

# IN WHAT WAYS MIGHT INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROMOTION OF CHINESE CULTURAL IDENTITY? -- BASED ON THE DISCOURSE INVESTIGATION OF OVERSEAS SHORT VIDEOS ON MAZU CULTURE

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**Abstract:** The "Mazu Belief" has been designated as China's first intangible cultural heritage in the religion category. A comprehensive analysis of the discourse among communicators and users of 226 Mazu culture short videos on the TikTok reveals a deliberate effort by communicators to reinforce the connection between overseas Chinese and China. This effort is manifested through the dissemination of "the common belief in Mazu culture" with the objective of fostering a sense of unity and belonging among the Chinese nation. The high-frequency keywords in the user discourse of the short videos exhibit a strong overlap with those of the communicators, thereby forming a key discourse with beliefs in Mazu culture. The conclusion indicates that the overseas short videos of Mazu culture provide a communication paradigm of intangible cultural heritage for forging the sense of Chinese national community through the path of "empathetic narrative and synergistic communication".

**Keywords:** Meizhou island; The Mazu Culture; Overseas short video

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage constitutes a significant component of fine traditional Chinese culture. It is frequently intricately intertwined with specific national festivals, ritual practices and custom, which elicit common national sentiments and a sense of belonging among individuals. Intangible cultural heritage can function as tourist destination symbols, thereby attracting visitors[1]. Concurrently, Intangible cultural heritage can facilitate cooperation and exchange among overseas Chinese communities, thereby reinforcing their cultural identity. It can be posited that Intangible cultural heritage exerts a substantial, cohesive influence on both Chinese nation and overseas Chinese communities. In particular, Intangible cultural heritage has been demonstrated to play a pivotal role in the process of cultural preservation and promotion of Chinese cultural identity by facilitating the transmission of history, fostering emotional connections, and catalyzing development. Intangible cultural heritage serves as a unifying force, transcending the boundaries of ethnic groups to foster a shared cultural heritage. It functions as an emotional bond, a foundational value, and a practical conduit, thereby contributing to the advancement of Chinese cultural identity. Ma culture is characterized by a pronounced sense of inclusiveness and openness. This cultural symbol is not only emblematic of China's coastal regions but also boasts a substantial following among overseas Chinese communities. Annually, Mazu cultural festivals and Mazu temple fairs are held around the world, attracting the participation of many overseas Chinese. These activities have been shown to enhance the understanding and identification of overseas Chinese communities with Chinese culture, as well as to promote exchanges and integration between different ethnic groups and regions. This provides a robust foundation for the promotion of Chinese cultural identity.

Secondly, an examination of discourse practices in short videos abroad concerning Mazu culture, as they relate to Chinese cultural identity.

## 2 THE PRACTICE OF CHINESE CULTURAL IDENTITY DISCOURSE IN OVERSEAS SHORT VIDEOS ABOUT MAZU CULTURE

Technology is defined as the production and dissemination of discourse. Prior to the contributions of McLuhan and Innes, the materiality of the medium existed in a state of obscurity. Kittler, drawing upon the perspectives of McLuhan, Innes, Shannon's information theory, and Foucault's discourse analysis, ultimately the concept of Aufschreibesysteme[2] serves to expand the materiality of the medium into the materiality of communication. Specifically, Shannon's information theory is principally "based on the Shannonian theory of sources, channels, reception, as well as input, transmission, and output of information"[3]. In contrast, Foucault underscored that the content of discourse, rather than the thoughts or reflections of the speakers, is of paramount importance[4]. He argued that what systematically organizes discourse from the outset is of greater significance. In this manner, Kittler offered an examination of the technical substance of "Aufschreibesysteme". Peters conceptualizes this "Aufschreibesysteme" as a "substrate for the cultivation of all other media"[5].

