

# 1 Framing Chinese National Culture in Southeast Asian 2 Digital Media.

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4

## 5 Abstract

6 With the rapid expansion of short-video platforms, national culture is increasingly communicated,  
7 reinterpreted, and localized through algorithm-driven digital media environments. Platforms such as  
8 TikTok have transformed cultural communication from institutionally curated narratives into fragmented,  
9 visually mediated, and everyday encounters embedded in users' routine media consumption. In this  
10 context, national culture is no longer primarily conveyed through authoritative explanation or  
11 comprehensive historical narration, but through repeated exposure to short, platform-adapted cultural  
12 moments that privilege immediacy, recognizability, and affective engagement.

13 This study examines how Chinese national culture is framed in Southeast Asian digital media, with a  
14 particular focus on TikTok-based short-video narratives circulating in the Malaysian context. Drawing  
15 on qualitative content analysis and framing analysis, the study analyzes a corpus of TikTok videos  
16 produced by both Chinese and Southeast Asian content creators. Rather than treating cultural  
17 communication as a coordinated institutional project, the study adopts a national culture communication  
18 perspective that conceptualizes culture as a flexible and negotiated set of meanings shaped by platform  
19 affordances, creator practices, and cross-cultural interaction.

20 The findings identify four dominant cultural frames through which Chinese national culture is  
21 represented: everyday cultural practices, symbolic heritage, experiential and tourism-oriented narratives,  
22 and simplified cultural identity. These frames demonstrate how national culture is localized through  
23 accessible practices such as food and lifestyle, condensed into visually recognizable symbols, mediated  
24 through creator-centered experiences, and stabilized through repetition and symbolic simplification.  
25 Cultural meaning emerges not through comprehensive representation, but through selective emphasis  
26 aligned with short-video storytelling conventions and algorithmic visibility.

27 The study contributes to communication research by extending framing theory into cross-cultural,  
28 platform-mediated contexts and highlighting the role of short-video infrastructures in shaping  
29 contemporary national culture narratives. By focusing on Southeast Asian digital media, the findings  
30 offer insights into how national culture is recontextualized beyond institutional diplomacy and adapted to  
31 everyday digital environments, contributing to a deeper understanding of platformized cultural  
32 communication.

## 33 Keywords

34 framing theory; national culture communication; TikTok; cross-cultural digital media; Southeast Asia

## 35 1. Introduction

36 In recent years, short-video platforms have evolved from entertainment-oriented  
37 applications into everyday cultural infrastructures that shape how people encounter,  
38 interpret, and normalize cultural meanings. TikTok, in particular, occupies a central  
39 position in this transformation due to its algorithmic recommendation system,  
40 immersive audiovisual design, and emphasis on rapid content circulation. Unlike  
41 traditional media formats that rely on linear storytelling or institutional gatekeeping,  
42 TikTok facilitates fragmented, repetitive, and highly personalized encounters with  
43 cultural content. As a result, national culture is no longer primarily communicated  
44 through curated narratives or authoritative explanations, but through continuous  
45 exposure to short, visually engaging cultural moments embedded in users' everyday  
46 media routines.

47

48 This shift has important implications for cultural communication research. Short-video  
49 platforms do not merely host cultural content; they actively shape how culture  
50 becomes visible, memorable, and meaningful. Cultural elements that align with  
51 platform logics—such as immediacy, emotional resonance, and visual  
52 recognizability—are more likely to circulate widely, while complex or  
53 context-dependent meanings may remain marginal. Studying TikTok therefore allows  
54 researchers to examine how national culture is transformed into an ambient,  
55 taken-for-granted presence within digital life, rather than a formally articulated object  
56 of learning or persuasion.

57

58 Frames emphasize certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, thereby  
59 influencing how audiences interpret issues, attribute meaning, and form judgments  
60 (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). In this context, the communication of culture  
61 increasingly extends beyond official channels and state-led initiatives. National culture  
62 is increasingly mediated through platform-based content production, algorithmic  
63 recommendation systems, and localized audience practices (Couldry & Hepp, 2023;  
64 Van Dijck et al., 2024). Short-video platforms such as TikTok have further transformed  
65 cultural communication by privileging visual immediacy, narrative condensation, and

66 creator-driven storytelling, reshaping how cultural meanings are selected, emphasized,  
67 and circulated (Abidin, 2023).

