

On John B. Thompson's Philosophical Reflection on the Mediatization of Everyday Life

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Abstract

Currently, with the profound development of mediated society, mass media has deeply permeated people's daily lives, becoming an important variable that reconfigures everyday life and shapes social relations. Consequently, the mediatization of everyday life has emerged as a significant problem domain in media studies. John B. Thompson, focusing on the issue of mediated existence in industrial capitalist society, perceptively captured the previously neglected characteristic of modern society—“mediatization-modernity”—and conducted a comprehensive investigation from the perspective of modernity into how mediated spacetime reshapes everyday life, the existential paradox of the mediated self, and the re-rooting of mediated tradition in everyday life, thereby profoundly analyzing the morphological manifestations and underlying logic of the transformation of everyday life mediatization. Examining Thompson's theory of mediated everyday life provides new analytical perspectives and directions for social critique for contemporary Chinese academic research on mediatization, which is beneficial both for examining and reflecting upon current Chinese media practices and for promoting the modernization transformation of traditional Chinese culture.

Full Text

On John B. Thompson's Philosophical Reflection on Mediated Everyday Life

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Abstract: With the in-depth development of a mediated society, mass media has profoundly permeated people's daily lives, becoming a crucial variable in reconstructing everyday life and shaping social relations. Consequently, the mediatization of everyday life has emerged as a significant domain in media

studies. John B. Thompson, focusing on the problem of mediated existence in industrial capitalist society, astutely captured the previously neglected characteristic of modern society— “mediatization-modernity.” From the perspective of modernity, he conducted a comprehensive investigation into how mediated spacetime reshapes everyday life, the existential paradox of the mediated self, and how mediated tradition re-roots itself in daily life, offering a deep analysis of the morphological manifestations and underlying logic of the mediatization transformation of everyday life. Studying Thompson’ s theory of mediated everyday life provides new analytical perspectives and directions for social critique for current mediatization research in Chinese academia, which is beneficial both for examining and reflecting on contemporary Chinese media practices and for promoting the modernization of traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: mass media; mediatization; everyday life; tradition; modernity

The renowned British media studies scholar John B. Thompson systematically examined and critiqued the problem of human existence in mediated society from the dimension of everyday life. His focus on mediated everyday life stems from the fact that, with the development of industrial capitalist society and the rapid rise of the Internet and various forms of mobile network communication, mass media has become deeply embedded in people’ s daily lives, reshaping their living environments and giving rise to crises of mediated existence. Therefore, mediated everyday life is essentially a modernity manifestation in which media deeply constructs people’ s lifestyles and continuously highlights the paradox of human mediated existence. Moreover, as media technology iterates and upgrades, mediated spacetime increasingly deepens the reshaping of human everyday life and the crisis of alienated existence.

I. Mediated Spacetime: The Modernity Landscape of Reshaping Everyday Life

Since the 20th century, a trend of “returning to everyday life” has emerged in Western philosophy, with philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Lefebvre constructing systematic theories of everyday life critique, of which mediated everyday life practice constitutes an important theme. The iterative upgrading of communication technology and transportation has rewritten people’ s mediated spatiotemporal concepts. James Lull, paraphrasing McLuhan’ s view, states: “Each new communication medium manipulates space and time in unique ways” [1]. In his view, human cognition and perception of spacetime are constrained by the media technology and other technological levels of their era. Regarding the development of human mediated spatiotemporal concepts, Thompson argues that mass media is the core force of modern social development, taking the concept of “mediatization” as the anchor point of his research. He reflects on the social landscape of mediated everyday life from the perspective of modernity, deeply analyzing the internal logic of everyday life mediatization from the

dimension of mediated spacetime, revealing the profound impact of the social mediatization process on cultural transmission and social interaction.

