

# A Study on the International Communication of Chinese Culture by Japanese Self-media in the Context of New Media

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**Abstract.** Under the background of new media, the advantages of self-media in cultural communication have become more and more obvious, and the way of communication of cultures of different countries has changed a lot. How to better realize cross-cultural communication in the new media era has attracted much attention. Nowadays, foreigners in China are playing their own role in spreading Chinese culture with their unique perspectives and methods. This paper takes Japanese self-media works in China as an example, analyzes the contents of their China-related documentaries, discusses the characteristics and advantages of such works in cross-cultural communication, and looks forward to how better to realize cross-cultural communication through self-media in the future, so as to promote the cultural exchange between countries and the understanding and recognition of foreign cultures.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, with the continuous development of network technology and new media, new media are widely used by their convenience and play an important role in international communication. With the increase of China's international influence, many self-media publish videos about China through new media platforms such as "Weibo", "Youku", "Bilibili" and so on, to spread Chinese culture. Among them, expatriate self-medias are telling China's stories from their unique perspectives and in unique ways, providing new ways for the world to learn about China. Many of them make videos to show foreigners' experiences of living in China and engage in active cross-cultural communication with their audiences. Japanese director Ryo Takeuchi's life documentary is not only popular among viewers but has also attracted much attention from scholars in recent years. His masterpiece "The Reason I Live Here" has been widely acclaimed for its honesty in documenting the stories of many foreigners living in China and Chinese living in Japan.

In the current context of new media, many international studies on social-media focus on the commercial value of self-media such as brand collaboration and internet celebrity marketing [1-3]. Chinese domestic studies have focused on cultural value, most of the expatriate self-media studies in China has focused on the current status, characteristics and impact of self-publishing communication [4-6]. Li (2022) focuses on the operation status and operation strategy of foreigners' self-media in China, but also categorizes video themes and contents [7]. Lu (2023) focused on analyzing the "China"-focused works on the YouTube channel "Living in China", and analyzed their videos by using the analysis software

Gephi to modularize the English vocabulary in the video titles [8]. Yuan and Tian (2023) selected representative videos and comment texts to analyze the textual dialogue mechanism between multimodal texts more microscopically based on textual dialogue theory [9]. And there are not many textual analyses of self-media video content.

This paper takes Ryo Takeuchi's documentary "The Reason I Live Here" (hereinafter referred to as "The documentary") as the object of study, and explores the characteristics of cross-cultural communication of expatriate self-marketers in China by analyzing the content of this online video, to provide a reference for the international dissemination of Chinese culture in the era of new media.

## 2. Case study

The documentary mainly records the daily life and interviews of foreigners in China and Chinese in Japan. Among them, the Chinese section tells the "Story of China" in its unique way by filming the lives of the Japanese people in China, which has become a successful case of international dissemination of Chinese culture.

### 2.1 Daily life of foreigners in China: spreading Chinese culture

#### 2.1.1 Depicting China's nature and humanities

The documentary depicts China's customs and people through the scenes of foreigners' lives in China. For instance, Mr. Okawa (Season 2, Episode 113 of the documentary) is a photographer who has been living in

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Danba for a long time. Along the way, he introduces the cuisine and other local culture. Following Mr. Okawa's footsteps, the unique and beautiful house of the chieftain was built hundreds of years ago, and the Beauty Valley of Four Girls Mountains also came into view. His close interaction with the locals is a natural display of China's ethnic minorities. Another main character, Mr. Yamaguchi (Season 2, Episode 149 of the documentary), lives in Dali, China. The camera starts with the blue sky and white clouds of Dali, all the way to the Erhai lake and the beauty of the Cangshan Mountains, followed by the streets of the old city and the Erhai Gate, as well as the fireworks on the eve of New Year's Day, and the beautiful sunrise on New Year's Day morning with the Erhai lake and the mountains in the background from a high vantage point. Yamaguchi proudly describes Dali as a place with good water, good air, a good natural environment, and the "three things" of "quietness, peace of mind, and happiness". Mr. Asano (Season 2, Episode 156 of the documentary) lives in Beijing as a cartoonist. His comics are set in Beijing, and he spends his days off walking through the streets of Beijing shooting street scenes. The documentary shows the new tall skyscrapers in Beijing on one side, and on the other side, there are scenes of old Beijing neighborhoods full of life. He likes Beijing very much because he thinks the charm of Beijing is that history and modern architecture blend well here. By capturing the daily lives of Japanese in China, this self-media work successfully depicts the natural and humanistic landscape of China, where "every blade of grass and every tree is a landscape, and everything has a feeling".

