

Chinese Cultural Soft Power Research: Based on Li Ziqi Case

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The purpose of this research is about the soft power of Chinese culture, taking Li Ziqi as a case. Li Ziqi's videos has been recognized and appreciated by the government for its shaping of China's national image in the cultural dimension, judging from the attitude of official media such as *People's Daily* and CCTV to its reporting. China also explores more possibilities for shaping its national image and presents a more diversified, richer, and wonderful China. With "high-speed rail", "China C919 Plane", and other aspects, Li Ziqi is also a manifestation of China's cultural soft power.

Keywords: cultural, soft power, Li Ziqi, China story

Introduction

The importance of soft power to various states and empires can be seen, but history does not provide a detailed definition of what soft power is. The soft power of each generation varies with the change of dynasties, which also brings new disputes and new assimilation, etc. In the information society, the soft power is actually a reflection of local culture and popular preference, so it has attracted the attention of all major countries.

So what is the importance of soft power now? Generally speaking, in order to maintain social stability and national unity, a society needs great soft power. It is the embodiment of national will. In Joseph's (2013) book *Soft Power*, the United States, as the largest country in the world, did not use force to conquer other countries, but used soft power to make others subdue. The book also mentioned that soft power is a political policy that relies on attraction to achieve its goal rather than coercion. The purpose of this research is about the soft power of Chinese culture, taking Li Ziqi as a case.

This research follows the principle of typicality and chooses typical examples as the research object, under the support of soft power theory, the video analysis, audience comment analysis, keyword summary, and aesthetic analysis of Li Ziqi's video carried out.

Literature Review

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The literature review could be divided into two parts.

Soft Power Theory Review

The first part is about soft power theory. In this area, there are lots of authoritative researchers who built the research foundation of soft power. They have done such extraordinary job ahead of us and it is vital for us to review some of the significant papers.

Looking back to a famous political researcher, one of the major leaders of China, Wang Huning's paper in 1993 and 1994, it defined soft power as a brand new concept in politics that includes political system, economic structure, historical development, technology, and ideology. The impact of each of the factor included in soft power has made soft power so important that it becomes a key element in international relationship. According to his work, the impact of soft power is related to the diffusion of culture. Furthermore, each country's soft power could be determined by industrialism, scientism, democracy, and nationalism. On the basis of his study, culture is crucial. Under the existing circumstance, there are two primary theories which is cultural expansionism and cultural protectionism. Countries would enact strategies to gain dominance in culture; meanwhile, they would also try to protect their own culture lest the domestic value is undermined (Wang, 1993; 1994).

As the prevalence of the term "soft power", Yan Xuetong (2008) came up with a formula for soft power. The variables in the formula are international appeal, international mobilization power, and domestic mobilization power. The political structure and the universality of ethnic culture count for international appeal. In order to promote the soft power of a country, it is necessary for a country to make some strategic change because the political structure is hard to reform for most of the countries.

There is a global consensus on the rising of a country that war is essential in this process. However, according to Men Honghua's (2007a; 2007b) research, soft power could break this paradox. He concluded soft power into culture, notion, development patterns, international system, and international reputation.

Guo Shuyong (2007) suggested that soft power and hard power is two relative concepts. Soft power is not only about the power of system and the power of culture, but also encompasses international identity, discourse practice diplomatic power. Internationalism is intimately related with soft power and a peaceful development is still the theme of the world in 21 century.

A famous researcher, Hu Jian (2012) proposes that China's soft power is origin from Chinese traditional culture. It is humanism, introspection, ethic that forms Chinese characteristic. Moreover, it is highly parallel with the global value. That is the major advantage of China in soft power.

Li Ziqi Case Review

The second part is about Li Ziqi case. In general, after Li Ziqi has become a popular case of cultural communication in China, relevant researches are quite rich, which can be classified into the following categories: first, the analysis of Li Ziqi's video based on the theory of communication; second, the cultural interoperability of human pastoral dream; third, the modern expression of Chinese traditional culture in cross-cultural communication.