1. The Mediatized Reshaping of Life Spacetime

Modernity is closely related to changes in human spatiotemporal concepts. Giddens points out: “Early newspapers (and all other kinds of magazines and periodicals) played an important role in separating space from place, but it is only with the convergence of print and electronic media that this process has become a global phenomenon” [2]. In his view, mass media is an important factor in the separation of spacetime and constitutes “the extreme dynamism of modernity” [3]. Throughout the history of human communication, we find that the evolution of media technology has not only increased the speed of human information transmission but also gradually freed humanity from the constraints of spacetime, entering a broader, global spatiotemporal domain. Innis argues that all communication media exist in spacetime and possess spatiotemporal biases. For instance, written communication breaks through spatiotemporal boundaries, allowing written symbols to be transmitted to distant spaces and future times; electronic media conquers space, enabling instantaneous information transmission. Hence, McLuhan proposed the thesis that “the medium is the extension of man” and the concept of the “global village,” where nations worldwide become interdependent and coexist through media technology. Thompson also endorses these arguments, noting that mass media possesses the characteristic of “spatiotemporal distancing,” with the most significant consequence of mediatization in modern society being the reconstruction of the spatiotemporal order of social life. He emphasizes that the development of mass media has promoted long-distance interaction across spacetime in cultural transmission. For example, the emergence of electronic communication has led to the separation of spacetime, enabling people to communicate instantaneously and achieve simultaneity in temporal terms. Because the production, transmission, and reception of symbolic form commodities do not occur within a shared spatiotemporal social environment and are detached from their production context, there exists a certain “spatiotemporal distance” between production and reception, requiring transmission through technical media to people in distant spacetimes. Thompson states: “The development of new communication media and new transportation also affects the way individuals experience mediated life spacetime” [4]. He deeply analyzes the multiple modernity experiences brought about by this mediated spatiotemporal reconstruction: First, mediated “historicity” — people’s perception and memory of the past increasingly depend on media transmission through books, newspapers, films, and television, making mass media an important carrier of historical memory and information. Second, mediated “globality,” which means that people’s interactions break through the limitations of spatiotemporal proximity, mediated symbols reshape people’s everyday life perceptions, and the space of daily cognition expands to a global scale. Third, mediated “sociality” —in the process of mediatization, people increasingly tend to identify with communities disseminated or organized by media products and

media institutions. Therefore, modern media has reset the spacetime of life.

2. The Mediatized Turn of Daily Interaction Patterns

Everyday life interaction is the most essential mode of social existence for human beings, constantly evolving dynamically, and media is an important force driving the transformation of social interaction patterns. Habermas points out: “With the emergence of new media, the forms of interaction themselves have also changed, and their influence is extremely penetrating, exceeding anything that could be achieved by any newspaper” [5]. With the accelerated iteration of media technology, people’s lifestyles, interaction patterns, and modes of thinking have changed, and Thompson provides an in-depth analysis of this. He states: “The use of communication media involves creating new forms of behavior and interaction, new social relationships, and new ways of interacting with others and with oneself” [6]. In his view, the development of media technology has driven the transformation of people’s mediated interaction patterns from face-to-face interaction to mediated online interaction. Based on four key characteristics—“spatiotemporal constitution,” “range of symbolic implication,” “degree of interaction,” and “direction of action”—he distinguishes types of mediated interaction, identifying four basic types of interaction in people’s daily lives: face-to-face interaction, mediated interaction, mediated quasi-interaction, and mediated online interaction, and analyzes the different characteristics of these four types in detail (see chart, compiled according to Thompson’s theory).

[Table: The chart referenced appears to be corrupted in the original text.]

In everyday life, we coexist with media. Peters points out: “There is no life free from media in the world, and being ‘embedded in media’ is indeed a fine human condition” [7]. The development of media technology profoundly influences people’s life perception patterns and social interaction modes. Regarding this, Thompson further explains and analyzes from the dimension of everyday life. He believes that the ways people use media technology to interact and communicate with others in daily life are dynamically changing. These four types of activities are not fixed or clearly bounded; individuals can interact by blending characteristics of different types, constantly moving and switching between them. The choice of which medium to use largely depends on the kind of interaction and interpersonal relationships they wish to establish and maintain with distant others. Currently, most social networks are multifunctional, multi-layered platforms where users communicate and interact with others in various ways anytime and anywhere according to their needs.

3. The Mediatized Dissolution of Public-Private Boundaries

The protection of personal privacy rights is an inevitable product of modernity development. However, in modern society, with the upgrading and development of media technology, the boundaries between the public sphere and the private sphere are gradually dissolving. Joshua Meyrowitz argues that communication

media “throw more of people’ s private territories into public places” [8]. In response, Thompson points out: “By providing information to vast and dispersed audiences distributed across spacetime, the configuration of mass communication technical media is also used to reconstruct the boundary between public and private life” [9]. In other words, the rapid development of media technology not only makes events occurring in the public sphere or activities of people in the private sphere more public and transparent in their publicization process, but also enables people to accept the publicity of events or people within the family context of the private sphere. This changes the nature of publicness and the ways people participate in it, producing mediated public events and mediated private events. He emphasizes: “Relying on the technical media of mass communication, the private sphere of modern society—particularly the private domestic environment—has become the primary site of mediated publicity” [10]. As long as a household owns a television, any individual in a privatized domestic context can enter the public sphere, presenting the phenomenon of the publicization of private life domains.