68

69 Against this backdrop, this study examines how Chinese national culture is framed and  
70 localized in Southeast Asian digital media, with a specific focus on TikTok-based  
71 short-video narratives circulating in the Malaysian context. The study adopts a broader  
72 national culture communication perspective, conceptualizing Chinese culture as a  
73 flexible and negotiated set of meanings shaped by cross-cultural interaction and  
74 platform affordances (Flew & Waisbord, 2023). This approach allows for the  
75 examination of both institutional and grassroots modes of cultural framing, as well as  
76 the role of digital infrastructures in structuring visibility and interpretation.

77

78 Within the analyzed content, symbolic references commonly associated with  
79 Xi'an—such as historical imagery, culinary practices, and culturally recognizable  
80 signifiers—appear in the dataset as recurring cultural symbols rather than as objects of  
81 place-based analysis. However, Xi'an is not approached as a bounded city-branding  
82 case in this study. Instead, it is treated as a cultural reference point through which  
83 broader narratives of Chinese national culture are articulated, adapted, and  
84 recontextualized in Southeast Asian digital environments. This analytical repositioning  
85 aligns with recent communication scholarship emphasizing how national culture  
86 circulates through dispersed, platform-mediated narratives rather than fixed  
87 institutional campaigns (Hepp et al., 2023).

88

89 Existing research has shown that social media platforms play a central role in shaping  
90 contemporary cultural communication, particularly through visual storytelling,  
91 participatory production, and algorithmic amplification (Bhandari & Bimo, 2023; Zeng  
92 et al., 2024). At the same time, scholars note challenges such as content  
93 homogenization, algorithm-driven visibility hierarchies, and the need for culturally  
94 sensitive localization in cross-cultural contexts (Jin & Yoon, 2024). In Southeast Asia,  
95 where cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity significantly shapes audience

96 reception, cultural narratives often require contextual adaptation to achieve resonance.  
97 Malaysian audiences, for example, may engage more readily with everyday cultural  
98 practices such as food and lifestyle representations than with abstract national  
99 symbolism, underscoring the importance of localized framing strategies (Halim & Kaur,  
100 2023).

101

102 These considerations motivate the present study. This research focuses on how cultural  
103 meanings circulate, stabilize, and transform within platform-mediated environments.  
104 Using qualitative content analysis and framing analysis, the study investigates  
105 dominant framing patterns in TikTok-based representations of Chinese national culture,  
106 the influence of creator identity on framing strategies, and the role of platform  
107 affordances in shaping and simplifying cultural narratives.

108

109 The study contributes to communication research in two ways. Theoretically, it extends  
110 framing theory into cross-cultural, platform-mediated contexts, demonstrating how  
111 national culture is reframed through short-video infrastructures. Practically, it offers  
112 insights for cultural communicators and policymakers seeking to understand how  
113 national culture is represented and localized in Southeast Asian digital spaces,  
114 contributing to more nuanced approaches to digital cultural communication.

115

116 Research Objectives

117 This study aims to explore how Chinese national culture is framed and communicated  
118 in Southeast Asian digital media through TikTok-based short-video narratives.  
119 Specifically, it seeks to:

120

121 Identify dominant framing patterns used in the representation of Chinese national  
122 culture in TikTok content circulating in Southeast Asia;

123

124 Examine how creator identity influences cultural framing strategies in cross-cultural  
125 digital environments;

126

127 Analyze the role of platform affordances in shaping and simplifying cultural meanings.

128

## 129 **2. Literature Review**

### 130 2.1 Framing Theory and Cultural Meaning Construction

131 Framing theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how  
132 communicators shape audience perceptions by emphasizing certain aspects of reality  
133 while downplaying others. Frames function as interpretive structures that guide how  
134 audiences define issues, assign responsibility, and construct meaning within mediated  
135 discourse (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Within communication research, framing  
136 has been widely applied to examine how symbolic elements—such as language,  
137 imagery, and narrative organization—influence audience interpretation and evaluation  
138 (Scheufele, 1999).

