Russian bloggers' mirror of Chinese culture: cultural communication and image construction from the perspective of others

O espelho da cultura chinesa nos blogueiros russos: comunicação cultural e construção de imagem a partir da perspectiva dos otros

El espejo de la cultura china según los blogueros rusos: comunicación cultural y construcción de imágenes desde la perspectiva de los demás

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Abstract

In the era of the rise of self-media, the perspective of others plays an important role in the shaping of national image and cross-cultural communication. Russian bloggers provide new possibilities for the international dissemination of Chinese culture and the construction of China's national image. In this research, we select the five most watched videos of Russian bloggers with the largest number of followers on the YouTube platform related to China as the research objects, and through the analysis of video content and audience comments, we explore the "stereotypes" that exist in the overseas audience from the dimensions of the audience's emotion and the content of the videos. Through video content analysis and audience comment analysis, we summarize the Chinese cultural elements, expressions and opinions that overseas audiences are interested in. In this way, we can effectively weaken the cultural differences between China and Russia, optimize the theme structure of cultural communication, play a good role in building China's national image, to promote the development of Chinese culture in Russia and other Russian-speaking countries.

Keywords: Russian bloggers, overseas audience, Chinese image, cross-cultural communication.

Resumo

Na era da ascensão da automídia, a perspectiva dos outros desempenha um papel importante na formação da imagem nacional e da comunicação intercultural. Os blogueiros russos fornecem novas possibilidades para a disseminação internacional da cultura chinesa e a construção da imagem nacional da China. Nesta pesquisa, selecionamos os cinco vídeos mais assistidos de blogueiros russos com o maior número de seguidores na plataforma do YouTube relacionados à China como objetos de pesquisa e, por meio da análise do conteúdo do vídeo e dos comentários do público, exploramos os "estereótipos" que existem no público estrangeiro a partir das dimensões da emoção do público e do conteúdo dos vídeos. Por meio da análise do conteúdo do vídeo e da análise dos comentários do público, resumimos os elementos, expressões e opiniões culturais chineses nos quais o público estrangeiro está interessado. Dessa forma, podemos efetivamente enfraquecer as diferenças culturais entre a China e a Rússia, otimizar a estrutura temática da comunicação cultural, desempenhar um bom papel na construção da imagem nacional da China e promover o desenvolvimento da cultura chinesa na Rússia e em outros países de língua russa.

Palavras-chaves: blogueiros russos, público estrangeiro, imagem chinesa, comunicação intercultural

Resumen

En la era del auge de los medios de comunicación propios, la perspectiva de los demás desempeña un papel importante en la formación de la imagen nacional y la comunicación intercultural. Los blogueros rusos ofrecen nuevas posibilidades para la difusión internacional de la cultura china y la construcción de la imagen nacional de China. En esta investigación, seleccionamos los cinco vídeos más vistos de blogueros rusos con el mayor número de seguidores en la plataforma YouTube relacionados con China como objetos de investigación y, a través del análisis del contenido de los vídeos y los comentarios de la audiencia, exploramos los "estereotipos" que existen en la audiencia extranjera a partir de las dimensiones de la emoción de la audiencia y el contenido de los vídeos. A través del análisis del contenido de los vídeos y del análisis de los comentarios de la audiencia, resumimos los elementos, expresiones y opiniones culturales chinos que interesan a la audiencia extranjera. De esta manera, podemos debilitar eficazmente las diferencias culturales entre China y Rusia, optimizar la estructura temática de la comunicación cultural, desempeñar un buen papel en la construcción de la imagen nacional de China y promover el desarrollo de la cultura china en Rusia y otros países de habla rusa.

