

# Analysing the Overseas Spread of Chinese Songs on TikTok Using Textual Analysis

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**Abstract.** The prevalence of short videos around the world, especially the huge success of TikTok overseas, has provided a brand-new opportunity for the spread of Chinese culture and China's national image. Chinese songs, with their natural communication attributes and carrying Chinese cultural values, have spread rapidly around the world using TikTok as a communication platform and have crossed language and cultural barriers, touching people's hearts deeply. It is with this unique charm that Chinese songs have successfully attracted the love and attention of overseas people through TikTok. In this era, the communication of China's national image should proactively seize the opportunities of this era, make full use of various emerging communication platforms and channels, change the passive situation of overseas communication of the national image in the past, and take a more active and proactive attitude to show the world China's charisma and elegance, so as to enable the world to better understand China's culture, values, and development achievements.

## 1 Introduction

Short videos, due to the characteristics of visual content and fragmented distribution, have taken a comparable mainstream position at present, and have had a great impact in the world. Whether it is international or domestic communication or even ideological and cultural penetration, short videos play an important role in it. According to third-party platform Sensor Power, TikTok has reached 1 billion users worldwide as of September 2021 and is widely popular in the United States, Europe, and Southeast Asia [1].

As a new communication media platform, TikTok's cultural dissemination function highlights its great advantages. As its overseas market continues to expand, more and more Chinese culture is being spread overseas. In May 2020, TikTok launched a challenge to cover the lyrics of 'One Cut of Plum,' (yi jian mei) which quickly gained attention [2]. Soon, the 'XueHuaPiaoPiao' hashtag on the platform attracted the attention of tens of millions of people [3]. Netizens enthusiastically uploaded videos of themselves singing 'A Cut of Plum', leading more people to imitate it. This old Chinese song has thus quickly exploded on overseas social media and has become a current people's song. The song 'One Cut of Plum' has a rich Chinese cultural background and the rhythms and vocals of a traditional Chinese song, and this song's popularity potentially spreads traditional Chinese culture. TikTok, as a

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media platform, already has a relatively important position overseas and an extremely large traffic pool, which has laid the foundation for TikTok to spread Chinese culture overseas. It is worth noting that the spread of Chinese songs overseas is popular, such as ‘A Cut of Plum’ and other traditional Chinese songs have triggered a very big impact overseas, and even ‘Unity is Strength’ and other Chinese ‘Red’ (In China, red is the colour stand for the Communist Party of China) songs have spread widely overseas, and TikTok has contributed to the effective spread of Chinese ideology.

In conclusion, at present, TikTok plays a key role in China's overseas communication, its huge traffic pool and influence allow China's voice to spread overseas widely. Chinese songs, as an excellent carrier of Chinese culture and Chinese ideology, have been successfully popularised overseas through short videos, and play an important role in the spread of Chinese culture. The research in this paper focuses on the overseas communication of Chinese songs on TikTok, and research in this direction will be of some help to China's overseas communication strategies and methods.

## 2 Literature review

At present, there are relatively in-depth studies on the overseas dissemination of Chinese culture and Chinese ideology at home and abroad, and the research areas are vary. Among them, due to the important position of TikTok in China's overseas communication, a large number of references use TikTok as a platform to do further research and fully affirm the important role of TikTok.

In response to the platform itself, Schwarz proposes using the concept of platform logic to think about the differences between platforms and traditional media logic. ‘The choices of how they are organized and how they are cashed in, what kind of content is taken down and why, the technological constructions of what is allowed and what is prohibited, are real and substantial interventions in the contours of public discourse’, influencing people's perceptions of facts such as ‘who we are’ and ‘what we should be’, and reconnect social networks and resource allocation [4]. It fully demonstrates the difference between the platform itself and traditional media, and shows a significant impact on mass communication.