139

140 Beyond news media, framing theory has been extended to cultural and social contexts,  
141 where meaning construction is shaped through recurring symbolic patterns rather than  
142 explicit persuasion. Benford and Snow (2000) argue that frames operate by selectively  
143 highlighting culturally resonant elements, thereby shaping collective understandings  
144 of identity, values, and social reality. This perspective is particularly relevant for  
145 cultural communication in digital environments, where visual cues, repetition, and  
146 narrative condensation play a central role in making culture recognizable and  
147 accessible to audiences.

148

### 149 2.2 National Culture Communication and Symbolic Representation

150 National culture communication refers to the circulation of narratives and symbols  
151 that articulate a nation's identity, values, and cultural heritage through  
152 representational practices (Hall, 1997). Cultural meanings are not transmitted in a  
153 neutral or comprehensive manner but are selectively encoded through shared  
154 symbolic systems that enable audiences to recognize and interpret cultural  
155 significance. As Hall (1997) emphasizes, representation is inherently interpretive,  
156 relying on culturally embedded codes rather than objective transmission.

157

158 In mediated contexts, national culture often emerges through everyday symbolic  
159 references rather than formal political or diplomatic discourse. Elements such as food  
160 practices, lifestyle representations, historical imagery, and ritualized spaces function

161 as accessible cultural signifiers that translate abstract national identity into tangible  
162 experiences.

163

164 From this perspective, urban cultural symbols do not operate solely within city  
165 branding frameworks but contribute to national culture communication by providing  
166 relatable points of reference. City-related imagery thus functions as part of a wider  
167 cultural narrative system, enabling audiences—especially those outside the national  
168 context—to engage with national culture through familiar and visually identifiable  
169 representations.

170

### 171 2.3 Platformization and Short-Video Cultural Communication

172 The increasing influence of digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped how cultural  
173 meanings are produced, circulated, and stabilized. Platformization refers to the  
174 process through which digital platforms structure cultural production and visibility  
175 through technical infrastructures, governance mechanisms, and economic logics (Van  
176 Dijck, Poell, & De Waal, 2024; Poell, Nieborg, & Van Dijck, 2022). In such  
177 environments, cultural communication is shaped not only by content creators but also  
178 by algorithmic recommendation systems and engagement-driven metrics.

179

180 Short-video platforms exemplify these dynamics by privileging brevity, visual  
181 immediacy, and affective appeal. The format encourages the condensation of cultural  
182 narratives into easily recognizable visual and narrative elements, often prioritizing  
183 familiarity and symbolic clarity over contextual depth. As a result, cultural frames  
184 circulating on short-video platforms tend to emphasize repetition, visual symbolism,  
185 and everyday practices that can be quickly interpreted by diverse audiences.

186

187 Importantly, framing in platformized environments is not solely controlled by  
188 institutional actors. Individual creators actively participate in selecting, remixing, and  
189 recontextualizing cultural symbols, while platform algorithms influence which  
190 representations gain visibility. This interaction contributes to the normalization of  
191 certain cultural frames and the marginalization of others, reinforcing dominant  
192 patterns of representation over time.

193

### 194 2.4 Cross-Cultural Digital Communication in Southeast Asia

195 Southeast Asia provides a particularly significant context for examining cross-cultural  
196 digital communication due to its cultural diversity, historical connectivity, and high  
197 levels of social media engagement. Audiences in the region interpret cultural  
198 representations through locally situated frameworks shaped by everyday experience,  
199 cultural proximity, and social values (McQuail, 2010). Consequently, cultural  
200 narratives that emphasize practical relevance and familiarity—such as food culture,  
201 lifestyle practices, and inclusivity—are often more accessible than abstract or  
202 ideologically framed national symbolism.