Palabras clave: blogueros rusos, audiencia extranjera, imagen china, comunicación intercultural

1. INTRODUCTION

The national image is composed of multiple aspects, which are relative and dynamic. It depends on the internal development of the country's economy and science and technology (Velazco, 2022; Tolmachev et al., 2022), as well as external factors such as cultural influence in the international community (Liu&He, 2006). Based on the theory of communication, the construction of a national image is a cross-cultural communication phenomenon, characterized by encoding in our culture, decoding in their culture. The process of encoding and decoding determines the effectiveness and acceptance of the information conveyed (Wu & Chelyapina, 2023). Shaping a positive national image in this process is an important means to enhance the country's soft power (Larry, 2015). Stuart Hall formally proposes the "encoding-decoding" theory in "Decoding and Encoding of Television Discourse" published in 1973, combined Marxist political economy, Louis Althusser's ideological theories, cultural hegemony of Gramsci and Saussure's linguistic theory. He believes that information production is the process

of "encoding—dissemination—decoding", and focuses on the "decoding", highlighting the subjective initiative of the audience when receiving information, and advocates that "encoding" should serve "decoding" (Li, 2013).

First of all, encoders need to consider the cultural background and habits of the decoders, selecting appropriate expressions and content to ensure accurate understanding and acceptance of the information (Bekbenbetova, 2022; Alimova et al., 2023). In the context of globalization, the boundaries between countries are gradually becoming blurred. Only by focusing on the development of one's own culture can one gain the right to speak on the international stage. However, cultural conflicts or cultural shock often occur in the process of promoting culture to go to sea (Yao & Wang, 2014). Therefore, the contextual culture of overseas audiences should be taken into account in the overseas communication of Chinese culture. China, as the representative of the high-context culture country, has a long history and rich culture, but this also leads to the fact that its culture is difficult to be decoded by countries with low-context culture. How to resolve the contextual differences and establish effective cross-cultural communication is not only an urgent theme for China, but also a problem worthy of consideration by every country at present to formulate targeted overseas cultural communication strategies (Gong, 2017).

At the same time, the guidance of the encoders to the decoders can also improve the adaptability of foreign cultures and create external for the construction of a positive national image. There are two main forms of shaping national image in cross-cultural communication: one is "self-shaping", in which the main body of communication is the country; The other is "other-shaping", in which the main body - other countries. There are always cognitive differences in the image of a country between "self-shaping" and "other-shaping" (Wang, 2006). In order to maximize this deviation, the consideration of cultural context differences cannot be based solely on subjective evaluation of other countries' history or culture. It is necessary to collect views and feedback on domestic cultural communication from the perspective of "others" to provide reference for building an objective national image.

National image is produced in the process of long-term interaction between two countries, which is essentially an information resource (Fang & Luo, 2017). The importance of

national image construction has become increasingly prominent in the process of the rise of a country. As China's largest neighbor, Russia has the geographical advantage of spreading Chinese culture. In order to dispel stereotypes in cross-cultural communication, summarize the current situation of cross-cultural communication in China, update the image of China in the international community, and optimize overseas communication strategies, this article selects videos related to China by Russian bloggers on the video-sharing platform YouTube, along with comments on these videos, as the research objects. Text and content analysis are conducted, extracting keywords from the comments and performing frequency and sentiment analysis, thereby revealing the objective phenomenon of decoding Chinese culture overseas, and finally suggestions are put forward for the encoding of Chinese culture from the perspective of others and the establishment of a positive national image.

2. REPRESENTING THE OTHER IN MEDIA STUDIES LITERATURE

The concept of "the other" is prevalent in Western postcolonial theory, where Europeans identify themselves as "self", and the people in the colonies as "other". In essence, "the other" encompasses all individuals and entities outside of oneself. It serves as a reference point that is distinct from yet connected to the subject. Through the perspective of "the other", one can gain a better understanding and definition of the self (Hall, 2001). "The other", as a perspective different from "self", facilitates intercultural dialogue and aids in shaping national identity.