Methods

This paper adopts the method of case study, which is to conduct in-depth and specific research on a single research object. The subjects of case studies may be individuals or individual groups or institutions. This paper adopts the case of Li Ziqi, a successful case of Chinese cultural soft power, which can provide strategies and

specific programs for the export of Chinese cultural soft power in methodology. In the research and analysis, this paper uses text reading, keyword extraction, video analysis, and other specific means.

Analysis and Results

Video Style of Li Ziqi's Video

Firstly, Li's video style is very unique. It is an introduction of some Chinese traditional practical skills. It includes various skills from different fields, like making Chinese cuisine, and producing some manufactured goods, which is interesting and practical, and that is the reason why her video became famous globally. For example, in the video introducing wild vegetables in spring, there are more than a dozen different varieties such as deer-eared leek, folded ear root, purple-backed geranium, thorn dragon bag, duck foot board, etc. Even people who are familiar with rural life may not know these scientific names. For most ordinary people, the food they come into contact with in daily life is generally "ready-made", but Li often presents the sowing, cultivation, picking, and production of a food material in a staged and panoramic manner. Her videos are often named after "the life of something", such as the life of pepper, the life of corn, and the life of ginger. Li's videos concisely introduce the steps of manufacturing Chinese traditional goods, in addition, its interesting and relaxed vibe makes audiences appreciate her videos a lot. Since nowadays people are having less time paying attention to watching a long-playing TV show, instead they attach more importance to short videos in YouTube or in TikTok, so Li's videos are appropriate for nowadays people, because watching it will not take a long time and people could also learn something from it.

Secondly, since Li's videos are presenting Chinese traditional customs. Audiences watching her videos are often overseas Chinese, and their nostalgia could be strongly expressed through the comments under her videos. However, how could Li cross over the obstacle of language, since YouTube and TikTok are software that serves people from worldwide? So researcher turns out a conclusion that her videos contain some special language symbols that could trigger people's empathy from different countries or ethnicity. First, her videos contain a type of symbols with sounds, which is called audio language sign. XinHua News Agency says there is no voice-over in Li's short video, and the vocal language symbols are mainly manifested as simultaneous voices. Specifically, most of these synchronous sounds are wind, flowers, snow, and moon in nature, firewood, rice, oil, and salt in cooking, etc. Among them, most of the synchronous sounds are similar to the popular "ASMR" abroad, that is, a phenomenon that produces a relatively comfortable mild stimulation in the brain through a specific type of auditory content. These auditory contents may be relatively weak sounds in daily life, such as chewing, drinking water, etc., or even some kind of "noise", such as the sound of rubbing plastic. In Li's short video, the sound of raindrops and grain pouring can all produce ASMR effects. Among them, the sound effect of burning firewood is the best. In Western culture, a wood-burning fireplace is an important emotional symbol and carries profound cultural significance. US President Roosevelt once used the symbolic value of the fireplace to narrow the distance with the people, and since then formed the tradition of "fireside speeches". In the same way, the similar voices in Li's short videos conform to the auditory aesthetics of Western audiences, and shorten the psychological distance while satisfying their emotional needs. Secondly, her videos also use a technique called vocal nonverbal signs. In Li's short video, the audible non-verbal symbols mainly appear as background music. Her videos generally use oriental-style pure music. The tunes of these background music are long and soothing, intended to set off a contented, quiet, and comfortable atmosphere. This is in line with the value concept of "picking chrysanthemums under the eastern fence and seeing Nanshan leisurely" (a famous traditional poet that expresses

people's nostalgia) advocated by traditional Chinese culture. It is true that a specific cultural background is required to understand and realize this artistic conception, but the emotional symbols of living in peace and customs and leisurely care conveyed and shaped by its background music are universal and can still be widely recognized by foreign audiences. Lastly, the verbal signs in her videos could make an impressive feeling for the audiences. There are not many text and language symbols in Li's short video, mainly Chinese subtitles. The videos released by Li at home and abroad are exactly the same, that is, the text and language symbols are all Chinese characters. Chinese characters have visual structural characteristics of imagery and intuition, so they have the function of aesthetic symbols, that is, giving people an epistemological and metaphysical synaesthesia. The text symbols in Li's short video emphasize Chinese elements without affecting the perception, and properly spread Chinese culture. In order to understand the text symbols in the video, foreign viewers will spontaneously translate them and make foreign language subtitles. These foreign language subtitles composed of multi-national audiences and the Chinese subtitles of Li's short video itself have jointly constructed a new text language symbol system. This system demonstrates Li's influence in international communication to a certain extent, and reflects foreign audiences' curiosity and love for traditional Chinese culture. By these techniques, Li expresses her strong feeling of nostalgia and the sense of patriotic (Song, 2021).

