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## Overseas Chinese Bloggers' Construction of Northeast Asian Regional Culture (Post-print)

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### Abstract

This study examines Northeast Chinese self-media on Douyin, employing the “thematic analysis” method from Riessman’s narrative analysis framework to summarize the presentation characteristics of bodily narratives among overseas Northeast Chinese. It analyzes the discourse strategies of Northeast Asian regional culture in international communication, aiming to explore the multi-dimensional Chinese image constructed by Northeast Asian regional culture, thereby providing a new perspective for China’s Northeast Asian cultural creation and communication practices.

### Full Text

### Preamble

The Construction of Northeast Asian Regional Culture by Overseas Chinese Bloggers (Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing)

### Abstract

This paper examines Northeast Chinese self-media on Douyin (TikTok) using Riessman’s narrative analysis method to summarize the presentation characteristics of overseas Northeasterners’ bodily narratives. It analyzes the discursive strategies of Northeast Asian regional culture in international communication to explore the multi-dimensional Chinese image constructed by this culture, providing a new perspective for Northeast Asian cultural creation and communication practice in China.

**Keywords:** Northeast Asian regional culture; international communication; Northeast Chinese self-media; narrative analysis

## Introduction

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized strengthening international communication capacity building, noting that cultural power has become a key factor affecting national comprehensive competitiveness. In his report at the 20th Party Congress, Xi called for enhancing the influence of Chinese culture communication, comprehensively improving international communication effectiveness, and forming an international discourse power matching China's comprehensive national strength and international status. During his inspection in Liaoning, Xi stressed the need to demonstrate greater responsibility and action in revitalizing Northeast China in the new era, forging a new situation for Liaoning's revitalization and development.

Amid the wave of short video development, Northeast Asian culture is recorded and disseminated among the public through short videos, becoming an important channel for people at home and abroad to understand Northeast China. Indeed, short videos have become a crucial tool for shaping international image. The author searched Douyin using the term "Northeast Chinese in xxx," with the platform's algorithm suggesting over a dozen related tags, including "@NortheastChineseInJapan," "@NortheastChineseInUSA," "@NortheastChineseInKorea," and "@NortheastChineseInSouthAfrica." Using "Northeast Chinese in" as the keyword, the search yielded over 1,000 relevant account names in the user column, with the "Northeast Chinese overseas" category accounting for more than one-third of total results. This demonstrates that in the new media convergence environment, the overseas dissemination of Northeast Asian culture is outlined through short videos filmed by overseas Northeasterners, which is of great significance for achieving sustainable development and Northeast empowerment from top-down and inside-out perspectives.

## Presentation Methods of Overseas Northeast Chinese Self-Media Short Videos

**Character Traits of Northeasterners: Optimistic, Content, and Boldly Unrestrained** Northeastern regional culture presents itself through the character image of its people, with diligence, bravery, boldness, and simplicity as their excellent qualities. Shaped by geographical environment and historical traditions, Northeastern ancestors developed practical, straightforward, optimistic, and boldly unrestrained characters through their struggles with nature. The account "Wang Yan's Diary" exhibits a strong sense of ruggedness. For instance, Wang Yan has a slim build but a shiny bald head, often wearing slim pants and short jackets that match the stereotypical impression. In his videos, he bravely tries various levels of spicy food in Japan, using exaggerated expressions and humorous descriptions, earning him the nickname "Nagoya Spice King" from netizens. Similar to "@Northeastern Sauce in America," these accounts focus on demonstrating the responsible and hardworking side of Northeasterners. Their content is more casual, without fixed scripts or thematic limitations, primarily

consisting of life-centered skits, including taking fans to see dolphins. This fully embodies the optimistic, upward-looking, courageous, and unyielding spirit of Northeasterners.

Northeastern Sauce himself is an entrepreneur in the United States, running an import trade company. He encourages his employees to open self-media accounts, forming a matrix of “Northeast Chinese overseas” accounts centered around his own. In his videos, Northeastern Sauce is always cheerful, sharing daily life details with a curious and simple tone, portraying the image of a bold, adventurous, and down-to-earth Northeastern man. As an undeniable iconic symbol in Northeast culture, the “Northeasterner” figure is widely used across media accounts in external communication. Whether through classic Northeast character representations or grassroots stories, it has generated relatively extensive effects in disseminating Northeast Asian regional cultural content. The communication focus of this symbol concentrates on shaping the image of the communication subject, presenting the life image of Northeasterners placed in foreign lands as a holistic and systematic manifestation of Northeast Asian cultural symbols in short video communication.