In the era of self-media, everyone can learn about other countries' cultures via the internet, especially through influential bloggers. Overseas bloggers possess a wide audience reach and strong authority, granting it more "discourse rights" than Chinese media in the dissemination of Chinese culture abroad. These overseas bloggers are not only "encoders" who choose and process Chinese cultural information, but also "decoders" who re-interpret information through mass communication. Through the process of "encoding" and "decoding" information, unique national cultural symbols are formed, which further strengthen the recognition and expand the dissemination of Chinese culture by overseas audiences (Boulding, 1956)

3. METHODS

YouTube is the world's largest video-sharing website and one of the most representative early self-media platforms. The platform's creators maintain a steady level of attention and influence. YouTube has a large fan base in Russia, where self-media is characterized by greater affinity and spontaneity. In 2019, the Russia Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM, 2019) published data on the use of YouTube video hosting in Russia. The study showed that 58% of respondents watch YouTube (are its users). Exactly one-quarter of respondents use it daily, and one-fifth use it several times a week. The highest proportion of active users is among respondents aged 18-24 (24%), with the proportion slightly lower for respondents aged 25-34 (20%). In the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups, YouTube usage rates are 88% and 90%, respectively. YouTube has become the "television of the 21st century" for Russians.

Therefore, this study selected the video content of five Russian bloggers on YouTube as information sources, with the main purpose of analyzing the dissemination of Chinese culture in Russia, exploring how to establish a national image from the perspective of others, and proposing solutions to overcome contextual barriers in cross-cultural communication. This study uses a sampling survey method, selecting the top five Russian bloggers related to China on the YouTube platform (data as of April 30, 2024) based on their number of fans. In descending order of the number of fans, they are Petya English, Zubarev, Pognali!, lisav, and Laowai. The study examines the content related to Chinese society, history, and culture presented from an outsider's perspective by these Russian bloggers, the selective presentation of Chinese culture, and the impact of this selection on the audience. The specific information about the Russian bloggers is as follows:

Table 1
Detailed information of selected Russian bloggers.

Channel	Number of followers (m)	Number of Views	Number of videos
Petya English	4.35	2,403,265,832	185
Zubarev	2.92	2,596,030,151	3814
Pognali!	1.32	417,143,642	126
lisav	4.85	254,187,544	236
Laowai	1.99	54,343,828	647

Source: research data

Among the five bloggers selected for this study, Petya English, lisav, and Laowai are Russians who live, work, or study in China. These individuals use a narrative style that records the daily lives of foreigners in China, presenting Chinese stories from an accessible international perspective. The other two bloggers visited China as tourists, offering perspectives more representative of Russian groups with limited knowledge about China.

This study selected the five most-viewed China-related videos from each of the five bloggers as research samples. These videos, which are published from an outsider's perspective, represent different types of content with the highest view counts. They can reflect the impact of an outsider's perspective on the dissemination and perception of Chinese culture on the YouTube platform. The specific information about the video content is as follows:

Table 2
Detailed information of the 5 selected video samples.

Headlines of videos	Channels	Number of views (m)	Topics of videos
Another China. Spend three days in an RV in mainland China at the Shaolin Temple and the slums of old Shanghai	Pognali!	370	Travel experience
Street food in Guangzhou, China	Laowai	350	Food culture
Petya + Iris, wife from China! my story	Petya English	282	Cultural difference
China's social rating. What role does he play?	Zubarev	106	Social Issues
Languages: My Stories and Study Tips // English, Chinese, Korean and more	lisav	72	Language learning

Source: research data

The primary methods of this research are based on content analysis and textual analysis. Using Python, real-time comments from five videos were crawled, with the sampling date set for April 30, 2024. For each video, 100 comments were selected. After data cleaning, which involved removing special characters, punctuation marks, emojis, and stop words, a total of 329 comments were obtained. These comments were then segmented using the Micro Word Cloud online segmentation tool, and the main relevant keyword phrases were manually filtered and their frequencies counted to analyze audience feedback.

In terms of content analysis methods, this study first conducts sentiment analysis on the video samples, then analyzes the sentiment of the audience's comments on the videos and

establishes corresponding coding. The number of video samples in this study allows for manual coding to determine sentiment words. In content analysis, sentiment words are keywords used to identify and classify the emotional tendencies in the text. These words help researchers understand the emotional states expressed in the text, such as happy, good, angry, sad, afraid, hate, and shock, etc. In this study, the analysis of sentiment words can further reveal the outsider's perspective of Chinese culture presented by Russian YouTubers and how Chinese culture is manifested in different contexts. This, in turn, provides a foundational experience for constructing China's national image.

Table 3
Emotional analysis coding table.