### 2.1.2 Telling Chinese traditional culture

The work also captures the elements of traditional Chinese culture that are embedded in the daily lives of foreigners in China and tells the story of traditional Chinese culture by filming every aspect of their lives. Miss Saya (Season 1, Episode 23 of the documentary), the main character living in Shanghai, likes to spend her free time relaxing in the Tianzifang which is one of the most distinctive historic districts in Shanghai. As she walks into Tianzifang, the statue of the ancient painter Tianzifang and the cluster of old buildings with a long history around it, Saya says she loves the atmosphere of old Shanghai. Then she walked into a tea store that she liked very much. The store was decorated in an antique Chinese style, filled with Chinese tea and a variety of teapots and bowls. She admired the Chinese tea cups and marveled at the beauty of Chinese tea utensils.

Miss Saori (Season 2, Episode 157 of the documentary) is a Japanese woman who switched from modeling to working as a Chinese medicine practitioner in Shanghai. The scene starts with the director walking into a traditional Chinese medicine hospital where Saori is about to treat a patient. Right off the bat in front of the camera, she explains in fluent Chinese that there are many schools of Chinese medicine, including osteopathy and acupuncture, and then uses a special orthopedic gun to treat a female patient with an osteopathic treatment for her pelvis, followed by acupuncture for a patient with muscle pain.

At Saori's home, she served her famous Chinese medicine for tumors instead of tea. Saori has two refrigerators in her home, and when she opened them, they were full of her herbal medicines. She demonstrated the process of mixing herbs in milligrams. She has mastered a variety of Chinese medicine treatments, including osteopathy, acupuncture, and ear acupuncture. Hayato (Season 2, Episodes 176 and 177 of the documentary), the band's drummer who moves around China, has a hobby of seeking out local traditional food, so following his performance itinerary, the audience can see traditional snacks that are featured throughout China. Examples include Beijing Spring Cake, Guiyang Black Bean Hot Pot, Wuhu Steamed Rice. Mr Nishida (Season 1, Episode 66 of the documentary) is a Japanese student who is learning "Xiang Sheng", and practicing and performing "Xiang Sheng" is his daily routine. There are many scenes of him in a long shirt standing on a stage performing "Xiang Sheng" as he strives to convey traditional Chinese art and culture. Their daily lives have long been permeated with a strong sense of traditional Chinese culture.

## 2.2 Interviews: expressing reasons for living in China

### 2.2.1 Getting new motivation and opportunities

Mr. Mochizuki (Season 1, Episode 25 of the documentary), a hotel executive, responds to the question of why he lives in China by saying that he feels a new motivation in China. He says that people will stop growing without motivation. Mr. Yasuda (Yasuda) (Season 2, Episode 133 of the documentary) is a famous Japanese potter who has been living in Jingdezhen for more than a decade, having moved to China after a long stay in England. He contrasts the ease of living in Japan with that in England, which is not a good environment for artists. He says that "excitement" comes in the process of development. Jingdezhen gives him this "stimulus", he continues: "The city is full of the energy of young people and the love of porcelain". In addition, he emphasizes: "I came here because there are a lot of new opportunities in China and I am looking forward to these new things. I don't feel old here." The vibrant and thriving Chinese environment makes him feel that he is still young too. He says firmly, "There is no reason for me not to live here." Nakamura (Season 2, Episode 107 of the documentary), a young man who has started his own business in China, says that he has seen all sorts of "massive things" in China since he arrived. He was overwhelmed by the rapid development of China. He believes that the young people who are starting businesses in China are very passionate, which is something that cannot be found in the Japanese environment of "older men" who commute to work "in the streetcar".

Mr. Tsukino (Season 2, Episode 187 of the documentary) commented that "young Chinese people are very enthusiastic and their ideas are very positive". Yoshida (Season 2, Episode 110 of the documentary), who also started his own business in China, talks about how China is growing and becoming richer and stronger. This

makes him feel that there are a lot of “possibilities” in China, which is very attractive. Those who have chosen to work and live in China agree that the booming Chinese society has brought them a new motivation and given them more opportunities for development.

### 2.2.2 *Realizing a higher value in life*

The 71-year-old Mr. Kawasaki (Season 2, Episode 119 of the documentary) is an agricultural expert who lives in a village called Xiaoliugu in Henan Province and researches organic cultivation and recycled agriculture. He summarizes in one sentence that the reason for living in China is to realize the value of life. He says that when he worked for a large company before retiring, he felt that he was just a “cog” in the wheel and that he had not been “touched in this way” in China. He hypothesized that if he were to return to Japan to enjoy his old age, he would feel that his life would be meaningless and that his work in China would be more meaningful to him. In China, he has successfully cultivated pesticide-free tomatoes, which have not yet been developed in Japan, and he has also developed organic wheat technology that has surpassed that of Japan. He says, “This is the best time of my life because I have a real feeling that I am contributing to the modernization of agriculture in China. It is a pleased thing.”