### **Northeastern Dialect: Lively, Humorous, and Unrestrained Language Integration**

Language symbols are important markers of human development and the core of all communication. The Northeastern dialect is the most prominent cultural symbol of Northeast Asia. Overseas Northeasterners, born in Northeast China, instinctively speak Northeastern dialect, which is typically direct, lively, humorous, and emotionally expressive. Their dialogues often feature witty jingles or patter that is vivid and highly humorous, especially the use of folk similes. As overseas life experience accumulates, situations where foreign languages and Northeastern dialect are interspersed frequently occur. One form involves alternating expressions between Northeastern dialect and foreign languages; another involves using Northeastern dialect’s direct expression style mixed with foreign language expressions, for example: “好了! 強すぎる! 壊してるのね! それは恐ろしいです!” (Too strong, you’re going to break it, okay okay! That’s scary!). Many bloggers also often say phrases like “no one care” and “别整这没用的” (stop with the useless stuff).

The Northeastern dialect is inherently rich in folk wisdom and life pleasure, forming the important core of Northeastern comedy culture. Even when leaving the broader Chinese linguistic context, its funny and witty colloquialisms and catchphrases attract overseas audiences’ attention. The Northeastern dialect embodies the humorous and optimistic character of Northeasterners and portrays their most authentic life. As globalization and digitalization accelerate, overseas Northeasterners are no longer lonely individuals in distant lands but have successfully integrated Northeastern characteristics with local life, widely applying Northeastern dialect in various overseas life scenarios and continuously spreading this ethnic dialect abroad.

**Northeastern Customs: Folk Culture and Food Culture** As the saying goes, “a particular landscape nurtures a particular people.” Northeast China’s unique geographical environment and abundant natural resources have created distinctive cultural symbols. Overseas Chinese also continue Northeast Asian cultural customs abroad. Specifically, short videos on Northeast Asian culture mostly feature ice and snow culture, ethnic food culture, and folk entertainment such as “errenzhuan” (two-person folk performance) and “yao huashou” (hand dancing). Countries adjacent to Northeast China share similar ice and snow cultures. For instance, Zhang Cailing’s videos in Canada show Northeastern Mom in Japan ice skating with her Japanese husband; there are many scenes of snowball fights and skating with Canadian family members.

The manifestation of Northeastern food culture is most prominent in “Northeastern Mom in Japan.” Since Northeastern Mom frequently cooks at home, characteristic Northeastern dishes such as corn buns, celery stir-fried potatoes, “tianbula,” dipping sauce vegetables, “popodong” radish, and “gadabai” often appear in her videos. While filming the prepared meals, she explains the daily menu to her son, with Northeastern cuisine accounting for over half of the content, demonstrating great richness. For example, during major Chinese festivals like New Year’s Eve, she prepares colorful skin jelly, fish, hand-held mutton, and lucky pig trotters to share with her Japanese husband. The Japanese husband particularly enjoys these specialty foods, often asking for an extra bowl of rice. With an expression of happiness and satisfaction, his reaction has become an iconic visual symbol for “Northeastern Mom in Japan,” frequently praising the food with “Hao chi!” (delicious) and giving thumbs-up.

Grassroots culture is presented in short videos through forms such as “errenzhuan” and hand dancing in front of Shinjuku’s scenic streets in Japan, often wearing tiger-striped clothing. The combination of a bald head with black suit and round glasses spontaneously creates the image of a Northeastern “big brother.” According to Saussure’s semiotic theory, indexical symbols can become signs that have direct or indirect relationships with what they represent. Through representation and guidance, information recipients can obtain regional history and cultural information about the signified objects. These overseas Northeast Chinese self-media accounts mostly present Northeastern customs through daily life documentation videos, possessing a profoundly unique Northeastern flavor. Under the influence of its own characteristics and the subjective demands of overseas Northeast bloggers, various forms of Northeastern culture express different connotations in different contexts, reflecting the internationality and diversity of the new Northeastern culture.

### **Problems in Content Dissemination of Overseas Northeast Chinese Self-Media Short Videos**

**Communicators: Absence of Overseas Voice** As regional culture communication is a niche dissemination activity requiring certain contextual comprehension and imagination from audiences, overseas viewers in different cultural

fields face difficulties understanding foreign cultures. To help overseas audiences comprehend Northeast Chinese regional culture, issues such as unequal cognitive levels and understanding gaps regarding Northeastern humor must be addressed. Currently, Northeast Asian regional culture communication mainly concentrates in the ancestral Northeast region, surrounding areas, regions that received Northeast assistance after the First Five-Year Plan, and domestic short video platforms. International media coverage of Northeast Asian culture is extremely scarce, and no large-scale discourse institution for regional culture communication has been formed. To promote external communication of Northeast regional culture, more diverse types of accounts must be constructed to disseminate the multifaceted nature of Northeast Asian regional culture.

