

Analysis of Thai Chinese Businessmen's Identification With China in the Context of Maritime Silk Road Development—Take a Cover Interview of @*ManGu Bangkok*, a Mainstream Chinese Language Magazine in Thailand as an Example

LAN Xialing

Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, Nanning, China

Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, Bang Chalong, Bang Phli, Samut Prakarn, Thailand

YAO Ting

Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanning, China

Thai Chinese businessmen are important practitioners and supporters of China's construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, serving as important trendsetters among ASEAN countries with great significance. In this context, this paper analyses and presents the image of Thai Chinese businessmen and their identification with China under the framework of the report and discourse by taking the cover interview of the Chinese mainstream magazine @*ManGu Bangkok* in Thailand as an example, to show the sentiment and sense of belonging of overseas Chinese to their ancestral homeland, and to provide an emotional "link" for China and ASEAN countries in the mutually beneficial cooperation.

Keywords: Maritime Silk Road, Thai Chinese businessmen, Chinese identity, mainstream magazine in Chinese

The Pivotal Role of Thai Chinese Businessmen in China-Thai Economic Cooperation

Thailand is one of China's key strategic partners in the construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The trade volume between Thailand and China has witnessed continuous increase over the past 46 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, with the bilateral import and export

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LAN Xialing, lecturer, College of Southeast Asian Languages and Cultures, Guangxi Foreign Language Institute, Nanning, China; PhD student, Overseas Chinese University of Thailand, Chong Sheng, Bangkok, Thailand.

YAO Ting, PhD, associate professor, School of Culture and Communication, Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanning, China.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to LAN Xialing, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, No. 19 Wuhe Avenue, Qingxiu District, Nanning, China.

volume of goods between China and Thailand in January 2022 was US\$12,351,447,900, an increase of US\$2,202,653,900 or 21.6% compared with the same period in 2021, ranking Thailand the third largest trade partner among the eleven ASEAN countries (China Institute of Industrial Research, 2022). Thai Chinese businessmen play a pivotal role in the economic cooperation and serve as the main practitioners in promoting the continuous development of the China-Thailand Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and the sustained growth of bilateral trade and investment, as well as the integration of China's "Belt and Road Initiative" with Thailand's "Thailand 4.0" and Eastern Economic Corridor development strategies (Wang, 2007). In this context, this paper aims to study the extent to which Thai Chinese businessmen identify with China, so as to build a sense of belonging to the home country of overseas Chinese, which is conducive to identifying emotional links to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with neighbouring countries with an aim to provide a valuable reference for China's foreign communication and serve the development of regional economic cooperation.

Sample Selection of Thai Chinese Businessmen in the @ManGu Bangkok Report

Sample Selection

Taking one of the most influential Chinese language magazines in Thailand, @ManGu Bangkok, to analyze the image of Thai Chinese businessmen and their reporting strategies in its cover interviews as the research object, this paper aims to summarize the extent to which Thai Chinese businessmen identify with China.

Founded in 2012 by the Asia Public Group, @ManGu Bangkok is the Chinese language magazine in Thailand with the largest circulation. With the aim of "promoting Sino-Thai friendship and conveying the voice of China", it was selected as one of the top overseas Chinese media influencers in the first half of 2021 in the *New Media Influence of World Chinese Media 2021* project jointly conducted by China News Service and the School of Journalism of Communication University of China (CUC) (Chinanews.com, 2021). The magazine's cover interviews feature Thai Chinese who have made positive contributions to the political, economic, and cultural exchanges between China and Thailand, and have a certain degree of influence and appeal in Thai society and internationally. The celebrity effect and social influence of them have very significant and practical significance for constructing and actively promoting the interconnection and connectivity between China and Thailand.

Principles of Sample Selection

The samples were selected from @ManGu Bangkok magazine published between 2012 and 2022. The author categorized the Chinese people featured in the 220 issues of @ManGu Bangkok over the 10-year period into three main categories based on text analysis: political leaders, Chinese business leaders, and entertainment stars. Among them, there are 50 interviews with Chinese business leaders in Thailand. Articles containing keywords such as "Chinese families", "Chinese culture", "traditional Chinese customs", "impressions of China", "Sino-Thai cooperation", and "learning Chinese language" were sampled and analyzed.