The advent of Internet technology has precipitated a transformation in traditional media, such as newspapers and television, towards a digital format. In this context, "brief video content has attained a notable degree of popularity

among media outlets and their users"[6]. This popularity can be attributed to the ability of these brief videos to deliver new information with expediency, catering to the diverse informational needs of individuals in a timely manner. In the context of the digital era, short videos have emerged as a significant medium for the international communication of Mazu culture. The utilization of Internet technology has rendered short videos a prominent medium for information input, transmission, and output, as well as for discourse rules such as "everyone can have a voice" and "the communicators and the users can fully interact". The manner in which information is input, transmitted, and output, as well as the principles of discourse, such as the notion that all individuals have the capacity to speak and that communicators and users can engage in full interaction, are evidently distinct from those observed in traditional media, such as television. The materiality of short videos has been shown to lead to a change in the way Mazu culture is practiced, and its discourse practice of Chinese cultural identity unfolds in the "Aufschreibesysteme" of the communicators and the users.

The present study focuses on the discourse of Mazu culture in short videos created for overseas audiences. The researcher collected a total of 487 Mazu culture overseas short videos on the TikTok overseas platform from February 20, 2024, to February 20, 2025. After eliminating duplicated content and selecting representative content, 226 Mazu culture overseas short videos were selected for analysis. The discourse production of Mazu culture short videos is examined in terms of the communicator's discourse and the user's discourse respectively.

## 2.1 The Production of Discourse by Short Video Communicators

Initially, the titles of 226 brief videos underwent lexicographic processing, and subsequently, the top 30 keywords of the Mazu culture overseas short video, including "Mazu," "Pilgrimage," "blessing," among others, were obtained. The top 30 keywords based on social network analysis Methods by SPSSAU. Finally, the high-frequency keyword network structure of overseas short video titles and contents related to Mazu culture was obtained.

Firstly, the prevailing folk belief among Chinese communities worldwide posits that Mazu culture serves as a pivotal conduit in the interaction between Chinese communities. The global Chinese diaspora shares analogous beliefs and ceremonies surrounding Mazu. The ceremonial attire, musical compositions, and choreographed performances exhibit shared cultural elements. These common ceremonies constitute a pivotal component in the transmission of Mazu culture. Through these ceremonies, individuals can enhance their comprehension and acknowledgment of Mazu culture. The following investigation sought to determine the most frequently used and central keywords in the title content of A-Ma culture overseas short videos. The analysis of the high-frequency keyword network structure of the title content of the aforementioned videos revealed that the terms "Mazu," "cross-strait," and "compatriot" were the most frequently used and central keywords. The terms "Mazu," "cross-strait," and "compatriot" are the top three keywords in terms of frequency and degree of centrality. These terms are the centerpiece of the cultural exchange and emotional connection of the Chinese diaspora's Mazu beliefs. This phenomenon indicates a deliberate effort on the part of communicators to fortify the connections between the motherland and the Chinese diaspora through the medium of short videos showcasing Mazu culture in foreign countries. The more commonalities the general Chinese diaspora has in material aspects such as lifestyle, language and script, interests and demands, and economic development, and especially in spiritual aspects such as attitudes, emotions, and values, the easier it is to develop a sense of belonging to and identification with Chinese culture[7]. In the context of Mazu faith, the Chinese diaspora exhibits a notable degree of uniformity in their spiritual inclinations, particularly concerning their devotion to Mazu[8].