203

204 In multicultural societies such as Malaysia, audience reception of foreign cultural  
205 content is further shaped by religious norms, ethnic diversity, and lived cultural  
206 interaction. These conditions highlight the importance of localized framing strategies  
207 in national culture communication. Rather than assuming uniform interpretation,  
208 cross-cultural digital communication requires attention to how cultural meanings are  
209 adapted and reassembled to align with local sensibilities and everyday experiences.

210

## 211 2.5 Research Gaps

212 Despite extensive scholarship on framing theory, national culture, and digital media,  
213 several gaps remain. First, existing studies often examine framing processes or  
214 platform communication in isolation, with limited integration of framing theory into  
215 analyses of short-video platforms as sites of cultural meaning construction. Second,  
216 while Chinese culture has gained increasing visibility through global digital platforms,  
217 empirical research examining how Chinese national culture is framed and localized  
218 within Southeast Asian digital environments remains limited. Third, studies focusing  
219 specifically on TikTok-based cultural narratives in Malaysia are scarce, despite the  
220 platform's growing influence in shaping everyday cultural perception.

221

222 Addressing these gaps, the present study applies qualitative content analysis and  
223 framing analysis to TikTok-based short-video narratives circulating in Malaysia. By  
224 examining how Chinese national culture is framed through platform affordances and  
225 creator practices, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural  
226 digital cultural communication in contemporary media environments.

227

## 228 **3. Methodology**

### 229 3.1 Research Design

230 This study adopts a qualitative research design combining content analysis and  
231 framing analysis to examine how Chinese national culture is represented and localized  
232 in Southeast Asian digital media. Qualitative content analysis is suitable for  
233 identifying patterns of meaning embedded in mediated texts, particularly when the  
234 research focus is on symbolic representation rather than the measurement of media  
235 effects (McQuail, 2010).

236

237 Framing analysis is employed to identify recurring interpretive patterns through which  
238 cultural symbols and narratives are emphasized or marginalized in media content.  
239 Frames are understood as organizing principles that structure meaning and guide  
240 interpretation (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). This analytical approach is  
241 particularly appropriate for short-video content, where meaning is often conveyed  
242 through visual symbolism, narrative condensation, and repetition rather than explicit  
243 explanation.

244

### 245 3.2 Data Source and Sampling Strategy

246 The empirical data for this study were collected from TikTok, a short-video platform  
247 characterized by algorithmic content recommendation and high levels of participatory  
248 media production. TikTok was selected because of its widespread use in Southeast  
249 Asia and its growing role in cross-cultural cultural communication.

250

251 Data collection focused on videos circulating within the Malaysian digital media  
252 context that contained identifiable elements of Chinese national culture. A purposive  
253 sampling strategy was adopted to identify information-rich cases relevant to the  
254 research objectives. Videos were selected based on the presence of culturally  
255 recognizable elements such as food practices, everyday lifestyle representations,  
256 symbolic imagery, and culturally meaningful spaces.

257

### 258 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

259 All videos analyzed in this study were publicly accessible at the time of data  
260 collection. Each selected video was reviewed manually, and descriptive information  
261 was recorded, including content description, visible cultural elements, creator  
262 positioning, and language use. Manual data collection enabled close attention to  
263 visual, narrative, and contextual features that are central to cultural meaning  
264 construction but are difficult to capture through automated methods.

265

266 Creator identities were categorized at a general level (for example, local Southeast  
267 Asian creators or culturally affiliated creators) to support analysis of representational  
268 variation without focusing on individual attribution. In line with established practices  
269 in media research, all content was treated as cultural text rather than personal  
270 communication (McQuail, 2010).

271

### 272 3.4 Coding Process

273 The study employed manual, inductive coding, allowing analytical categories to  
274 emerge from repeated engagement with the data rather than being imposed a priori.  
275 This approach is consistent with qualitative content analysis methods that emphasize  
276 sensitivity to context and meaning (McQuail, 2010).