Emotional Orientation of Videos	1 Positive 2 Negatives 3 Neutral
Emotional Orientation of Comments	1 Positive 2 Negatives 3 Neutral

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Keyword analysis is often used in text analysis and can, to a large extent, reflect the audience's attention and attitude towards the video. Based on the above research methods, we obtained the keyword cloud as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *China's social rating. What role does he play?* cloud words in video comments.

Blogger Zubarev is known for his interesting and diverse content. His video content often focuses on pop culture and current trends, making him popular among a wide audience. Its video *China's Social Rating What role does he play*? With 1.06 million views, the blogger introduced China's social rating system to overseas audiences in the video. Social rating is a system that scores citizens based on their behavior. Scores range from 500 to 800, with high rankings granting various privileges., such as credits and online store discounts, while a low ranking may limit access to certain services. This topic immediately aroused a lot of discussion in the overseas community. *Surveillance, garbage, slavery, and nonsense* reflect the negative attitude expressed by the audience towards this video. Many netizens have a wait-and-see attitude towards this video. @alexmercer4578 commented: *At first, ratings were negative for almost everything. No impact let's see what it will be like in 10-20 years*. @Slavik_93 commented: *It reminds me of Black Mirror: people walking around smiling at everyone and raising each other's ratings*.

Picture 2. *Petya + Iris, wives from China! My Story* **cloud words in video comments**

Petya and Iris, as a Chinese-Russian multinational couple, share their experiences of traveling around China in an RV on their channel. Their videos show stories about travel and adventure. In the most popular video *Petya + Iris, wife from China!* In My Story, Petya shared the story of how he met and fell in love with his wife. The video has been played 2.82 million times. Judging from the high-frequency word cloud of audience comments in Figure 3, *China, Story, and Gentleness* appear the most frequently, among which China appears 14 times, and *Gentleness, Happiness* and *story* appear 9 times each. *Wonderful, happy, beautiful*, and *wish you happiness* reflect the audience's love and best wishes for the bloggers. Among them, @user-xs3eo8ue8k commented: *Everyone is in love with Iris, some Many envious people*, I hope you live happily together. @user-wq6gv5vw1c left a message: *Your Iris is simply a miracle, so cute, we got to know the world through the Internet*. Some viewers also expressed their gratitude. In response, @user-dv8et7bp9c said: *Thank you for your wonderful story, and I wish you happiness and health. I am 69 years old this year, and this is the first time I have seen China like this*.

Among the linguistic symbols, the Chinese language is profound and profound. In the eyes of overseas audiences, learning Chinese has become the most direct way to understand Chinese culture. Therefore, the audience showed great interest in the Chinese learning skills shared in the video of blogger Lisa (username lisav). Keywords such as *learning, interesting, like, motivation* and *thank you* appear more frequently, showing the audience's love for Lisa's video in this issue. From the appearance of high-frequency keywords such as *admire, awesome, motivation* and *understanding*, it can be seen that the audience has shared the difficulties encountered in the language learning process shared by the blogger Lisa, which has resonated with the broad audience. . The Chinese learning method shared by blogger Lisa showed the charm of language to many viewers. Many viewers gradually learned about China and began to learn Chinese. In addition, many netizens left messages in the comment area expressing that learning Chinese is a very interesting process. For example, netizen @lalchips commented: *I really admire people who know more than two languages. Now I admire Lisa even more*. @incognito-lena commented: *When I look at Lisa, I have hope for a bright future. Hope, how young we are!* Comment from @staynetheguitarist: *I study Chinese, English and Spanish. In*

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fact, when you see something in the language you are studying and really understand what is written in it, It's quite a shock. It's a very pleasant feeling, as if life is opening a new door for you that you haven't opened in a long time. This feeling alone is worth learning a new language, by the way. In a word, Chinese is really not difficult.