Frame Analysis on the Cover Story of @ManGu Bangkok on Thai Chinese Businessmen

This article analyses the construction of the Thai Chinese businessmen's "identification with China" by the mainstream Thai Chinese magazine @ManGu Bangkok from the perspective of the framework and textual analysis with the framework analysis focusing on the structure of the articles and the textual analysis emphasizing the rhetorical techniques to present the image of Thai Chinese businessmen in the media.

Double Headlines Build a Positive Image of Thai Chinese Businessmen and Embrace Chinese Cultural Heritage

The main headline is used to present the core or main idea of the article, while the sub-headline is used to supplement the main headline, providing information like the industry, company name, position, and name of the interviewee.

The main headline is mostly action-oriented, spiritual-focused, slogan-oriented, and inspirational. In terms of syntax, when the main headline is a verb-object structured phrase, the predicate verb is the main focus, emphasizing the actions and status of the protagonist to highlight his/her outstanding abilities, such as “叱咤” (leading) in “叱咤金融風雲” (leading the financial trends), “开创”(Pioneering) in “开创泰国电视广播行业新纪元” in “Pioneering a new era in the Thai television broadcasting industry”, etc. When the main headline is a attributive structure, it clearly reflects the definition of the Chinese business leaders' industry, such as “creators of Thailand's landmark buildings”, “‘Chinese dream’ of Thai banking leaders”, “master of Thailand's business”, and “Global Business Pioneer of the Zheng Family in Thailand”, highlighting the important position and authoritative influence of Thai Chinese businessmen in the social economy. The main headline also uses proverbs and idioms to create a variety of effects such as puns, implications, metaphors, symbols, and associations, making the headline concise and profound, thus enhancing the attractiveness of the interview. Examples of this kind are: “Diligence can make up for lack of experience”, “The love between China and Thailand as neighbors”, and “Twenty years to sharpen a sword”, which have a strong Chinese cultural connotation.

Among the 50 cover reports, most of the Chinese enterprises featured in the subtitles have Chinese names, such as “Thai Kai Tai Bank”, whose Chinese name is taken from the “San Yang Kai Tai” in the *Book of Changes*, signifying a good start and steady growth; “Thailand Zhengda Group” is derived from “Guang Ming Zheng Da”, meaning “As righteous as the Heaven and Earth and as bright as the sun and moon”; “Thai Hua Gum (Public) Co.”, the company's name is a symbol of “China and Thailand are close as a family”.

The Opening Chapter Introduces the Background of Thai Chinese Businessmen to Evoke the Sentiment of the Home Country

The cover story of @ManGu Bangkok is often written from the perspective of the audience to resonate them with the interviewee. The narrative focuses on the family business history of Chinese businessmen in Thailand, their feelings towards their ancestral country, and the environment in which they grew up, in order to reflect the changing times and their social context and to show the characteristics of the person through the “spiritual-focused” reenactment of sentences.

The cover interview with Ng Wan Thong, Chairman of Kai Thai Bank, begins with a historical overview of his ancestors as prominent patriotic leaders in Thailand, recounting his great-grandfather Ng Chor Nam's support for Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary activities and his donations to the Tian Hua Hospital and School, and his grandfather Ng Bak Lam's remittances to China to support the patriotic movement during the Japanese Invasion in China. In the cover interview, Xie Guomin, Director of Zhengda Group, talked about “benefiting the nation, the people and the enterprise”, using the theme song of Zhengda Variety Show, which is familiar to Chinese audiences, as prelude to the story about Zhengda Group being the first foreign enterprise to invest in China in 1979, and being a participant and witness of China's reform and opening up.

Modularity in the Framework of the Interview, Presenting a Sense of Belonging to China

The “conversational” text of @*ManGu Bangkok*’s cover story is written in a typical “verbal” repertory style. The interviews are often presented through five modules on “identification with China”, including: “Tell us about your Chinese family background”, “Do you speak or write Chinese”, “What is the biggest influence of Chinese culture on you”, “What kind of cooperation does your business have or will have with China”, and “How do you see China nowadays or what is your message to Chinese readers?”. Through the questions and answers between the interviewers and the interviewees, the emotional attachment of Thai Chinese businessmen to their “Chinese identity” is reproduced in its most authentic form. For example, in the interview with Wong Tien Kwong, Chairman of the Thai Chiu Chow Association, he was asked with the question “What is the important role of the Thai Chiu Chow Association in China-Thailand exchanges?” His answer was:

We have to cooperate with the central government, to let our ancestral country [China] know that we will never forget the Chinese culture, because our roots and our ancestors are there. I am the third generation of the big family, the five generations, including my grandfather, my father, my son, my grandchildren and me, will carry on this sentiment all the time.