277

278 In the initial coding stage, videos were examined to identify salient cultural elements  
279 and representational features. Preliminary codes captured observable characteristics  
280 such as:

281

282 types of cultural symbols (e.g., food practices, lifestyle elements, symbolic  
283 imagery); representational mode (e.g., everyday-oriented, visually symbolic); creator  
284 positioning; narrative and visual emphasis.

285

286 In subsequent stages, codes were refined through constant comparison across cases to  
287 enhance conceptual clarity and internal consistency. Related codes were grouped into  
288 broader analytical categories reflecting shared patterns of cultural meaning  
289 construction.

290

### 291 3.5 Framing Analysis

292 Following the coding process, a framing analysis was conducted to identify  
293 higher-level interpretive frames organizing cultural meaning across the dataset.  
294 Frames were identified based on recurring patterns of symbolic emphasis, narrative  
295 structure, and representational strategy rather than isolated content features (Entman,  
296 1993).

297

298 Rather than treating individual codes as analytical endpoints, the analysis focused on  
299 how combinations of cultural symbols, visual cues, and narrative elements

300 collectively produced recognizable frames through which Chinese national culture  
301 was represented and localized in the Malaysian digital media context. This approach  
302 aligns with framing theory's emphasis on meaning organization and interpretive  
303 structure (Scheufele, 1999).

304

### 305 3.6 Ethical Considerations

306 All data analyzed in this study were obtained from publicly accessible TikTok  
307 content. No private data were accessed, and no interaction with content creators  
308 occurred during the research process. Creator usernames and identifiable personal  
309 information were not recorded or reported. The study adheres to established ethical  
310 principles for digital media research by treating platform content as contextualized  
311 cultural artifacts rather than personal communications.

312

## 313 **4. Findings**

### 314 4.1 Overview of Identified Cultural Frames

315 Based on the qualitative content analysis of TikTok videos circulating in the  
316 Southeast Asian digital media environment, this study identified four dominant  
317 cultural frames through which Chinese national culture is represented. These frames  
318 emerged inductively from recurring patterns in symbolic emphasis, narrative  
319 structure, and visual presentation across the dataset. Rather than appearing as isolated  
320 cultural elements, representations of Chinese culture were consistently organized into  
321 recognizable meaning clusters that enabled rapid interpretation within the short-video  
322 format.

323

324 The identification of frames was guided by attention to how cultural elements were  
325 selected, foregrounded, and repeated across videos. These patterns reveal that cultural  
326 representation on TikTok is not random or purely individual, but structured through  
327 shared conventions that shape how meaning is produced and circulated. As such,  
328 frames function as interpretive devices that allow audiences to make sense of cultural  
329 content quickly, even in the absence of explicit explanation or contextualization.

330

331 The identified frames reflect both creator-level representational choices and  
332 platform-level constraints, particularly the affordances of TikTok's short duration,  
333 visual orientation, and algorithmic visibility. Creators adapt their storytelling practices  
334 to platform norms, while the platform itself reinforces certain representational  
335 strategies through visibility and circulation mechanisms. Together, these frames

336 demonstrate how Chinese national culture is selectively highlighted, simplified, and  
337 localized in Southeast Asian digital contexts.

338

339 To enhance analytical transparency, the four dominant frames and their key  
340 characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The table provides an overview of how  
341 each frame emphasizes different aspects of culture, relies on distinct symbolic  
342 resources, and employs specific representational features that align with short-video  
343 storytelling.

344

345 **Table 1. Dominant Cultural Frames in TikTok-Based Representations of**  
346 **Chinese National Culture**

Frame Name	Core Focus	Key Cultural Elements	Dominant Representational Features
Everyday Cultural Practices	Lived and consumable aspects of culture	Food preparation, dining scenes, daily routines	Sensory appeal; casual narration; visual immediacy
Symbolic Heritage	Condensed representations of historical and cultural identity	Architecture, traditional imagery, iconic symbols	Visual shorthand; high recognizability; limited contextual explanation
Experiential and Tourism-Oriented	Personal encounters with culture through mobility	Travel experiences, recommendations, first-person exploration	Subjective evaluation; narrative immediacy; movement-oriented framing
Simplified Cultural Identity	Reduction and repetition of cultural meaning	Recurrent symbols across multiple videos	Symbolic condensation; platform-friendly repetition

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348

Source: Author's qualitative content analysis of TikTok videos.