Cross-Cultural Communication in Li Ziqi's Videos

Li ziqi's videos are a good example of Chinese culture in cross-cultural communication. Li ziqi's videos contain multiple elements that could be understood by people from different cultural background. According to the data of YouTube, Li ziqi's videos receive a 97.8% favorable rate and this is not only the symbol of audiences' interest, but also the foundation of cross-cultural communication. Such positive feedback might be an abundant resource for us to study. In Li ziqi's video of Lanzhou beef noodles, which is one of the most prevail videos of Li ziqi, there are some key terms that are worth analyzing.

The first term is "Handmade Everything". Many of her videos are consisted of the process of handcraft. It is appealing to people regardless of their cultural background because every culture, every nation, every tribe has their own handcraft. A person who is watching Li ziqi's video might be brought to the reminiscence of his childhood or grandparents. From this short term excerpt from the most liked comments below Li ziqi's video, we can know that Chinese culture is actually parallel with other main cultures in the world. However, the biggest difference between Chinese culture and other cultures is the continuity of Chinese culture. Chinese culture is the only culture in the world that has not been corrupted by both domestic and external force. Supported by the solidity and the broadness of itself, Chinese culture could arouse the sense of identity of any person and thus has the tremendous advantages in modern world.

The next two terms that should be discussed are "Role Model" and "Motivated". The setting of Li ziqi's videos is the traditional Chinese countryside, reflecting that Li ziqi's identity is a normal girl in a village. Moreover, cooking Chinese traditional dishes, most of the context of Li ziqi's video require lots of physical works and this strengthens the hardworking impression the audiences have on Li ziqi. This rustic setting could appeal to the audiences' nostalgia since the majority live and work in the city which is far from their hometown. Furthermore, these videos set up a comparison between the serenity and the noisy of modern society. Regardless of people's faith, nationality, such diligent trait could be anyone's motivation. In fact, they are motivated by Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese culture valued a peaceful life and Li ziqi is transmitting this belief casually to her audiences, promoting the transportation of Chinese culture. Meanwhile, the comments below show that

Chinese culture has the potential to guide one's action and to encourage people to live an active life which is the benefit Chinese culture could bring to the world.

Last but not least, according to the comments below, Chinese culture is also related to key terms like "Jealous", "Super Good". "Jealous" shows that the audiences admire the life Li ziqi performs in her videos, living in the place far from the city, eating food that is completely handmade, enjoying the greatness of nature, revealing that the audiences themselves would like to live a life like Li ziqi's. Thus, there is an opportunity for Chinese culture to cultivate in foreign places. The strategy of it is to permeate Chinese culture through an unconscious publicity appealing to people's emotion. When doing so, the most important thing is to establish a clear image of Chinese culture. For example, Li ziqi's videos emphasize the rural life of Chinese culture, rendering Chinese culture from a vague concept into a specific lifestyle. What is more, Liziqi's videos give us the insight that food could help bridge the gap between people from different culture background. Chinese food has been known for both its deliciousness and food is the mutual language shared by the people in the world. Hence, food could be a door for Chinese culture to dispel the misunderstandings.

The success of Li ziqi's videos represents the potential of Chinese culture in cross-cultural communication. Her success also provides another angle of the transportation of Chinese culture: The communication between cultures does not always require official action; conversely, the spontaneous civil communication is more important. Furthermore, to promote a culture, it is more important to facilitate the conversation between people than only broadcasting the culture itself (Liang, 2018).