In this article, Dr. Wong Tien Kwong’s love for his ancestral country and Chinese culture is expressed strongly through action-based reproduction sentences, presenting his attachment and sense of belonging to his ancestral country in words and actions.

Ending With Emotional Appeal, Emphasizing the Thai Chinese Businessman’s Patriotic Sense and Mission

The closing part of the interview of cover interview of @*ManGu Bangkok* is usually a subjective and descriptive one, describing the overall characteristics of the interviewee, echoing the opening chapter, achieving an effect of “leading” and “prominent” of the interviewee by highlighting the charm of him/her in the changing times.

The interview with Song Pan, Chairman of Asian Cable and Satellite Television Broadcasting Association and founder of True Visions ends with his remark saying that he will actively participate in the “I Love Thailand, Clean Thailand from Me” campaign, with the aim to reverse the negative image and influence of some Chinese people in the minds of Thais, to show the high quality of the new generation of Chinese people and to truly promote Sino-Thai friendship. The closing part is intentionally linked to China, emphasizing Thai Chinese businessmen’s identification with China and their efforts to promote a positive image of China.

Keywords and High-Frequency Words With “Chinese” to Convey a Sense of Identification With China

Five key words were identified based on the text analysis of the sample reports, namely “Chinese family”, “Chinese culture”, “impression of China”, “Sino-Thai cooperation”, and “Chinese language learning”. Among the 50 cover interviews with Thai Chinese businessmen, 35 articles mentioned the influence of the “Chinese family of origin” on their career development; 30 articles mentioned the influence of the good qualities of “Chinese culture”, including the teachings of their ancestors, Confucian culture, and classics; 35 articles mentioned the “impression of China”, marveling at the rapid development and changes in China, its strong economic development, and favorable political environment. Almost every one of them mentioned “Sino-Thai cooperation”, including the friendly cooperation between China and Thailand and the initiatives for the Chinese market. In terms of “Chinese language learning”, 25 Thai Chinese businessmen mentioned about their experiences of learning Chinese language, how their Chinese language skills have helped them in their business, and their high expectations for their future generations to learn Chinese language.

“Chinese Elements” in the Photos, Showing a Strong “Chinese Style”

A statistical analysis of the photos in the 50 cover interviews shows that the Thai Chinese businessmen are mostly dressed in formal suits, presenting the image of the competent industry elite. The background of these photos is mostly set in their office, showing a strong “Chinese style”, for the office is decorated with “Chinese elements” such as porcelain ornaments, Chinese calligraphy, and paintings, and “dragon” shaped gold jewellery lamps. For example, the 93rd cover interview with Dr. Chen Yingquan, Chairman of the Board of Supalai Real Estate in Thailand, shows Chinese books, calligraphy, and paintings written by himself with photos presenting the calligraphy and paintings in his office, expressing a strong classical Chinese atmosphere. With the pictures of people, colours, interview headlines, and other visual language with strong Chinese flavor, they render the “Love for China” of Thai Chinese businessmen.

Features of @ManGu Bangkok's Cover Story About Thai Chinese Businessmen

The cover stories of @ManGu Bangkok are characterized by distinctive personalities, industry characteristics, and features of the times, which effectively showcase the Thai Chinese businessmen.

Positive Reporting in Multiple Genres to Show Distinctive Personalities

Following the principle of focusing on positive report, the magazine strives to demonstrate the historical connection with China, economic and trade relations, as well as their respect and recognition of Chinese culture of the Thai Chinese businessmen, presenting distinctive personalities and contemporary spirits. Through the cover stories of representative Thai Chinese businessmen, it leverages the group effect to extend the influence. In terms of the specific approach, cover stories are presented in the form of special editions, using interviews, feature articles, and other genres to vividly tell the stories of overseas Chinese in different parts of the world with carefully selected language and pictures, showing their unique characteristics and rich cultural connotation.