## 349 4.2 Dominant Cultural Frames in TikTok-Based Narratives

### 350 4.2.1 Everyday Cultural Practices Frame

351 The most prevalent frame across the dataset centers on everyday cultural practices,  
352 particularly food-related activities and lifestyle routines. Videos frequently depict the  
353 preparation, consumption, or exploration of Chinese cuisine, presenting food as an  
354 accessible and relatable entry point to Chinese culture. Rather than emphasizing  
355 formal heritage discourse or historical explanation, these narratives focus on sensory  
356 experience, visual appeal, and practical engagement.

357

358 Within this frame, Chinese national culture is constructed as familiar and experiential,  
359 allowing audiences to engage without requiring prior cultural knowledge. Cultural  
360 meaning is conveyed through visual cues such as cooking processes, dining  
361 environments, and casual commentary, reinforcing a sense of cultural proximity. The  
362 use of informal narration and first-person perspectives further situates culture within  
363 everyday life rather than institutional settings.

364

365 The prominence of this frame suggests that everyday practices function as a key  
366 mechanism through which national culture is localized for Southeast Asian audiences.  
367 Food and lifestyle representations resonate with shared regional experiences, enabling  
368 cross-cultural interpretation through familiarity rather than abstraction. As a result,  
369 cultural difference is softened, and national culture is presented as approachable and  
370 consumable rather than distant or authoritative.

371

372 Importantly, this frame does not attempt to offer a comprehensive representation of  
373 Chinese culture. Instead, it selects culturally resonant moments that align with  
374 platform logics of immediacy and relatability. Through repetition across multiple  
375 videos, these moments contribute to the normalization of Chinese culture within  
376 everyday digital consumption.

377

### 378 4.2.2 Symbolic Heritage Frame

379 A second dominant frame emphasizes symbolic heritage, drawing on visually  
380 recognizable cultural markers such as architecture, traditional aesthetics, and iconic

381 imagery. Unlike comprehensive historical narratives, this frame relies on brief visual  
382 references that signal cultural depth without extended explanation.

383 Heritage elements within this frame operate as symbolic shorthand, enabling rapid  
384 recognition within the temporal constraints of short-video content. Cultural symbols  
385 are detached from detailed historical context and instead function as markers of  
386 authenticity and continuity. Viewers are invited to recognize, rather than fully  
387 understand, the cultural significance of these elements.

388 This framing strategy reinforces the legitimacy of Chinese national culture while  
389 remaining compatible with platform-driven storytelling practices. By compressing  
390 complex historical meanings into visually distinctive symbols, the frame balances  
391 cultural authority with accessibility. However, this compression also narrows the  
392 scope of representation, privileging iconic imagery over less visible or everyday  
393 forms of heritage.

394

#### 395 4.2.3 Experiential and Tourism-Oriented Frame

396 The experiential and tourism-oriented frame presents Chinese culture through  
397 personal encounters, movement, and discovery. Videos structured around visits,  
398 recommendations, or first-person exploration frame culture as something to be  
399 experienced rather than formally learned. Cultural meaning is constructed through  
400 personal reaction, spatial navigation, and subjective evaluation.

401

402 This frame emphasizes immediacy and affect, aligning closely with TikTok's  
403 emphasis on personal storytelling and visual engagement. The creator's perspective  
404 serves as the primary interpretive lens, shaping how cultural elements are introduced  
405 and evaluated. Rather than positioning culture as fixed or authoritative, experiential  
406 narratives frame it as dynamic and situational.

407

408 Although cultural elements may overlap with everyday practices or symbolic heritage,  
409 the defining feature of this frame is the foregrounding of individual experience.  
410 Culture is understood through what the creator sees, feels, and reacts to, highlighting  
411 the role of creators as mediators in platform-mediated cultural communication.