4. The Mediatized Empowerment of Everyday Life Visibility

Mass media not only reconstructs different social interaction scenarios but also creates new platforms for media performance and the cognition of others, expanding the scope of people’ s “visibility” and transforming its modes of presentation, highlighting the representation of modernity. Foucault points out that visibility is a principle people frequently attend to, and that visibility is related to surveillance power [11]; Thompson comprehensively studies mediated visibility within the theoretical framework of the sociology of information media. He argues that the rise of mediated visibility is closely related to the transformation of media communication patterns, particularly as modern information media has prompted the shift in people’ s daily information interaction patterns from face-to-face interaction to mediated online interaction, generating numerous forms of “mediated visibility” (The new visibility) . This new type of mediated visibility involves media information exchange detaching from the spatiotemporal framework of mutual coexistence, expanding people’ s horizons in space and extending them in time, enabling real-time communication across locations. Therefore, this new visibility is determined by the characteristics of the media itself, a series of social and technical factors, and various new communication types created by media, featuring unidirectional interactivity, diverse differentiation, and cross-spatiotemporal simultaneity. The generation of mediated visibility is complex; it possesses significant influence and permeability in social life, gradually becoming an important political force reshaping public life. Mediated visibility has become a weapon in everyday life struggles, generating complex entanglements with political power. Because various modern media technologies are developing rapidly, and media institutions independent of state power are widely emerging, the media information environment is denser, broader in scope, and faster in information flow. Possessing mediated information has become an important means of active self-shaping in modern

society, yet we find it difficult to control our own mediated information, images, and the consequences of information dissemination. He states: “Public figures and institutions strive to make their own or others’ voices and images heard or seen by the public, so media texts, images, and symbolic contents compete for favor” [12]. Consequently, people increasingly seek to obtain visibility through media to elevate their status or expand their influence to boost their career development. An individual who cannot secure mediated visibility may become obscure and disappear from people’s view. Thus, mediated visibility is a double-edged sword: communication media provides unprecedented opportunities for self-presentation in the life practices of political figures, while simultaneously bringing enormous risks of visibility. If mediated visibility cannot be effectively managed, misstatements, leaks, riots, and scandals may occur. In summary, Thompson uses media as a framework and method to reflect on the landscape of modern everyday life from the dimension of daily life, revealing the existential representations of people against the backdrop of mediated life.

II. The Mediated Self: An Important Dimension for Reflecting on “Modernity” Life

Subjectivity is the core issue of modernity. “Modernity’ s manifestation as subjectivity is expressed in three aspects: the affirmation of individual value, rebellion against divinity, and the comprehensive enhancement of initiative” [13]. In mediated society, mass media is deeply embedded in people’ s daily lives, and media subjects actively construct their identities in the mediated lifeworld, gradually evolving into a mediated self. As one scholar notes: “Media constitutes our information environment and extended nerves, shaping our life patterns” [14]. The mediated self reshapes subjectivity in the mirror image of media others but may also lose itself in the mediated world, presenting the existential paradox of the modern self.

(1) The Dual Effects of “Long-Distance Non-Interactive Intimate Relationships”

Modernity allows the mediated self to be liberated, gaining more freedom, but this also becomes a project requiring active self-construction. As one scholar notes: “Thompson, however, sees the modern self as a ‘symbolic project’ and as long-distance intimacy without feedback” [15]. Thompson argues that media information not only becomes a beneficial resource nourishing individuals but also transforms modes of self-presentation, making “long-distance non-interactive intimate relationships” possible in mediated interaction across spacetime. Because this mediated interaction has detached from the interactivity and reciprocity of face-to-face, shared-space interaction and is non-dialogic, this intimate form is non-interactive in nature; therefore, it is termed “long-distance non-interactive intimate relationships without face-to-face or shared-space interaction.” He states: “This distinctive non-interactive long-distance intimate relationship is both attractive and costly for individuals” [16]. In other words,

