluation of the food is relatively objective. In addition, 14% of the videos show a change of attitude, from disbelief and rejection before tasting to shock and love after tasting. For example, they changed their dislike of Chinese hot breakfast after trying the bun and soya milk. This strategy of resorting

to contrast shows the implication of reducing the "other stereotype" of culture. Stereotypes are relatively simplistic attitudes that ignore differences in detail and can be seen as expectations, beliefs or overgeneralizations about the characteristics of other cultural groups.^[4] There is no doubt that the foreigners in the video have certain stereotypes about Chinese food due to their own culture, but it is after the tasting of the food and the explanation of the culture behind it that these stereotypes are dissipated. Thus, this strategy of resorting to contrast in the video shows the effectiveness of food culture communication while highlighting the deliciousness of Chinese food.

3.3 Low-level framework

3.3.1 Cultural identity resorting to language

Language originates from a specific culture and is a symbol of a particular cultural identity. The use of linguistic symbols in the video can be understood in two ways. Firstly, the use of Chinese dialects by overseas Chinese themselves indicates their own cultural identity while evoking a sense of cultural identity shared with the audience. For example, Mimi from Sichuan often refers to her German husband as "gua wa zi". Here culture is an unconscious habit, an act, and an expression of cultural identity. Secondly, the use of Chinese by foreigners shows the cultural acceptance from other countries. The foreigners in the video often use poor Chinese to pronounce the names of dishes and praise the deliciousness of the food. Here the language functions as a form of emotional communication, reflecting an effort to approach a heterogeneous culture. Overall the use of Chinese language symbols in the video shows the overseas Chinese's affirmation of their home country's cultural way of life and the foreigners' acceptance of Chinese culture.

3.3.2 Symbolic attraction to the audience

From the use of audiovisual symbols, 83% of the videos use special effects, and 77% of the videos use both simultaneous sound and background music. The live sense of visual symbols enhances the audience's sense of participation, while the vividness of auditory symbols plays a role in setting the atmosphere and rendering emotions. In terms of creative content, 93% of the videos do not contain commercials, while 7% of the videos have commercials. In terms of title grammar, 34% of the titles used exclamatory sentences, 18% of the titles were in the form of questions, and 16% of the titles used the compound form of exclamations plus questions and thus completed the setting of suspense. For example, "When the British in-laws met Shanxi cuisine, they were too scared to eat the rice cakes!" "The Iranian sister-in-law is here for dinner again! This time, I gave her a whole Chinese chicken claw, see if she dares to come back next time?" In addition, the use of words such as "can't stop", "conquered", and "shocked" is a strategy to exaggerate to

enhance the attractiveness. In terms of the choice of dishes, hot pot, which is representative of Chinese cuisine, appears most frequently, while "challenging" foods such as snail noodles, preserved eggs and chicken feet satisfy the audience's curiosity. The abundance of information nowadays also means the relative lack of attention, and the competition for virtual space and media time makes the content on the platform follow the thinking of traffic, and obviously the production of overseas Chinese food short videos also implies this logic.

4. THE DOUBLE MEANING OF THE FRAMEWORK CONSTRUCTION

The framework involves selection and prominence, and the food narratives of overseas Chinese reflect both their subjective consciousness of spreading Chinese culture and follow the basic logic of flow. On the one hand, the visualization of daily life reflects the awareness of overseas Chinese to share their good life, the act of sharing Chinese food reflects the cultural subject consciousness of overseas Chinese to break through the individual, and the harmonious and different images of Chinese and foreign food culture exchange reflect the group's identification with the cultural identity of their home country and the awareness of cross-cultural dialogue. On the other hand, the use of audiovisual symbols, the setting of title grammar, the selection of dishes and the insertion of advertisements show the commercial attributes and fan effects of overseas Chinese food short videos embedded in digital platforms. Thus we can see that overseas Chinese who have implanted national emotions have consciously practiced cultural communication, and with dual cultural backgrounds they see the possibility of Chinese and foreign cultural exchange and integration, but still follow the mindset of platform traffic in the process of visualizing and presenting their food sharing behavior. Therefore, how to balance online traffic and real-life practice, so that overseas Chinese can reap commercial benefits and motivate their cultural communication is the most important thing to consider when amplifying the role of this group in foreign communication.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Jürgen Habermas once said in "The Past as the Future" that "different cultural types should transcend the limits of their respective traditions and fundamental values of their forms of life and respect each other as equal partners in dialogue."^[5] The short food videos of overseas Chinese show the exchange and collision between two heterogeneous cultures, and also provide a possibility to examine our own culture from the perspective of the other. From the comments on the coexistence of rejection and love of Chinese food, we can see that only by trying to understand the differences and common points can we break away from ourselves. The

Chinese-Western dining scene reminds us that cultural differences do not always impede dialogue, and that unity and diversity are more like two sides of an equally important coin. This reflects that the ultimate goal of cultural communication is not to be accepted completely but to gain understanding and respect on the premise of recognizing differences. This inspires us to establish a new concept of communication based on the diversity, equality and inclusiveness of civilizations, so that we can "transcend civilizational barriers with civilizational exchanges, transcend civilizational conflicts with mutual appreciation, and transcend civilizational superiority with civilizational coexistence" and thus construct a new practice of international communication of Chinese culture in the context of civilizational exchanges and mutual appreciation.^[6]

6. CONCLUSION

Food symbols are not only regional, but also have spiritual commonality, which is both the expression of internal culture and the sharing of universal meaning. Taking food as a medium can not only effectively spread the charm of food culture, but also bring an extension effect for the spread of higher spiritual culture. We can see the commonality and integration of cultures in the short videos of food released by overseas Chinese, which reveals that we should turn to a communication concept of civilizational diversity and inclusiveness, and use cultural exchange to facilitate cultural communication. However, this group does not have the ability to structure narratives yet, and the communication practice faces the challenge of flow thinking. Therefore, to

elevate the cross-cultural narrative of overseas Chinese to foreign communication requires not only the official attention to this group but also their own transformation from the spontaneity to the consciousness of cultural communication.

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