Traditional Chinese Culture in Li Ziqi's Videos

As a YouTuber who is very popular abroad, Li Ziqi's various cultural characteristics of China are vividly displayed in her videos. As one of the oldest virtues in China, filial piety is shown in Li's video to respect elders and traditional culture. Through various behaviors, such as giving up seats to the elderly, eating and letting the elderly eat first, and eating by themselves, they show their unique filial piety for the elders and the elderly. There are also things such as food in Li's video, which also vividly and exquisitely reflect the breadth and depth of Chinese culture in food. She has an extremely clear definition of the process of making food and the meaning it contains, attracting many people around the world to observe traditional Chinese culture. For example, she will meticulously reveal the growth process of raw materials such as food and the growth conditions and other details very seriously. For example, in her video, the growth and picking process of corn were carefully recorded, and then the significance of this crop to the local culture and why it was planted would also be explained in detail. It can be said that the success of Li's video has nothing to do with her meticulous and clear definition. As for the clothes in her video, because she really lives in the countryside and shoots, her clothes often have an extremely strong local style and ancient Chinese charm, which restores and displays the cultivation methods and farming process of people in history.

The idea of home also makes great contribution to the prevalence. In Li Ziqi's videos, her grandma often shows off, talking with her and helping with something. The character invokes people's memory of home-families helping each other, talking with each other. More importantly, the picture of grandma, in most people's minds, is kind and humane. The appearance of grandma in the videos fits the thought about grandma in most people's mind, attracting more fans of the videos. The idea of home embodied in the videos is not only about the small home consisting of grandma and granddaughter, but also about the big neighbourhood surrounding the small home. In the videos, the neighbourhood shows harmonious atmosphere. Neighbours often help each other,

support each other, and share valuable objects with each other. For example, in the videos, when Li Ziqi makes some delicious food, she will call on her neighbours to share the food with them. Seeing these images, the audiences feel the warmth of home, the ideal home in their imagination.

In addition, the figure of Li Ziqi in the videos is an optimistic and diligent woman. She does lots of things by herself and is always happy with what she has. This kind of Chinese traditional women's figure turns to be distinct nowadays. As the social developments take place, people's demands for better keep being more intense, marking the distinctiveness of the figure shown in the videos of Li Ziqi. Besides, it also gives some people a chance to review their life. An audience of Li Ziqi's fans from Poland, after watching the diligence of Li Ziqi shown in the videos, regained the confidence to find a new work.

Tradition, a word that appeared most frequently in the comments of Li Ziqi's videos, is an important factor leading to the prevalence of her videos. Li Ziqi's videos show the heritage of Chinese traditional culture, invoking people's thought about traditional culture. Around the world, lots of traditional culture gets extinct. The videos make people start to think that how they can preserve their traditional culture and how they can develop their own traditional culture (Zhang, 2022).

Pastoral Poem of Li Ziqi's Videos

Pastoral poem, a special genre firstly created by Theocritus, has been circulated for several thousand years. This kind of poem mainly describes natural beauty and nice countryside life. Pastoral poem created large influence on the society, acting as a great container for less noticeable daily life of citizens and precious natural beauty.

In recent years, Li Ziqi's videos get popular on the Internet. Lots of people, from different places in the Earth, get to know about the beauty of nature and countryside life in China. Li Ziqi's videos mainly talk about parts of life in countryside in China. Portraits of natural beauty are common in her videos, acting as a special feature of the videos. The videos, just like pastoral poem, are containers of human life in countryside and natural beauty.

Li Ziqi's videos do not have a specific narrator, which other videos normally use to help the stories involved in the videos. Instead, it uses subtitles and offscreen voice to show the beauty of the great nature and the normal life in the countryside in China. Besides, the background music of her videos is usually traditional music, made by traditional Chinese instruments like Guzheng. Sometimes, dialogues in local slang between her grandma and her and between neighbours and her occur in her videos, adding a special feature to her videos.

Aside from sounds, the setting of camera in her videos is also special. Li Ziqi's videos usually use fixed lens and slowly-move lens, accompanying with some close-up zoom lens and some long shot, to build a beautiful picture of the countryside and the nature there. The movement of lens is smooth, without any interrupted lens and intentional emotion expression. All the lens are about the topic of the video, generally the detailed process of making some daily objects. Watching the videos makes people feel that they are experiencing the same thing with the characters in the videos.