through the communicative mode of mediated quasi-interaction, we can become acquainted with distant others who can enter our life spacetime at any moment, entertain each other, and provide information, avoiding the interactive demands and complexities inherent in relationships maintained through face-to-face interaction. Thompson emphasizes that this intimate relationship also produces many negative effects. Because such relationships free themselves from the reciprocal obligations required by face-to-face interaction, they may evolve into a form of everyday life dependency. The mediated self gradually becomes dependent on distant others, who become objects of infinite worship for the self, with subject consciousness being deeply controlled and influenced by others. Postman points out: “For young viewers who rely too heavily on television to understand the world, when watching television news, they are more willing than any other audience group to believe that all reports of brutality and death are exaggerated and need not be taken seriously or responded to rationally” [17]. Thompson analyzes in detail the advantages and disadvantages of “long-distance non-interactive intimate relationships.” He believes that becoming a fan is a way of instinctively organizing oneself and daily behavior, controlling most of one’s activities and interactions with others. Fans can obtain large amounts of media products by participating in activities, and through the absorption, transformation, and integration of these products into a fan’s symbolic world, they create a special lifeworld separate from the non-fan world. Why is fandom so attractive? Thompson identifies several reasons: First, the process of becoming a fan can be understood as a form of self-action planning that can expand and consolidate “long-distance non-interactive intimate relationships.” Second, fandom offers the possibility of becoming a group or community, with the potential to develop social networks with others who share similar orientations. Third, the fan experience is addictive. Fans become increasingly immersed in the fan world, unable to extricate themselves. Individuals become increasingly focused in daily life on cultivating intimate relationships with distant others, making participation in fan activities a compulsive form of activity from which they have no intention of freeing themselves. Self-life gradually loses control, and they are repeatedly harvested in the consumer society.

(2) The Life Representation of Active Media Audience Presence

In the landscape of communication studies, audience research has always occupied a “primary position.” Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl point out: “The audience has always occupied a central position in mass communication research” [18]. In mediated life practice, is the audience passive or active? The academic community has produced the Frankfurt School’s “passive audience theory” and the Birmingham School’s “active audience theory” [19]. Based on this, Thompson critiques the mistaken notion that “the audience is a passive consumer,” arguing that the audience’s reception of media products in daily life is an active and dynamic process of self-interpretation. He emphasizes that many media scholars in the past theoretically assumed that media information reception was a simple process, focusing on analyzing the content of media messages

and supplementing it with some audience reaction data. This research method seriously underestimates the complexity of the actual process by which individuals in specific contexts receive and use media messages, neglecting the close connection between audience reception of media information and the interactive modes of everyday life. First, receiving media products is an integral component of people's daily lives. In media information reception activities, to achieve their own purposes, audiences are not limited to specific locations but actively master and process the symbolic materials they receive, with reception modes characterized by diversity and relative concealment. In the process of receiving and appropriating media information in daily life, the audience engages in active, innovative, introspective construction, gradually weaving media information into the symbolic construction of everyday life. Second, media information reception is a contextualized activity. Receivers of media products are always situated within specific social-historical contexts, engaging in activities that can maintain a certain distance from the actual environment of everyday life. This reception activity depends on the power and resources available to potential receivers, involving relatively stable power relations and differential access to various accumulated resources. Because media product reception is both a fixed daily activity and a skilled practice, different technical media typically require different skills and knowledge, and different audiences may exhibit social differences and backgrounds in certain aspects of the reception process. As Morley states, "To understand the meaning of a text, we must consider the discourses it encounters under specific conditions...Because different readers use different discourses (knowledge, prejudices, resistances, etc.) to understand the text, they construct different textual meanings" [20]. In other words, audience skills and knowledge, as socially acquired attributes, may differ across groups, classes, and historical periods. Finally, media product reception is fundamentally a process of self-interpretation. The audience's use of symbolic materials may differ significantly from the original intentions (if any) of the producers of these materials, and receivers may reframe and elaborate upon them in ways completely different from the producers' goals and intentions. As Hall of the British Cultural Studies School proposed in his encoding and decoding theory, different audiences have different ways of interpreting the "code," and audiences are active producers of meaning. A large amount of media information can provide individuals with means to explore alternative lifestyles in symbolic or imaginary ways, and can also provide experiences of alternatives, enabling them to critically reflect on themselves and the actual conditions of their lives. In his view, individuals who receive media products typically engage in a process of interpretation; audiences often integrate media symbols into their understanding of themselves and others, using symbolic forms as tools for reflection and self-examination, and as a basis for thinking about themselves, others, and the life circles to which they belong. He uses the term "appropriation" to refer to this extended process of understanding and self-understanding, actively absorbing relevant media information and incorporating it into their own lives, interweaving various aspects of their lives with the reiteration of media information and their reactions to this reiterated information. As Paul Willis points out: "Although media attract

certain specific interpretations, young people not only learn the rules of the code but also learn how to play with code interpretations...Cultural media are used as tools to produce vitality and to provide and construct various dimensions of their existing and future identities” [21].