Among the five selected Russian bloggers, the most viewed video is about travel experience, the video Another China. *Spending Three Days in the Shaolin Temple and the Slums of Old Shanghai in a RV in Mainland China* has been played up to 3.7 million times. From Figure 5, *China, Life, Video, Thank you, Blogger, interesting*, and *travel* are high-frequency words in the comments of this video, among which China appears 22 times, video 13 times, Thank you 12 times, and travel 6 times. This type of video attracts both audiences who are familiar with Chinese tourism and those who are not familiar with it. For these two audiences, the travel experience in different places and the interesting interactions between video bloggers and Chinese people because they speak Russian and English are quite valuable. Judging from the entertaining and interesting audience comments, this type of video demonstrates the charm of language in crossing cultural communication and emotional barriers. As netizen @ilyaaleksandrov4759 commented: *As someone who has studied and lived in China for about 8 years, I officially declare: This is one of the best questions about China and reflects the entire essence of the Chinese people*. @rian5574 commented: *I am deeply impressed by your story-telling style, so simple and sincere*. The content of the video about the cultural experience in Shaolin Temple and the content related to tourist symbols still remain in the general overseas people's perception of Chinese culture. *Shaolin Temple, Martial Arts*, etc. @user-qw1qx6sy9n commented: *A very interesting show that covers a lot about food, countries and people and their culture. I loved it! Thank you for a wonderful, educational tour!*

After analyzing the keywords of audience comments, this study can determine the impact of video content on the emotional tendency of the audience through coding. Different types of video content have different communication effects, so they also affect the emotional tendency of the audience.

Table 4
Emotional tendencies of selected video samples and audience.

Headlines of videos	Topics of videos	Emotional tendencies	Emotional Orientation of Comments (%)		
			Positive	Negatives	Neutral
Another China. Spend three days in an RV in mainland China at the Shaolin Temple and the slums of old Shanghai	Travel experience	Positive	90	3	7
Street food in Guangzhou, China	Food culture	Positive	47	9	44
Petya + Iris, wife from China! my story	Cultural difference	Positive	90	3	7
China's social rating. What role does he play?	Social Issues	Neutral	43	21	36
Languages: My Stories and Study Tips // English, Chinese, Korean and more	Language learning	Positive	74	9	17

Source: research data

The above analysis of emotional tendencies shows that in videos with the theme of travel experience, bloggers show positive, and the positive emotions in audience comments reach 90%. The author believes that travel experience content itself is exploratory and can arouse the curiosity of the audience. RV travel experiences in different areas such as old Shanghai and Shaolin Temple present different cultural experiences to the audience, from cities to representative Chinese traditional culture Shaolin Temple, so the audience has positive emotions after watching it. In the video comments on cultural differences and transnational marriage themes, the audience showed an emotional tendency consistent with the video, with positive emotions reaching 90% respectively. For videos with social issues as the theme, the comment area also showed positive emotions, with 43% of positive emotions, while the videos had no obvious emotional characteristics. In videos with the theme of food culture, positive emotions also appeared in the comment area, accounting for 47% of positive emotions and 9% of negative emotions.

Combined with word frequency analysis, it can be found that in comments expressing positive emotions, high-frequency words are mainly interesting, awesome, cool, thank you, love, etc. When researchers analyzed the emotional tendencies of the audience, they found that the audience made comments when they had emotional resonance. Starting from the generation of empathy and identification, it can directly touch the basic emotions of the audience's needs. As shown in Figure 1, in the comments of the video Language: My Story and Learning Skills // English, Chinese, Korean, etc., *Interesting, Like, Inspiring, motivation, thank you etc.* appeared more frequently. These words are derived from people's most primitive emotions, empathy for others' learning experiences and self-reflection.

In the comment, we can also see the audience's praise for the blogger's breaking of stereotypes. One netizen commented: *As a Chinese teacher, I am very happy to have people like Lisa who break stereotypes.* Some netizens also commented on learning Russian: *I am a person who is learning Russian from scratch. I would say this is a very complicated language for me. Speaking was difficult, so I didn't want to learn it, but now I speak it well and I'm proud of it.*

In these comments of the video, most of the audience empathized with the difficulties and obstacles encountered in the process of learning different languages in the video, and the content of the video played a motivating effect on the audience. Language plays a vital role in cross-cultural communication. It is not only a tool for transmitting information, but also carries and reflects the values, traditions and social customs of a culture. By learning and using different languages, people can have a deeper understanding and experience of other cultures, shorten the distance between people, achieve emotional communication, and weaken cross-cultural communication differences (Borodina, 2021; Sergeeva et al., 2021; Stavruk et al., 2023).