Liu Jianping and Liu Jiang also pointed out that short videos, with the characteristics of convenience and ease of use, as well as social attributes and emotional functions, make it possible for everyone to be the producer, disseminator, and recipient of images, and to be the cognisant and constructor of the national image, and it is an important force for constructing the national image [5]. It shows the significance and importance of short videos for China's national image communication.

Han Jingzi and Jiang Yongxia et al. conducted a study on the international dissemination of China's excellent traditional culture in 2023, and they pointed out that: the hashtag #China on TikTok has a total topic exposure of more than 48.5 billion times, and the content of the videos includes traditional Chinese crafts, city attractions, food, animals, economy, and so on, and there is even street photography of various colours, which is rich and diverse, showing a real and beautiful China for users around the world. The widespread use of TikTok in overseas markets has made China no longer the singular image reported by Western media, but the voice of China to the world through its own media [6]. It shows that TikTok is of great significance to China's overseas communication and has successfully enabled a large number of Chinese elements to go out. In 2021, Fu Rao responded to the explosion of ‘One Cut of Plum’ by suggesting that ‘One Cut of Plum’, a Chinese golden song born in the 1980s, has exploded into popularity overseas after more than three decades, and has become the first Chinese song to become a hit on Western social media. As another cultural output phenomenon after ‘Li Ziqi’, differently, whose cultural output is based on ‘content as king’, the cultural output of ‘One Cut Plum’ ‘overlooks content’ and ‘focuses on dissemination’.

The cultural output of ‘One Cut Plum’ is different from that of ‘Li Qiqi’, which is based on ‘content is king’ [7]. It shows the success of the cultural export of ‘One Cut Plum’ as an example and provides a reference basis for the dissemination of subsequent Chinese songs.

In addition, Coleman introduced the concept of modeling, defining it as ‘infectious images, videos, and catchphrases that spread rapidly across the Internet under constant imitation and modification by users [8]. This theory, in turn, has been widely used in the study of the diffusion of short videos and is considered one of the explanatory reasons for the emergence of a large amount of parody UGC content.

In summary, a large number of scholars have discussed and explored the platforms and contents of overseas communication, but at present, most of the overseas communication of Chinese songs on TikTok is in the form of individual cases, which is seldom categorised as a whole category and described and introduced in a general way. This paper will try to rely on the textual analysis method to conduct an effectual analysis of the overseas dissemination of Chinese songs and explore the attitudes of overseas audiences towards them.

### 3 Methodology

This paper attempts to explore the attitudes and emotional tendencies towards Chinese songs expressed in the comments, sifting through the comments under popular TikTok videos. Based on this, in this paper, the author will use text analytics to filter comments from popular Chinese song videos in TikTok. In addition, a review of the literature found that textual analyses indeed approaching mainstream status as a research method [9]. This conclusion also shows the wide use of textual analysis and the fact that it has a certain degree of scientific validity and reliability.

In this paper, ENG (amount of interaction) is used as the main criterion for video screening, and 10,000 ENG is selected as the standard line. After that, comments were crawled by the Python crawler technique using keywords as search criteria, and the total number of comments crawled totaled 7,287. Data processing and cleansing were carried out through manual review and screening of invalid comments by using computer technology to enter banned words, resulting in the screening of 6,734 comments with a total word count of 34,037. Afterward, the data was imported into SPSSAU for textual analysis, and the comments were textually analysed through textual sentiment analysis, textual cluster analysis, word cloud analysis, and so on. The results were also cleaned to remove invalid and erroneous information using SPSSAU's own sentiment lexicon and disabled lexicon as well as the sentiment lexicon and disabled lexicon supplemented by browsing the comments. Finally, the results of the analyses were exported.