(3) The Construction and Dissolution of the Mediated Subject

In a lifeworld increasingly permeated by media industry products, new stages for self-performance have emerged. As Sun Wei states, “Media is not merely a means of connecting subject and object; it directly participates in the construction of the subject...Mediated existence is becoming humanity’s overall mode of existence and state of everyday life” [22]. Thompson also believes that with the rapid development of media technology, the presentation of the mediated subject has become reflective and open, increasingly dependent on media resources for self-construction. Initially, the knowledge people acquired was local knowledge, meeting practical life needs through oral communication. However, with the development of media technology, people can obtain more “non-localized knowledge” through media, constructing the self through continuously expanding media symbolic materials of non-local knowledge and other types, enriching and strengthening introspective construction. As symbolic resources available for the self-formation process expand, the mediated subject’s horizons and symbolic reference points constantly change, and the introspective construction of the self becomes increasingly important as a feature of social life.

The tremendous expansion of symbolic materials as media opens up new possibilities for self-construction, but this introspective self-construction can also produce disturbing consequences, leading to the “domination” of media information and resulting in the weakening and dissolution of subjectivity. Marcuse points out: “Behind the veil of technology, the loss of human dignity is revealed...At the height of technological progress, we see the negation of human progress” [23]. First is the invasive infiltration of ideological information. Media permeates people’s daily lives, but this infiltration is concealed and easily forms hegemony in everyday life, conducting information discipline on the mediated self. Thompson states: “The development of media has greatly enhanced the ability to transmit potentially ideological information across vast spaces and times...creating conditions for ideological information to infiltrate the actual environment of everyday life” [24]. In his view, when mediated symbolic forms are reflectively incorporated into the construction of self-formation, the intensification of introspective construction serves a considerably advantageous ideological function. Lefebvre points out: “ ‘Messages’ flood audiences with monotonous news and current affairs topics, weakening their sensitivity and eroding their desire for knowledge” [25]. Second is the double bind of media dependency syndrome. Mass media is deeply embedded in the gaps and interstices of people’s daily lives, and “media dependency syndrome” has become a new-era symptom. Postman provides a deep critique of this, noting that media dependency runs through the entire transformation of mediated society, particularly people’s de-

pendence on print culture: “Print is almost the only pastime in people’ s lives” [26]. In Thompson’ s view, although the availability of media products helps enrich the introspective construction of the self, it also creates a double bind of media dependency: in the process of self-formation, the more diverse and abundant media symbolic forms become, the more the self depends on the media system, and individuals become increasingly dependent on complex systems for the production and dissemination of mediated symbolic forms, yet most people have almost no control over these systems. “Media shapes people’ s unconscious states in ways they cannot perceive, making them ‘docilely’ accept the sensory experiences and behavioral influences brought by media, and human subjective consciousness is amputated unconsciously” [27]. Furthermore, there is the disorienting effect of symbolic overload. With the massive growth of media symbols in people’ s daily lives, the social environment becomes increasingly complex, and individuals utilize media materials to establish practical specialized knowledge systems to cope with the complex demands of modern society. Thompson points out that the wide variety of information provided by media creates a “symbolic overload” effect. In mediated everyday life, the subject faces not only self-media narratives but countless pieces of media symbolic information. In some cases, the mediated subject becomes highly dependent on media symbolic information and reflectively incorporates it into mediated self-construction, becoming an object of intense and emotional attachment for personal identity. “In the realistic context of mediated existence, media is no longer merely a communication tool and circulation intermediary but, in people’ s deep dependency or even superstition and blind faith, increasingly displays certain dominating and substitutive powers, becoming a kind of spontaneous belief” [28]. Finally, there is the separation of mediated experience from everyday life. Thompson believes that media can provide us with experiences unavailable in daily life, but these experiences are largely detached from everyday life or involve events that everyday life cannot encounter—recontextualized experiences featuring behaviors that are difficult to control or beyond personal influence. In this regard, Baudrillard points out: “The ‘information’ brought by television is not the images it transmits but the new relationships and perception patterns it creates, and the transformation of family and group traditional structures” [29]. In everyday life, social phenomena such as illness, madness, and death are separated from daily social contexts, placing us in a world where experiential capacity is disconnected from encountered activities. For instance, few people today encounter individuals hit by sniper fire or disabled by mortar shells, yet we witness such encounters on television screens.