The contents of her videos are always about some precious Chinese traditional culture including the produce of Sichuan embroidery and making skirt using the cover of grapes. These are all parts of Chinese traditional culture, formed through the accumulation lasting for thousands of years. Chinese traditional clothes also act as an important role in her videos. The main characters involved in the videos are all dressed up with Chinese traditional clothes. The most representative one is the blue embroidered garment of the protagonist, leaving deep impression on lots of people. What's more, the appearance of Chinese traditional agricultural tools like hoes,

sickles, and bamboo baskets in her videos shows the abundant contents involved in Chinese agricultural culture. These special features can help to explain the prevalence of Li Ziqi's videos.

Using the special setting of lens, the unique offscreen voice, and background music, Li Ziqi builds an ideal Utopia based on the images of the Chinese countryside. An important theme of her videos is to show the harmony between human beings and the nature. In her videos, human beings revere the nature and the nature gives its precious objects to human beings to improve their life. The portraits of the nature in the videos just look like fairyland. These special features help build the base of the ideal Utopia. Moreover, in her videos, lots of images of different periods in the countryside build a vivid picture of the place in the mind of the audience. For example, when she is trying to show the process to make preserved fruit, Li Ziqi put the images of the products in different stages of process to make the audience feel like they have experienced the process by themselves. The special method lets the ideal Utopia be more accessible to the audience, being more yearning for the Utopia; meanwhile, it increases the prevalence of the videos (Jiang, 2021).

Conclusion: National Image, China Story, and Chinese Soft Power

Li Ziqi, known as an "Oriental food and life scholar", as a typical representative of folk we-media, has become popular for filming traditional rural life around traditional Chinese food culture. Her videos focus on the daily life of traditional rural life, and reveal the historical and value connotation of traditional Chinese culture by telling about the food, clothing, housing, and transportation in traditional rural life.

In the era of new media, the channels and ways of national image construction are greatly enriched. It is no longer limited to traditional media and no longer dependent on specific events. Instead, it can construct national image through refreshing forms and using any elements with positive significance.

The construction of national image requires not only grand narrative, but also micro narrative. It is not always about political system, economic strength, and military strength, nor is it always about three emperors and five emperors, reform and opening up, and the Belt and Road Initiative. A porridge, a meal, a needle can also serve as the carrier of the image of a great country and Chinese civilization.

With the help of short videos, Li Ziqi short video spreading Chinese traditional culture from the perspective of ordinary people is conducive to enhancing understanding of Chinese culture going out of the country and stepping into the world. Li Ziqi's short video includes the broad and profound traditional Chinese culture, the daily life in rural China, and the independent and hard-working working people. The video impresses China in the hearts of overseas audiences and makes indelible contributions to the construction of China's national image. Li Ziqi's video is an authentic exhibition of traditional rural life in China. The vividness and affinity of the video are enough to let the world see a diversified and rich "Civilization Country".

"China Story", covers China's politics, economy, culture, history, diplomacy, national life, and other aspects of the story. Doing a good job in communicating Chinese stories to the outside world will help win the trust and support of the international community, eliminate antagonism and misunderstanding, and lay a broad foundation for building and spreading a good national image. It is conducive to breaking out of the strict barriers of "international discourse" built by Western powers, and then striving for and building China's international discourse power; It is conducive to further enhancing the international export ability of Chinese stories, boosting cultural confidence through narrative, and building cultural "soft power". But how do you tell Chinese stories in different cultural contexts? Li Ziqi gives the answer.

Li Ziqi's videos has been recognized and appreciated by the government for its shaping of China's national

image in the cultural dimension, judging from the attitude of official media such as *People's Daily* and CCTV to its reporting. China also explores more possibilities for shaping its national image and presents a more diversified, richer, and wonderful China. With “high-speed rail”, “China C919 Plane”, and other aspects, Li Ziqi is also a manifestation of China's cultural Soft power.

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