### 4 Results

When the data is processed by using SPSSAU, it can be found that after sifting out the banned words, it can be found that except for SONG, LOVE is the most high-frequency word in more than 6,000 comments. The top ten words in terms of word frequency are shown in the following table: (see Table 1)

**Table 1.** Word frequency table

Number	Syncopated	Word frequency	Emotional orientation
1	song	525	leaning towards goodwill
2	love	162	goodwill
3	like	152	goodwill
4	nice	74	goodwill
5	beautiful	69	goodwill
6	good	66	goodwill
7	singing	65	leaning towards goodwill
8	voice	57	leaning towards goodwill
9	different	56	leaning towards goodwill
10	please	55	goodwill

Not only that, when text sentiment analysis was performed using SPSSAU, the top 1000 high-frequency words were selected, of which 361 were positive/positively oriented, 65 were negative/negative oriented, and the rest were neutral words. In terms of word frequency, positive words are also much higher compared to negative words. It is easy to find that positive words occupy a larger proportion of these words according to this finding. The TF-IDF (term frequency-inverse document frequency) analysis also reveals that the importance of positive and negative high-frequency words is roughly the same, with about equal reference values. The top 10 positive and negative high-frequency vocabulary word counts are shown in the following table (see tables 2 and 3):

**Table 2.** Negative word table

Number	Syncopated	Word frequency	TF-IDF	Emotional orientation
1	cina	39	0.43	leaning towards malice
2	wrong	26	0.64	malice
3	hell	10	0.49	leaning towards malice
4	chinoise	9	0.38	leaning towards malice
5	tired	9	0.57	leaning towards malice
6	literally	9	0.49	leaning towards malice
7	triste	9	0.49	leaning towards malice
8	listening	8	0.43	leaning towards malice
9	stuck	7	0.56	leaning towards malice
10	peux	7	0.54	leaning towards malice

**Table 3.** Positive words table

Number	Syncopated	Word frequency	TF-IDF	Emotional orientation
1	song	525	0.38	leaning towards goodwill
2	love	162	0.51	goodwill
3	like	152	0.46	goodwill
4	nice	74	0.69	goodwill
5	beautiful	69	0.56	goodwill
6	good	66	0.60	goodwill
7	singing	65	0.45	leaning towards goodwill
8	better	36	0.61	goodwill
9	thank	32	0.65	goodwill
10	best	30	0.52	goodwill

However, it is worth noting that when using SPSSAU to analyse the social network relationships, this research found a deserve attention phenomenon, although there is some correlation between the words 'love' and 'like', which obviously express positive emotions,

and 'China' and 'Chinese', the correlation between them does not reach a particularly high level. On the contrary, the association between 'love' and 'song' is very strong, showing a high degree of correlation.

## 5 Discussion

It is easy to see from the analysis that the most frequent word 'love', apart from 'song', carries a distinctive emotional signal and expresses the personal emotions of the commentator. A review search by word location also reveals that most of the semantics are positive emotions. In addition, the rest of the high-frequency words, such as nice, god, best, and like, also conveyed more clearly positive emotions. And, just in terms of the frequency of vocabulary occurrences, there are also relatively more positive words. Although there are still some not-so-positive comments maligning and vilifying China, the large number of positive comments shows that foreign netizens are highly enthusiastic and interested in Chinese songs. This behaviour facilitated Chinese voices, culture, and connotations to global dissemination.

Most of the time in the past, China's cultural output has been strongly resisted by foreign netizens due to geopolitical reasons, such as the Song of the 13th Five-Year Plan which aims to promote China's 13th Five-Year Plan, and China's national image advertisements placed in New York's Times Square, which did not receive good feedback. The unpopularity of Chinese songs may be attributed to the phenomenon of cultural discount, which is prevalent in the cross-cultural dissemination of cultural products [10, 11]. Cultural discount occurs when a cultural product is highly favored within its native context but fails to resonate with audiences from different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the predominantly negative portrayal of China in Western media exacerbates this issue, as many Western audiences tend to exhibit an inherent resistance to Chinese cultural products. However, the dissemination of Chinese songs overseas is more unofficial and packaged in an entertaining way, using TikTok as the medium of dissemination, which greatly reduces the public's resistance to it, and receives the public's praise and love. And this kind of praise and favourite actually does not directly point to the improvement of China's national image actually. The social graph shows that words such as 'China' and 'Chinese' are rarely associated with strong favourite elements such as 'like' and 'love' directly. Most of the time it needs to be correlated through words like song, songs, etc. as a bridge. It is easy to see that most of the foreign netizens' favourites are limited to the songs themselves rather than the hidden ideology behind them. Therefore, fewer comments are directly and explicitly pointing to the love and praise of China.