III. Mediated Tradition: The Modernity Mechanism Rooted in Everyday Life

The primary problem of modernity is the problem of “detraditionalization.” With the development of cultural globalization, mass media has gradually changed the nature and modes of symbolic exchange, reshaping people’ s everyday life environments and generating contradictions and conflicts between tradition and

modernity. Giddens points out: “For most of its historical development, modernity has been dissolving tradition on the one hand, while continuously reconstructing it on the other” [30]. That is, modernity and tradition are not simply antagonistic but dialectically interactive. Does the global dissemination of media products destroy traditional lifestyles? Thompson analyzes this from two dimensions— “the essence of tradition” and “the role of media in traditional development” —arguing that in the development of modernity, tradition will not disappear due to the development of modern media technology; on the contrary, it will re-root itself in people’ s everyday lives.

(1) From the Perspective of “The Essence of Tradition,” Tradition Has Not Gradually Disappeared from People’ s Daily Lives

With the rapid development of modern society, does cultural tradition return to or vanish from people’ s daily lives? Many classical social theorists believe that in the process of modernity development, the status of tradition in social life has irreversibly declined. For instance, Max Weber believed that the development of industrial capitalism necessarily accompanied the demise of tradition and that traditional religious thought should be abandoned. Sociologists of modernization theory such as Beck and Giddens further developed this idea, arguing that modern society is undergoing “detraditionalization.” Although tradition has not disappeared from modern social practice, it has lost its original status. In response, Thompson argues that the sociological theorists’ assumption of “the decline of tradition in modern society” is the result of the interaction of various factors. Because these classical social theories are products of Enlightenment thought that place tradition in opposition to reason and abandon it, the development of modern society contains an inherent dynamic of destroying tradition—that is, tradition is the enemy of Enlightenment and a “legacy” of the past that must be critiqued and eliminated in the name of reason, destroyed by the vitality stimulated by modern society. Habermas points out: “Since modernity sees itself as opposed to tradition...modernity must consolidate its position based on its only remaining authority, namely reason. For in the name of Enlightenment alone, modernity devalues and overcomes tradition” [31]. Thompson agrees with Habermas’ s view, noting that the classical and modern social theorists’ perspective on “the decline of tradition’ s role in modern life” has two problems: First, these scholars fail to see that certain traditions and religious beliefs still exist in the late 20th century and have not been dissolved by modern society; simultaneously, the retention of tradition is not a return to the past, a shelter for backward souls, or stubborn resistance to the disappearance of tradition. Second, they pay little attention to the impact of media on tradition. They generally believe that capitalist economic and rational activities have had direct and indirect destructive effects on traditional lifestyles, without noticing the important role media plays in traditional lifestyles and that media technology promotes the continuation and development of tradition. American sociologist Edward Shils states: “Anything called tradition is not a whole; each of its parts must go through a process of acceptance, modification, or resistance...When they

appear to resist, they still retain a considerable portion of tradition. Obviously, even revolutionaries who claim to make a complete break with their society' s past cannot escape the grip of the past" [32]. That is, tradition is the result of active choice in social development, a process of continuous development and innovation possessing certain stability and continuity.

Simultaneously, Thompson demonstrates from the "essence of tradition" that "tradition will take root in people' s everyday lives." Regarding the essence of "tradition," different scholars hold different views. Edward Shils believes that tradition is "a necessary component of valuable life" [33], and that under internal and external factors, tradition undergoes changes in the process of transmission from generation to generation. Rapoport believes that "tradition must rely on human subjects to be transmitted" [34]. On this issue, Thompson conducts critical reflection, arguing that tradition will return to everyday life through media mediation. He deeply describes the "essence of tradition" from the "hermeneutic level," "normative level," "legitimacy level," and "identity level," believing that tradition can be deeply embedded in people' s everyday lives. He argues that from the hermeneutic level, tradition is an interpretive mechanism that provides frameworks and backgrounds for people to understand the world. From the normative level, a series of assumptions, beliefs, customs, and behavioral norms transmitted from past life can serve as guides for action in people' s daily lives. From the legitimacy level, according to Weber' s authority theory of "charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational" types, tradition has obvious political properties in certain situations and can be used to maintain social power relations. From the identity level, values, beliefs, customs, and behavioral patterns transmitted from the past provide abundant symbolic materials for both personal and collective identity, and with the development of communication media, they exert important influence on cultural identity. In summary, tradition will not disappear with social development but will undergo changes and innovative transformations.