Select Representatives From All Trades and Professions to Demonstrate Distinctive Features of the Times

The persons featured in those cover stories are from all trades and professions to demonstrate the distinctive features of the times. In the 50 articles, renowned Thai Chinese business leaders, including the President of the Zhengda Group, the Rubber King, and the Gold King, as well as business elites from the finance, construction, media, food, and express delivery industries are featured, depicting a picture of Chinese business people actively working in various fields and industries in Thai society, and showing the important role of Chinese business people in the development of Thai society.

Select a Report Approach That Reflects a Sense of Social Responsibility and Cultural Heritage

High frequency words as “Chinese families”, “Chinese culture”, “impression of China”, “Sino-Thai cooperation”, and “Chinese language learning” used in the 50 cover stories not only reflect the Thai Chinese businessmen's emotional attachment to Chinese identity. The sense of mission and urgency of Thai Chinese businessmen for the transmission and inheritance of Chinese culture is presented in a number of cover reports, especially in the area of family education, where they educate by model.

Chinese Identity Presented in the Cover Story of @ManGu Bangkok of Thai Chinese Businessmen

Through the statistical analysis of the sample texts of @ManGu Bangkok cover stories, the content of Thai Chinese businessmen's identity with China in the cover stories is also multi-faceted and falls into three main

categories: identity with their own Chinese identity, cultural identity, and economic identity. The identity of the Thai Chinese businessmen is reflected in their “inheritance”, i.e. the teachings of their ancestors and their expectations for future generations; while the identity of Chinese culture includes the learning of Chinese traditional customs, Chinese language, and character, classical literature, and the influence of Confucianism; the economic identity is reflected in the construction of the image of China, economic and trade policies, and cooperation with China.

Chinese Identity: Transmission and Inheritance in Thai Chinese Business Families

(1) Influence of a family background with Chinese origin

As a Chinese businessman in Thailand, many of the interviewees expressed their pride in being born into a Chinese family. Over the years, their ancestors have contributed to the prosperity and development of Thailand by carrying forward the wisdom and courage of overseas Chinese businessmen through their spirit of self-improvement.

The influence of my father's family tradition was inculcating and subtle, as he taught us first and foremost the quality of honesty, honesty with customers and honesty with employees. From a very young age, our father made it a rule that I had to go to the mall with our older brother in after school times to get a sense for how business works and do minor tasks that we could, like gift wrapping. (Shaping a world-class hotel brand in Thailand, Centara Hotel & Resorts by Shangtai Group, Michelle Cheng, Vice Chairman, Issue 28)

(2) Education and heritage for future generations

Considering the rise of China's economy and the need for bilateral trade and economic exchanges, many of the Thai Chinese businessmen interviewed require their offspring to learn Chinese traditional culture and master Chinese language skills, and send their children to study in China, as reflected in the reports. For example, the rubber king Lim Lap Seng also expressed his expectation for his children to master the Chinese language and planned to take them to live in China for a period of time to experience the culture and customs of China in person.

In addition, many Thai Chinese businessmen mentioned the influence of the traditional Chinese virtues passed on by their ancestors and their concern about their children passing on Chinese customs and culture. As said by Mr. Cheng Ngok Long, “our future generations might have little contact with Chinese culture, so I hope they could spend more time and effort to pass on our Chinese traditions and culture.” (A Pure Heart that Never Rest the Pursuit—Interview with Mr. Cheng Ngok Long, Chairman of the Thai-Chinese Importers Association, Issue 118).

It is noteworthy that more than half of the Thai Chinese businessmen interviewed have Chinese names in family ranking, and they are happy to introduce the meaning and origin of their names. To them, the Chinese name provides a unique and important perspective for them to recognize their identification with China and serves as an important reflection of their awareness.