Mr. Chiba (Season 2, Episode 186 of the documentary) is a soccer coach who gave up his once comfortable middle-class life to move to China. He founded a soccer training institute to realize his “dream” of creating a good environment for teenagers to play soccer. He said: “I don’t want to say who is trained by me, this is what I don’t need to say. The key thing is that the more children who like soccer and sports in Chinese society, the happier I am. It’s not only the people who are good at the skill who can continue, we want to create the environment where the people who like it and the people who work hard can continue.” Regarding the value of life, here’s what he says: “Human value is not something that others decide by others or by prices. Value is created, no matter what you do.” He is striving to “create” higher personal values in China.

Ms. Yuka Hoshimoto (Season 2, Episode 145 of the documentary), is a housewife who married from Japan to Nanchang, Jiangxi Province. However, instead of enjoying her life as a noblewoman in Jiangxi, she chose to start her own business in Shanghai. Yuka founded an early childhood education school that focuses on AI education, and commutes between Nanchang and Shanghai all the time. When interviewed about starting her own business, she said, “I, as a woman, should have my own things to do”. She similarly mentioned the value of life, saying that now “her value is reflected”. Those who chose to come to live in China have realized a higher value in life and gained a meaning in life that is uniquely their own.

## 3. Cross-cultural communication characteristics of Japanese self-media works in China

### 3.1 Unique and varied storytelling

As the main characters of the documentary are both guests and hosts in China, each of them is an observer and a participant in life. When they encounter situations or unfamiliar things in China that they have never encountered in their own countries, they will compare their own cultures and feel surprised and new to them. This is the feeling of the “outsider” who is outside the community to which the insider is subordinated [10]. However, on the other hand, those who have lived in China for a long time are not “isolated entities suspended above the living world”, but have become “participants in it” [11]. When it comes to life in China and topics that are closely related to their lives, in some areas they are even more specialized and in-depth than the Chinese. This kind of multi-dimensional life experience of the main characters in the documentary shows China in a more three-dimensional way and spreads Chinese culture in an objective way.

The documentary is seemingly simple, but full of diverse content. There are different life experiences of international students, researchers, entrepreneurs, office workers, housewives, freelancers, and other people. It captures the face of the first-tier big cities and includes life in remote mountainous areas, rural towns, and other parts of the country. The content of life ranges from the basic clothing, food, housing, and transportation of the protagonist’s day, and goes deeper into the main activities such as study, work, and research. The work covers a wide range of content such as food, natural landscape, architecture, traditional arts, ethnic minority customs, etc., successfully enriching the “Story of China”.

### 3.2 Natural and real experiential

Although the documentary does not specifically introduce Chinese culture, it naturally shows Chinese culture in the details of the daily lives of foreigners in China. Unlike traditional large-scale cultural documentaries, this self-media work does not do too much artistic processing, but shows China in a natural and simple way like a “plain face”. In addition, there are many informal interviews in the documentary, in which director Ryo Takeuchi chats with the protagonists at any time during the filming of their daily lives. This kind of chatting interview is more relaxed and casual, and can naturally express the real feelings of foreigners in China towards China “without realizing it”. Their natural expression attracts many foreign viewers’ interest in China.

On the other hand, the program focuses on people, showing the real life of foreigners in China. Through the camera, viewers seem to follow the main characters to “experience” their daily lives and get the feeling of being in the real world. The real feelings here include not only the actual events but also the emotions felt by the audience [12]. The prerequisite for making viewers who have never

really experienced the same life experience feel the same way is that people think it is real enough. The documentary has successfully restored reality with this kind of civilianized expression, which makes the audience feel close and easy to resonate with and empathize with.

## 4. Conclusions

With the development of information technology, the form of media communication has changed dramatically. Self-media releasing videos related to cross-cultural communication through new media platforms has become a trend today. Through analyzing the online works of Japanese self-media in China, it is found that their contents are characterized by significant experience and storytelling. It tells rich Chinese stories and spreads Chinese culture objectively and neutrally through the unique and diversified life experiences of the “foreigners”; it naturally and realistically restores the daily life of the main characters, and shows the real Chinese style. It is this outstanding experiential and storytelling feature that makes foreign media works have strong cross-cultural communication power.

Drawing on the experience of cross-cultural communication of foreign media in China provides new ideas for the international communication of Chinese culture in the future. First of all, for overseas audience groups with great cultural differences, in addition to the traditional Chinese “I” as the first-person introduction to Chinese culture, we can combine the culture of the “outsiders” of the comparative audience group, and use the diversified narratives of “host + guest” to tell the Chinese story, so as to achieve effective communication. Additionally, the use of civilianized narratives that are closer to people’s lives can give overseas audiences who are unfamiliar with China a more immersive experience, closer, and create empathy, thus enhancing their in-depth understanding of China.

From “my” story to “our” story, from the introduction of food, clothing, housing, and transportation to the search for the truth of the community of human destiny, the international dissemination of Chinese culture is not just a tool for unilateral cultural export but should become a “field” for world exchanges and mutual appreciation.

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