(2) From a Communication Studies Perspective, Mass Media Plays an Important Role in the Renewal and Development of Tradition

In the transition process from traditional to modern society, despite numerous difficulties, every country and region cannot resist the temptation of modernization and "is trying to break free from the shackles of tradition to join the ranks of modern society with a completely new modern posture" [35]. Many experts and scholars have discussed this. Daniel Lerner, a representative of classical modernization theory, analyzed the relationship between mass communication and society in *The Passing of Traditional Society*, arguing that in the development process from tradition to modernity, mass media is a "marvelous amplifier" of social development, exerting significant influence on accelerating social development, enhancing the degree of social modernization, and shaping people' s lives [36]. Regarding Lerner' s argument, Thompson conducts analytical critique, believing that Lerner' s interpretation of "media playing an

important role in the rise of modern society and cultural transformation” is a beneficial antidote to classical sociological theory, but this interpretation is too absolute and too inclined toward modernization theory—for instance, it fails to anticipate the persistent significance of Islam, among other things. In his view, with the development of human society and media technology, the legitimacy and normative aspects of tradition are declining; however, in other respects, tradition retains its meaning in the modern world as a means of understanding the world and creating a sense of belonging. He believes that the transformation of tradition is fundamentally linked to the development of communication media, and this connection has a dual nature: On the one hand, the development of communication media promotes the decline of traditional authority and traditional ritual action; on the other hand, new communication media also provides means to separate tradition from shared public spaces, thereby creating conditions for the renewal of tradition. “Although tradition retains its meaning, it has been transformed in a crucial way: the transmission of symbolic materials constituting tradition has become increasingly detached from social interaction in shared locales. Tradition does not disappear, but it loses its moorings in the shared locales of everyday life” [37]. That is, tradition’s detachment from shared locales does not mean it can flow freely; rather, it re-embeds itself in new living environments, takes root in new fertile soil, and develops anew.

Thompson points out: “We must abandon the view that exposure to media necessarily leads to abandoning ‘traditional’ lifestyles and adopting ‘modern’ ones...Communication media can not only challenge and destroy traditional values and beliefs but also be used to continue and consolidate tradition” [38]. That is, the development of media has not caused tradition to wither; rather, it has transformed tradition in certain ways, with tradition becoming increasingly dependent on non-face-to-face communication forms. Because many mediated communication forms fix symbolic content onto material carriers to some extent, endowing media content with permanence that is unsustainable in face-to-face interaction, the maintenance of traditional values and beliefs gradually depends on the interactive forms of media products, and tradition becomes increasingly deritualized. However, this does not mean that media-conscious elements are eliminated from tradition; many traditions remain in close contact with everyday life in domestic, school, and other institutional environments. To some extent, the transmission of tradition increasingly depends on mediated traditional communication forms, gradually gaining a certain autonomy and independence, capable of existing and persisting independently of individuals transmitted from generation to generation. Before the development of media, tradition was rooted in the spatial environment of individuals’ daily lives, possessing a solid life foundation. As tradition increasingly depends on mediated communication forms for maintenance and intergenerational transmission, tradition gradually becomes partially delocalized. But they are not deterritorialized; they are shaped, innovatively developed, re-localized, and reconnected with territorial units that transcend the limitations of face-to-face interaction, continuing to develop. The life experiences of immigrant populations and nomadic traditions in history con-

firm the important role communication media plays in maintaining and renewing tradition, creating rich and diverse cultural landscapes.

IV. The Contemporary Value of Thompson' s Theory of Mediated Everyday Life

With the rapid development of media technology, media has comprehensively permeated people' s daily lives, rewriting their mediated life practices. Thompson deeply explores how the iterative upgrading of media technology drives social development and transformation, prospectively analyzing the theory of mediated everyday life. However, this theory of mediated everyday life emerged in the context of Western industrial capitalist society, primarily discussing mediated interaction, mediated self, and mediated tradition caused by broadcast television as the main medium. It does not consider the popularization of current mobile network and other communication technologies; for instance, mediated interaction patterns and the existential paradox of the mediated self fail to reflect the profound impact of new media on people' s daily lives, exhibiting certain historical limitations. Simultaneously, Thompson explores social transformation and the evolution of social interaction behavior from the perspective of media, placing media at the center of modern social development, which exhibits a certain tendency toward pan-mediatization. As one scholar notes: "In summary, Thompson values media, believing that media mediates all aspects of modern society. Throughout his book, one can find him prefixing the term 'mediated' to multiple words such as historicity, globality, sociality, quasi-interaction, publicness, visibility, and experience. He then elevates this characteristic of 'mediated' to the universal phenomenon of 'mediatization' (mediatization), analyzing the 'mediatization of culture' or the 'mediatization of tradition' " [39]. That is, Thompson conducts a social ontological investigation centered on media to some extent, considering the relationship between media and social development and transformation too simplistically, overemphasizing media' s role in social development without considering economic, political, and cultural factors in social development. Although Thompson' s theory of mediated everyday life has various shortcomings, it can examine and reflect on contemporary Chinese media practices and provide reference for the exploration of localized Chinese media.