Cultural Identity With China: The Internalisation of Culture, Literature, and Valuable Philosophies

Chinese businessmen in foreign countries are friendly messengers who pass on and promote the Chinese culture that reflects the common spiritual and psychological needs of the Chinese community. Text analysis of the statistical samples of @*ManGu Bangkok* shows that many Thai Chinese businessmen can conduct interviews in fluent and standard Chinese, and some of them express a deep love for Chinese calligraphy, painting, and literature. For example, Chen Yingquan sang “The Rolling of the Yangtze River” in Chinese

during the interview with ease, and Cai Bashan (Paisal Puechmongkol) wrote the Thai version of "Interpretation of The Romance of the Three Kingdoms" and published it in Thailand.

In addition to this, the influence of traditional Chinese culture on Thai Chinese businessmen is subtle, and they cannot help but be the beneficiaries of using Chinese culture to achieve business development. This is proven by their self-representation as "cultural identity in dialogue". For example, in an interview with Thai business king, Li Wenxiang, Li quoted several times the typical Chinese idioms and sayings to describe the management wisdom of his business.

A good team has to have at least three good members, just like the three men in the Peach Garden Oaths, and in the Journey to the West, there are at least three capable people. One person can't do much, we need to progress with our staff and use their collective wisdom to achieve business success. (Li Wenxiang—the "God of Business" of Thailand, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Hsien Chang Group, Issue 19)

Dr. Chen Yingquan, Director of Supalai Real Estate, has incorporated the wisdom of ancient Chinese thinkers into the management of the company because he admires their views.

I have always used the ideas of Confucius and Laozi to manage my company, and I always ask our staffs to learn from their teachings, such as we must have a conscience, be kind, have high morality, be polite, cultivate wisdom, use our wisdom to solve problems, be trustworthy, not to lie and cheat our customers, that is, be honest and so on. These are the reasons that make my company grow and develop. (Poet in the Real Estate Industry—a blossoming age of 68: Interview with Dr Chen Yingquan, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Supalai Real Estate, Thailand, Issue 93)

This shows that Thai Chinese businessmen have a high level of identification with the traditional values of Chinese culture and apply them in practical business management, which is a manifestation of a strong Chinese consciousness and adherence to the culture of the community, reflecting the common spiritual and psychological needs of the Chinese community, and reflecting the identification of "root" of the Thai Chinese businessmen with their Chinese cultural origins.

Economic Identification: Proactive Promotion of Sino-Thai Trade Cooperation and Development

In the context of the construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Thai Chinese businessmen have deepened their identification with China in their pursuit of mutual economic benefits, which is a driving source for the sustainable development of Sino-Thai exchanges. In terms of external factors, this is closely related to the progress of globalization, especially the rise of China's economy and its international influence; in terms of internal factors, it is a backlash triggered by the Chinese community's awakening of self-awareness stimulated by a long-standing policy of forced assimilation (Zhang, J. Y., 2021).

(1) Identification with China's national image

Through the text analysis of the statistical samples of *@ManGu Bangkok* reports, the older generation of Thai Chinese businessmen's identification with their ancestral country is concrete and strong, but the later generations are gradually alienated from China emotionally and have a relatively abstract perception of China. With the increased economic power and its international discourse influence of China, the potential for overseas Chinese businessmen and their descendants to identify with China has been stimulated, which effectively enhanced the Thai Chinese businessmen's identification with China and their confidence in Chinese trade.

I have been to China many times, and every time I find a different China, it is more developed by the year. I think, China is not only a big country in the world, but also a country with superb economy, trade and technology, and also a

developed insurance business, with many products that are worth learning for fellow companies. (Leading the Financial Industry—An Interview with Sara Lamsam, President and CEO of Thai Life Insurance, Issue 137)

China is a rising star, the economic power of the future. China is becoming more and more important in the world, and now countries have recognized that China has a strong economy, great purchasing power, huge production potential and consumption power, which makes the Chinese economy play an increasingly important role in stabilizing the world economy. So we should at least try the Chinese market. (Chinese Dream of the Thai Banking Magnate—Interview with Ng Wan Thong, Chairman and CEO of Kai Thai Bank, Issue 18)

In addition, China's epidemic response policies and actions have benefited overseas Chinese, Thai Chinese businessmen's pride in their country of origin has enhanced, which in turn boosted their confidence and determination to cooperate and trade with China. As PONG, CEO of Thai property development company SC Aseet, exclaims in the interview in issue 201, "The whole world is now facing the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic, I hope we can join hands in fighting the pandemic. I admire China for its speed and effectiveness in response to the pandemic."