Secondly, the cultural practice of blessing, a shared heritage of the Chinese diaspora worldwide, finds expression in Mazu culture. This tradition is characterized by its focus on the pursuit of blessings through ceremonies and rituals. These practices reflect not only the aspirations of individuals for a better life but also the spiritual qualities and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. The centrality of high-frequency keywords such as "blessing" and "Pilgrimage" is also emphasized, and the discourse of Mazu praying for blessings by Chinese diaspora has been incorporated into Chinese culture by disseminators. The practice of blessing constitutes an integral facet of China's rich cultural heritage, serving not only as a manifestation of faith and cultural legacy but also as a conduit for articulating collective sentiments and seeking solace. Furthermore, it functions as a medium for individuals to articulate their shared sentiments and seek solace. The cultural practice of bestowing blessings reflects the Chinese diaspora's profound love for life and their collective aspiration for a hopeful future. This positive and uplifting spiritual trait is emblematic of the universal pursuit of "blessing" among the Chinese populace. The Chinese populace partakes in the blessing rituals of Mazu culture, including "giving blessings," and "Pilgrimage." These rituals utilize common symbols of blessing culture, which play a pivotal role in the promotion of Chinese cultural identity.

Thirdly, high-frequency keywords such as "song and dance," "parade," "activities," and "folklore" fully reflect the integration and development of folk activities of the Chinese diaspora with Mazu culture. Therefore, it can be posited that folkloric pursuits serve as a pivotal conduit for the transmission of Mazu culture. The organization of folk activities by Global Chinese is a notable aspect of their cultural expression. These activities include collective sacrifices and round-the-border patrols, which are performed on occasions such as Mazu's birthdays or ceremonies. The significance of these practices lies in their ability to facilitate a deeper understanding of the connotations and the significance of Mazu culture among participants. The collective participation of global Chinese in Mazu folklore activities has been demonstrated to foster enhanced cohesion and a sense of belonging among this demographic. These activities contribute to the cultural enrichment of Chinese society and facilitate exchanges and mutual assistance among its members.

Fourthly, the high-frequency words "Putian," "Meizhou," and "Ancestral Temple" reflect the cultural homogeneity and

spiritual ties of the Mazu Ancestral Land Culture. Mazu culture, originating from Meizhou Island in Putian, Fujian Province, is a salient example of marine culture, embodying the traditional virtues and humanistic spirit of the Chinese nation. The spirit of "virtue, goodness, and love" in Mazu's beliefs is highly compatible with the concepts of "solidarity, unity, tolerance, and interdependence" in Chinese culture. Consequently, the cultural heritage of the Mazu ancestral land has emerged as a pivotal spiritual bond, fostering a sense of unity among Chinese individuals both within the nation and in global communities. The exchange and dissemination of Mazu culture has been demonstrated to enhance the sense of identity and belonging of overseas Chinese to their homeland. Furthermore, it has been shown to promote the exchange and mutual understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures. The cultural exchanges that occur within the Mazu ancestral land serve to transcend the conventional boundaries of space and time, thereby fostering a sense of Chinese cultural identity, with the ancestral land serving as the pivotal nexus for these cultural interactions.

## **2.2 An Examination of the Discourse Production of Users of Short Videos**

The researcher then proceeded to compile the comments of overseas Mazu video users into a list of words to identify the top 25 high-frequency keywords. These keywords were then regarded as the nodes of the discourse construction of overseas Mazu video users. To obtain the network structure of high-frequency keywords in the discourses of overseas Mazu video users, the researcher conducted a social network analysis through SPSSAU. An analysis of the data revealed a high degree of overlap between the most frequently used keywords in overseas short videos about Mazu and those used by the disseminators of these videos. The most notable of these keywords were "Mazu," "Miaozhou," and "belief." A close examination of the social network structure reveals that the terms "Mazu," "Meizhou," "faith," and "cross-strait" occupy a central role in both the communicator's discourse and the user's discourse of overseas Mazu short videos.

In order to further explore the key discourse surrounding Mazu cultural beliefs, the study obtained three clusters following the analysis of high-frequency keywords with multi-dimensional scaling. The keywords in the clusters are combined with the content of short videos to summarize three major themes of short video users' discourse: constructing a platform for the dissemination of Chinese culture through the Mazu blessing ceremony; promoting in-depth interactions between Chinese and overseas Chinese through cultural exchanges on Mazu; and constructing a "spiritual home for Chinese around the globe" through the Mazu ancestral land.