It should be noted, however, that the songs themselves contain ideological and cultural content, and therefore have a subtle influence on the people to whom they are transmitted. The dissemination of this series of Chinese song videos has had an impact on China's national image to a certain extent and has subconsciously changed the Western public's perception of China's image in a softer way. Most of the overseas media's coverage of China is somewhat biased, or at least not objective and comprehensive. But as Lippmann said, the media is a spotlight, and people will look wherever the light hits. As a result, the incomplete and non-objective coverage of overseas media has led to a one-sided and backward view of China among overseas people, and many of them even still have the same understanding of China as in the last century. The influence of China's official media in the world is weak compared to that of the BBC, CNN, etc. and does not improve the one-sidedness of overseas people's understanding of China well. At this time, a series of videos promoting various Chinese cultures through the medium of TikTok suddenly exploded in popularity and provided a brand new opportunity for China's overseas communication to develop. With the help of TikTok, China's overseas communication has changed the official communication and propaganda method of the past, instead, it has switched to an entertaining way, and through the way of short videos, it has made overseas people much less resistant to China's culture

and values, and successfully spread the word, which is a very important thing for China's overseas communication, representing that China's overseas communication has gradually opened up the layers of blockade by overseas media. This is very important for China's overseas communication, which means that China's overseas communication has gradually opened up the layers of overseas media blockade, and the real China has been visually transmitted to the overseas people by short videos and other means, reaching the recipients' minds directly.

In conclusion, through in-depth textual analysis of as many as 6734 comments, the researcher can clearly find that foreign netizens show a very high degree of goodwill towards Chinese songs. Most of them expressed their love and appreciation for Chinese songs in their comments, and such positive feedback is undoubtedly a kind of affirmation of Chinese songs, which is also what China's overseas communication hopes to see. However, how to form a closer and stronger correlation between this goodwill and China's national image is a key issue that needs to be addressed in the process of Chinese songs and even China's national image going abroad. After all, it is not enough just to make foreign netizens like Chinese songs; this is only the first step. This research also needs to leverage this goodwill to further enhance the recognition and reputation of China's national image in the international arena, so that the world can have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of China's culture, values, and development achievements. Only in this way will Chinese songs be able to better fulfil their roles as a cultural carrier and make a greater contribution to the dissemination of China's national image.

## 6 Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the current explosion of short videos, TikTok has undoubtedly provided a brand new and highly promising communication channel and platform for China's national image and cultural communication. With its unique charm and wide influence, it has greatly facilitated the dissemination and promotion of Chinese culture and values overseas. In this process, a series of videos created with Chinese songs as the core content sparked extremely passionate discussions overseas and quickly became the object of hot debates among overseas netizens. These videos not only show the unique charm of Chinese songs, but also create a brand new opportunity to improve China's national image. However, how to ensure that overseas netizens' goodwill towards Chinese songs can be maintained at the current level while successfully transforming this goodwill into recognition and love towards China's national image is a new and challenging issue given to Chinese songs going abroad. To solve this problem, it is necessary for more excellent Chinese workers to actively go abroad to show the world China's cultural heritage and charm so that overseas people can have a more comprehensive and in-depth knowledge and understanding of China's national image. Only through the unremitting efforts of all parties can the international dissemination of Chinese culture and the enhancement of the national image be truly realized.

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