(2) Identification with China's foreign trade policies

When China proposed the "Belt and Road Initiative", "21st Century Maritime Silk Road", and other economic and trade policies, Thai Chinese businessmen take active measures to carry out varied economic and trade cooperation with China in addition to their efforts in the home market, reflecting their active integration and adaptation to the development of the times. For example, the Chairman of Thai Wah Rubber (Public) Co Ltd, one of the world's top three natural rubber producers, Mr. Lim Lap Seng, has responded to the Thai government's call to encourage foreign investment and the Chinese government's "Belt and Road Initiative" and strategic cooperation policy by working together with a number of Chinese rubber product companies to achieve a win-win result.

Mr. Lim Choo Chin, President of the Thai Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said,

Thailand is not only a country along the Belt and Road Initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative is also integrated with the development strategy of Thailand's EEC region, which will promote closer economic cooperation between the two countries...To support the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, Thailand must accelerate the infrastructure construction, such as the Sino-Thai railway project (Bangkok-Korat-Nongkhai), as well as a massive high-speed rail project linking three airports and facilitating inter-regional transport. (The Power of the Times—Interview with Mr. Lim Choo Chin, Chairman of the Thai Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Issue 187)

(3) Identification with the Chinese partner companies

At a micro level, Thai Chinese businessmen's identification with Chinese companies and products is also of particular importance and has a direct impact on the sustainable and effective cooperation between Chinese and Thai companies. A text analysis of the statistical samples of the *@ManGu Bangkok* reports reveals that most of the Thai Chinese businessmen interviewed have indicated that, with the rise of China as the "factory of the world" and high-tech products, they have gradually built up a good confidence and trust in Chinese enterprises and even Chinese products. For example, the CEO of Thailand's largest telecoms company-AIS-Vikram Yum Yum Sakura, commented positively on the Chinese companies he works with:

Huawei and ZTE are two Chinese companies we have been working with for a long time, both in Thailand and worldwide. The advantage of working with Chinese companies is that they are very advanced in all aspects of technology. And I think they are very obliging and friendly, and the help they provide is continuous. At the beginning of cooperation, they are even not after profit...Our 3G technology is with Huawei, and we have helped Huawei to establish their business

in Thailand. (Vikram Yum Yum Sakura, CEO of Thailand's largest telecoms company AIS, a telecoms leader navigated through the political storm, issue 23)

In summary, in terms of identity, Thai Chinese businessmen value the inheritance of Chinese family education, and insist on the influence of Chinese education on their offspring's management of the family business. They generally emphasize the importance of learning Chinese language, and are proud of their Chinese names. In terms of cultural identity, Thai Chinese businessmen have a high level of identification with the traditional values of Chinese culture, which stems from the fact that they have benefited from the internalization of culture, literature, and the fine traditional philosophies, which has a positive impact on their practical business management. In terms of economic identification, Thai Chinese businessmen have a strong interest in China and perceive the country's image as positive recognizing. They recognize China's national influence, political and economic system, and the strength of Chinese companies. To conclude, Thai Chinese businessmen's attitude and perception of China is positive.

Summary

Through the analysis of the characteristics and connotations of the cover stories of *@ManGu Bangkok*, it is found that the magazine focuses more on the positive portrayal of Thai Chinese businessmen and the dissemination of Chinese identity, providing a valuable and practical exploration for the shaping of the image of overseas Chinese and the communication of China's image to the outside world. In order to improve its modular reporting model, we suggested that *@ManGu Bangkok* can carry out useful explorations in the following areas, such as setting up recruitment activities such as "Journey to the Origin" and "A Taste of Chinese Culture" to enrich the interaction with readers, adding a section on "Promoting China" to raise the awareness of the Thai Chinese community by introducing modern China, as well as regular introduction of the excellent traditional culture, literary allusions, and general knowledge of national studies. In addition, it can leverage the emerging media platforms to enhance the popularization and dissemination of "Chinese soft power" among overseas Chinese businessmen through Chinese films and videos, short videos, and online literature to deepen their identification with China so as to deepen the identification with China and economic and trade cooperation with emotional resonance and share the fruits of Belt and Road Initiative on the basis of mutual communication and construction.

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