Firstly, The primary objective is to establish a platform for the dissemination of Chinese culture, with the Mazu Prayer Ceremony serving as the primary medium. A close examination of the discourse of short video users reveals a prevalence of words related to the act of praying for blessings. These include "hope," "blessing," "gratitude," "peace," and "pray." The Mazu ceremony has emerged as a symbolic representation of collective memory. The legend of Mazu embodies the historical memory of the Chinese nation's maritime exploration and solidarity. Annually on the 23rd day of the third month of the lunar calendar, during the Mazu's birthday celebration, Chinese people worldwide engage in rituals, peace parades, and "Mazu's return to her mother's home" activities, thereby establishing a collective identity characterized by "shared feelings, shared sacrifices, and shared destinies."

Secondly, the promotion of in-depth civil interaction among Chinese people around the world through Mazu cultural exchanges is imperative. The study revealed that terms such as "cross-strait," "culture," and "faith" were frequently utilized in the discourse of short-video users. Mazu serves as the cornerstone of the shared spiritual beliefs held by the two sides of the Strait of Taiwan region. Since the inauguration of direct passenger flights between Meizhou Island and Taichung Port in 2009, it has become a customary practice for adherents to travel to Meizhou Island via these direct flights to pay homage to their ancestors. Furthermore, both sides of the Strait of Taiwan region have implemented initiatives to promote youth engagement in cultural innovation. These initiatives include the "Cross-Strait Mazu Cultural and Creative Design Competition," which aims to encourage young individuals to develop intellectual property (IP) products that incorporate A-Mazu elements. Furthermore, the "Mazu Culture Study Camp" has been initiated, with the objective of fostering a new generation of cultural inheritors by facilitating the participation of cross-strait youth in the learning of Meizhou ceremonies and the experience of circumambulation of Taiwan region.

Thirdly, the Mazu Ancestral Ground is utilized to establish a "global Chinese spiritual home." A preliminary investigation of the vocabulary employed by users of short videos reveals the presence of such terms as "ancestral temple," "mainland," and "cross-strait." The Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple, a pivotal institution in the Mazu faith, has initiated a global initiative with the objective of establishing the "Global Mazu Temple Association." This initiative entails the integration of the resources of the Meizhou Ancestral Temple with those of overseas Mazu temples. It is designed to facilitate the coordination of joint ceremonies, cultural exchanges, academic seminars, and other activities. The primary aim of this initiative is to establish a synergistic network of "Ancestral Temples and Sub-spiritual Temples." This network is intended to promote the spirituality of Mazu. The Mazu Ancestral Temple has established a collaborative network with the Branch Spirit Temple, fostering a synergistic relationship between the two institutions. The objective of establishing a "global Chinese spiritual home" at the Mazu Ancestral Places is twofold: first, to eliminate geographical distance through the medium of cultural identity, and second, to unite the emotions and value consensus of the global Chinese through common beliefs. Meizhou Island, as the core of the culture of the Mazu Ancestral Lands, will not only be an "Ancestral Temple" in the geographic sense, but also a "Spiritual Home" in the hearts of global Chinese that transcends time and space.