**Content: Excessive Localization and Low Quality** As a multi-ethnic, multi-form pluralistic culture, Northeast culture possesses obvious complexity. On international social platforms, Northeast culture communication presents a mixed and chaotic state. Analysis of sample data reveals that domestic audiences' cognition of Northeast culture mostly concentrates on grassroots culture, while overseas audiences' understanding focuses on humor and Northeastern folk customs. Content disseminating Northeast culture on platforms like Twitter and YouTube mostly features “errenzhuan” and “sauerkraut dumplings,” showing high homogenization and low-quality, one-sided content. This severely negatively impacts the positive dissemination of Northeast culture and creates cognitive biases among overseas audiences. Furthermore, official media exhibits some “passing off” phenomena, with some official blogs severely lacking original content, almost exclusively relying on sketches and film/television works from the Zhao Family Troupe. The depth of excavation into Northeast Asian culture needs improvement. As Northeast China's economic level rises and talent mobility increases, international understanding of the region has changed, requiring official media to adjust their communication contexts in international dissemination.

**Audience: Mainstream Media's Expression Catering to Imagination and Persistent Stereotypes** Although new media has endowed ordinary people with more possibilities for self-expression, mainstream media's external reporting on Northeast Chinese culture still employs carefully planned communication methods to reproduce and reinforce existing identity recognition and class imagination in order to gain more overseas audience approval. Consequently, Northeast culture's external communication remains in a structure of being produced and promoted, undergoing various processes of foreign cultural processing, imagination, and even editing. Due to historical factors, poverty-era Northeast China is associated with rudeness and contempt, resulting in minimal presence for Northeasterners in the global perspective and strong regional prejudice even within China.

## Strategies for External Communication of Northeast Regional Culture Image

**Distinguishing High and Low Context for Precise External Communication** American anthropologist Edward T. Hall first proposed high-context and low-context culture theory in his work *Beyond Culture*, which has been widely applied in cross-cultural communication research. He divided cultures into two categories: high-context cultures that frequently use high-context information, and low-context cultures that use less high-context information. In the context of new media convergence, short videos and social media as international communication channels shaping Northeast China's regional cultural image require building a diversified communication architecture with segmented audiences and multiple approaches, seeking preferences of audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

The subculture embedded in Northeasterners' straightforward, genuine, and loyal character aligns with low-context countries' thinking habits. In fact, their bold and enthusiastic personality is greatly appreciated by foreigners. Northeasterners' appearance is close to other Eastern cultures, sharing more similar cultural understanding methods, especially in external expression—telling Chinese stories in a global language. Therefore, precisely positioning market demands and adapting to foreign audiences' contexts using easily understandable content can satisfy and awaken emotional resonance among target audiences. When facing high-context Eastern countries, understanding can be facilitated through cultural integration.

**Finding Cultural Resonance and Creating Common Discourse** Fundamentally, constructing Northeast Asian cultural communication strategies from high/low contexts involves seeking common ground between local and foreign cultures. For countries not suitable for division by high/low context, communication strategies can be sought from the perspective of similar cultures. For example, Russia, Japan, and Korea—neighboring Northeast China—share commonalities with Northeast Chinese culture in ice and snow culture, pickled vegetables, winter sports, and heating methods. Therefore, natural discourse bridges can be formed in foreign communication, building fast channels for cross-cultural communication and providing quality topics for Northeast China's external communication to generate resonance among overseas audiences.

Drawing from neighboring country communication strategies provides a framework for other countries' cultural promotion: establishing an international perspective in creative concepts, seeking topics of common human concern, and gradually shifting communication content toward reflections on human civilization and displays of national cultural heritage. Although cultural divides exist worldwide, humans share common characteristics—curiosity and interest in our coexistent world, and common emotions and resonance regarding fundamental human issues. Natural landscapes such as Siberian tigers and the Greater and Lesser Khingan Mountains can reshape Northeast cultural symbols recognized

by the global discourse system. By embedding Northeast Asian regional culture's external communication within the emotional connection of human-nature harmonious coexistence, we can find the "greatest common divisor" between different cultures and achieve effective cross-cultural communication.

**Strengthening Official Discourse** In short video communication contexts, government credibility still plays a dominant role on short video platforms. Across vast overseas social media platforms, content presenting Northeast regional cultural images is scattered and limited, even stereotypical and fragmented, often constructed from imagination. The government should determine the positioning and overall planning for Northeast regional culture's image in international communication, establishing the overall tone for the region's characteristic cultural image from a macro perspective. It should integrate multiple resources, highlight the cultural characteristics and connotations of the three Northeastern provinces, and use urban and rural landscapes, historical and cultural features, and ice and snow culture as cultural symbols to leave deep impressions on overseas audiences. Additionally, it should prioritize selecting international mainstream communication platforms, promptly outputting Northeast regional culture in conjunction with international hot events and online topics to increase Northeast culture representing China's internationalization and modernization.

On the foundation of government and official institutions guiding video content, Chinese citizens abroad can through "bodily presence" become effective storytellers for China's image. According to the "third-person identity method" in attribution theory explaining communication effects, any cross-cultural communication behavior exists with persuasive motivation. Establishing interpersonal relationships becomes crucial in cross-cultural communication, showing significant effects on foreign audiences' cognition of Northeast China.

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