(1) Thompson' s Theory of Mediated Life Expands the Paradigm of Mediatization Research

Contemporary human society has entered an era of deep mediatization, and traditional media research can no longer fully explain the impact of media on social life. The European communication studies community has developed a "mediatization" research paradigm. Scholars such as Couldry note: "Currently, mediatization has become an important concept and theoretical framework for thinking about the relationship between media, culture and social interaction" [40]. Although Thompson is not explicitly categorized as a mediatization researcher, by examining his texts, we discover the beginnings of mediatization

research in his work. He adopts a social construction perspective, studying the impact of media on society in specific social contexts, pointing out the important role of media in driving social transformation, and comprehensively analyzing how media reconstructs people's daily social patterns, self-construction, and social relations. One scholar notes: "From sociologist to media studies expert, what changes is Thompson's specific research focus; what remains constant is Thompson's consistent concern with media and social life" [41]. Particularly, his analysis of how media changes the presentation modes and operational mechanisms of people's everyday life, along with his critique of the negative life consequences produced by media, provides new visions and new ideas for mediatization research in China.

(2) The Practical Value of Thompson's Theory of Mediated Everyday Life Lies in Reshaping Human Media Agency

The rise of global communication has gradually changed the empirical content of people's everyday lives, and various symptoms carried by media culture have gradually invaded people's spiritual worlds, intensifying people's mediated existence. In response, Thompson focuses on human mediated existence, not simply critiquing the mediatization of everyday life, but rather discovering how media transformation promotes changes in "human-oriented" interactive communication patterns, excavating and interpreting human agency behind media. He believes that audiences receiving media products are not passive subjects but active and dynamic subjects who can negotiate, interpret, and defend themselves against media products, actively presenting and constructing themselves in daily life to gain more mediated visibility and mediated life experiences. One scholar notes: "Thompson sees the 'self-included' characteristic of media transformation as a social reconstruction process. He consistently emphasizes the initiative and creativity of receivers in cultural transmission and social interaction, so media is not completely autonomous, and the perspective of agency re-emerges" [42]. That is, highlighting media agency is an important academic value of Thompson, providing a crucial dimension for contemporary localized Chinese mediatization research.

(3) Thompson's Research on Mediated Everyday Life Has Certain Theoretical Implications for the Modernization of Traditional Chinese Culture Today

In Thompson's view, in mediated society, tradition has not disappeared in the process of modernization, nor has it lost its rooting place or life in the actual environment of everyday life. Instead, through media, tradition is re-embedded into new environments and re-rooted in mediated symbolic communication that transcends face-to-face interaction, paving the way for the expansion and renewal of tradition. This enlightens us to promote the everyday life integration of traditional Chinese culture, allowing traditional culture to be transmitted, innovated, and continuously grow in contemporary communication. Xi Jin-

ping points out: “Filial piety, loyalty, trustworthiness, propriety, righteousness, integrity, shame, benevolence, love for others, kindness, unity of heaven and humanity, following nature’ s way, and continuous self-improvement still deeply influence Chinese people’ s lives to this day” [43]. That is, against the backdrop of global cultural diversification, we must break the spatiotemporal scenarios of traditional culture, promote the innovative development and creative transformation of traditional Chinese culture in the context of everyday life, and under the inspiration of the spirit of the times, endow tradition with modern connotations and modern expressions to fully activate the vitality of traditional culture.

In summary, the core characteristic of John B. Thompson’ s theory of mediated everyday life lies in its compatibility with and forward-looking anticipation of era development. Essentially, his theory innovates the perspective and expands the research space of Western media theory research from the dimension of everyday life. Therefore, the critique of mediated everyday life is not merely a critique of current media alienation; more importantly, it is a critique of capitalist social development itself and a critique of the infiltration of media logic into people’ s everyday lives.

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In the translation of “The new visibility,” Luo Jincheng translates it as “mediated visibility,” while Xu Fangbin translates it as “media new horizon.”

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv – Machine translation. Verify with original.