As shown in Figure 1, *happiness* and *joy* are in video *Petya + Iris, the wife from China*! My Story was used many times in the comments of the video to describe the blogger and his wife from China. Regarding transnational marriage, a netizen from Nizhny Novgorod shared his views in the comment area: *I really like you and your wife. Such a Slavic hero and the cutest little oriental girl. May your family be harmonious, harmonious and full of love*. Many viewers

expressed their affirmation of the blessing attitude shown by the transnational couple in the video and consider it worthwhile to learn how to eliminate cross-cultural differences on behalf of the people.

Overall, the positive comments mainly focused on expressing love for the Russian blogger's videos, support and gratitude for his views, as well as love for Chinese food and yearning for Chinese culture. Negative comments exist in different themes. In food culture videos, negative comments are mainly about stereotypes of Chinese food culture and questioning the hygiene of Chinese street snacks; in social issues topics, negative comments focused on doubts about China's social rating issues presented in the blogger's video, objections to the views presented, and some viewers questioned the authenticity and implement ability of the China Social Rating System. In the social issue videos where, negative comments are most concentrated, netizens commented: *Guys, don't be fooled by social rating ads*. Negative comments mostly appear in societies where opinions conflict. Among the questions, the content is mostly negative views held by the audience and the video itself.

Bekbenbetova et al. (2022) have noticed that even those who come from the same cultural background as the audience are still questioned when communicating about serious issues such as Chinese society. When a blogger's remarks can cause conflict of opinions and cognitive conflicts, it means that the audience watching the video does not have *fixed thinking*. Blogger content that can cause controversy is more likely to arouse thinking and discussion among a wider audience.

5 CONCLUSION

Symbols play an important role in the dissemination of a country's image and can influence overseas audiences' perception of a country to a certain extent. The China-related content mentioned in the videos of Russian bloggers selected in this article is a kind of cultural symbol through which specific meanings can be conveyed. Through analysis, researchers found that after watching videos of Russian bloggers, overseas audiences' understanding of Chinese culture is mainly based on three types of symbols, namely language symbols, food symbols and

travel symbols. Language is the main tool for cultural communication, and it also serves as a cultural bond to connect different cultural exchanges. The Chinese learning content shared by bloggers is itself an act of spreading Chinese cultural symbols. Bloggers use their own experiences from the perspective of others to provide new perspectives for more Russian audiences who are eager to understand Chinese culture, turning Chinese language and text symbols into a bridge of communication and a source of attraction. The unique identities and Chinese life experiences of Russian bloggers can resonate with overseas audiences, and their diverse cross-cultural backgrounds can help audiences overcome barriers to understanding, which allows them to play a unique role in shaping China's image. Through the understanding of special food culture, overseas audiences understand Chinese food and Chinese culture in cultural differences, and also reflect on local culture in the cognition shaped by the perspective of others. In the context of food symbols, the audience sees and understands the other in this cultural exchange process. In Russian blogger videos, "foreign travel experience" has always been a popular topic, especially for Russian audiences who know little about China and are full of curiosity. This type of video is highly attractive and interesting, such as showing modern life in the city. with a martial art learning experience at the Shaolin Temple.

In overseas social media, Russian bloggers use the "other" perspective to present concepts such as Chinese culture and social development from a first-person perspective, using language, images and other cultural symbols as carriers to construct the meaning of the country's image. space. The process of national image construction is the process of dissemination and reception of information, as well as the cognitive process of the audience. Through research, it was found that the "other" status of Russian self-media bloggers has significant advantages in affecting the cognition and emotions of overseas audiences. To build China's image through other shaping, you can choose to start from the perspectives of education (or the educational philosophy (Volkova, 2023)), food, tourism and leisure, etc., which is closer to life and can arouse emotional empathy among overseas audiences; when discussing social-related issues, due to different cultural and political backgrounds, such topics may cause negative emotions among overseas audiences.

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