### 3 THE CONSTRUCTION PATH OF THE CHINESE CULTURAL DISCOURSE SYSTEM BY OVERSEAS SHORT VIDEOS ON MAZU CULTURE

#### 3.1 Content Creation: Activate Cultral Identity through "Empathetic Narrative"

Firstly, the search for content that resonates with faith. As posited by the communicator, Mazu culture—as the common spiritual belief of global Chinese—has become an important link in global Chinese folk interaction. Therefore, in order to promote Chinese cultural identity, overseas short videos should seek content in Mazu culture that can elicit emotional resonance, thereby profoundly enhancing the global Chinese diaspora's connection to traditional Chinese culture. The concept of "faith resonance" refers to the process of fostering cultural identity and spiritual connection among groups through the shared utilization of faith symbols, ritual practices, and emotional experiences. In the context of the dissemination of traditional beliefs, such as Mazu culture, the concept of "faith resonance" has been demonstrated to transcend geographical, generational, and cultural boundaries, thereby facilitating the transformation of individual emotions into collective identities. The recurrent depiction of Mazu attire, effigies, choreographed gestures, ritual observances, and other emblems fosters the establishment of enduring visual memory points. A salient example is the Putian City 2023 10,000-person Mazu parade, which serves to reinforce the collective cognizance of the sanctity of Mazu culture. Concurrently, it enables international audiences to experience cultural resonance, thereby engendering a propensity for interaction and promoting the comprehensive identity of Chinese culture.

The fundamental principle of faith resonance entails the sublimation of individual spiritual needs into collective identity through the "trinity" of cultural symbols, ritual practices, and emotional ties. Mazu culture utilizes "common human values" as a unifying element, thereby establishing a closed-loop system encompassing "sacred experience, cultural consumption, and identity." In the future, the "Faith plus" model will be explored, with the objective of establishing an emotional bond between Chinese people worldwide, thereby realizing the transition from "cultural resonance" to "symbiosis of destiny."

#### 3.2 Cooperation Mechanism: Build a Collaborative Network of "Ancestral Land+Folk+Platfor"

Initially, the linkage network formed by overseas Chinese was the primary focus. In the analysis of communicators' discourse, it is common for communicators to use words such as "Meizhou Island" and "Ancestral Temple" to enhance the credibility of the message. This practice demonstrates that both communicators and audiences recognize the authority of the A-Ma Ancestral Ground. Consequently, the inter-temple network of the A-Ma ancestral temple in Meizhou can serve as a platform for overseas A-Ma temples, hometown associations, and Chinese-language schools to develop an "Ancestral Places Plus" approach, which fosters a sense of community. The Ancestral Places initiative has the potential to catalyze the development of folk cultural exchange activities and overseas short video platforms through a synergistic process.

Secondly, the cross-border exchange of culture and information is imperative. A discourse analysis of short-video users reveals that overseas Chinese nationals exhibit a high degree of recognition of the mainland's social order, economic prosperity, and comfortable lifestyle. For instance, individuals from other countries have expressed admiration for the mainland's social order, as evidenced by the Mazu parade and other events. Therefore, the key to promoting Chinese cultural identity lies in facilitating a sense of flourishing China among the audience through the cross-border sharing of Mazu culture. This approach enables overseas audiences to experience the spiritual connotation of Mazu culture and the prosperity of the motherland through the integration of "Mazu culture plus" China's development.

### 4 CONCLUSION

The evolution of media technology has undergone a transition from the "dual medium of imagination and reality" to the "material machine medium" to the "invisible technological medium"[8]. The advent of short videos as a medium reliant upon Internet technology has enabled the establishment of an interactive network between the communicator's discourse and the audience's discourse. This "communicative" discourse rule of short videos has effectively strengthened the role of Mazu culture in its identification with Chinese culture. The study determined that the fundamental objective of Mazu culture short videos is to integrate Chinese cultural symbols into the daily life and spiritual world of compatriots of Taiwan region and overseas Chinese through the medium of "empathetic narrative, collaborative dissemination, and firm awareness." In the future, it is necessary to continue to iterate the content form and strengthen the technological empowerment, so as to ultimately realize the deep transformation from "viewing" to "identification," and from "cultural consumption" to "cultural identity." Ultimately, it will realize the profound transformation from "viewing" to "identification" and from "cultural consumption" to "cultural identification." It will provide a communication paradigm of non-heritage culture for the promotion of Chinese cultural identity. This is a meaningful discussion on the promotion of Chinese cultural identity by non-heritage culture under the background of deep mediaization.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

**FUNDING**

This work received the support of "Fujian Provincial Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs 2024 General Project", Project No.: FJMZ202408.

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