412

#### 413 4.2.4 Simplified Cultural Identity Frame

414 Across the dataset, a simplified cultural identity frame operates by condensing  
415 complex cultural meanings into a limited set of recurring symbols. This frame does  
416 not function independently but intersects with other frames, shaping how culture is  
417 reduced to easily repeatable and visually distinctive elements.

418

419 The repetition of similar symbols across videos contributes to the stabilization of a  
420 narrow but recognizable representation of Chinese national culture. Over time,  
421 repeated exposure to familiar cultural cues produces a sense of coherence and  
422 continuity, even as representational diversity is reduced. Simplification thus functions  
423 as a cumulative process rather than a single representational act.

424

425 While this frame enhances accessibility and circulation, it also marginalizes less  
426 visible or less platform-compatible cultural dimensions. Cultural elements that require  
427 contextual explanation or extended narrative development are less likely to appear.  
428 This pattern highlights the role of platform affordances in shaping which cultural  
429 meanings gain prominence over time.

430

#### 431 4.3 Creator Positioning and Framing Variations

432 Framing strategies vary according to creator positioning and cultural proximity. Local  
433 Southeast Asian creators tend to emphasize accessibility and relatability, frequently  
434 framing Chinese culture through everyday consumption or personal comparison with  
435 local practices. Their narratives prioritize familiarity and experiential engagement,  
436 reinforcing cultural proximity and interpretive ease.

437

438 Creators with closer cultural affiliation or deeper cultural knowledge are more likely  
439 to incorporate symbolic heritage elements. However, even within these narratives,  
440 heritage is presented in a visually condensed and platform-friendly manner. Extended  
441 explanation remains rare, suggesting that creators across positions adapt to shared  
442 platform norms.

443

444 Across creator types, explicit cultural instruction is limited. Instead, meaning is  
445 conveyed through demonstration, repetition, and visual emphasis, indicating a  
446 reliance on platform-compatible storytelling conventions rather than didactic  
447 communication.

448

#### 449 4.4 Platform Affordances and Narrative Structuring

450 The TikTok platform plays a central role in shaping how cultural frames are  
451 constructed and circulated. The short-video format prioritizes brevity, visual  
452 immediacy, and narrative focus, limiting opportunities for contextual elaboration. As  
453 a result, cultural meaning is often communicated through symbolic condensation,  
454 repetition, and affective cues rather than detailed explanation.

455

456 Algorithmic visibility further reinforces dominant frames by favoring content that is  
457 visually engaging and easily interpretable. Over time, this contributes to the  
458 normalization of specific cultural representations while reducing representational  
459 diversity. These findings suggest that platform affordances are not merely a  
460 distribution mechanism but actively participate in structuring cultural meaning.

461

#### 462 4.5 Summary of Findings

463

464 Overall, the findings demonstrate that Chinese national culture is framed on TikTok  
465 through a combination of everyday practices, symbolic heritage, experiential  
466 narratives, and simplified cultural identity. These frames collectively construct a  
467 version of national culture that is accessible, visually recognizable, and aligned with  
468 platform logics. Cultural meaning emerges through selective emphasis rather than  
469 comprehensive representation, underscoring the role of digital platforms in shaping  
470 cross-cultural cultural communication in Southeast Asian contexts.

### 471 **5. Discussion**

472 This study examined how Chinese national culture is framed and circulated in  
473 Southeast Asian digital media through TikTok-based short-video narratives. By  
474 identifying four dominant cultural frames—everyday cultural practices, symbolic  
475 heritage, experiential and tourism-oriented narratives, and simplified cultural

476 identity—the findings reveal how national culture is recontextualized within  
477 platformized communication environments. Rather than functioning as a coherent or  
478 comprehensive representation of cultural tradition, Chinese national culture on  
479 TikTok emerges as a selectively assembled, visually mediated, and affect-driven  
480 construction, shaped by both creator practices and platform affordances.

## 481 5.1 Framing Chinese National Culture in Platformized Environments

482 The findings demonstrate that framing processes in short-video platforms differ  
483 fundamentally from those in traditional mass media or institutional cultural  
484 communication. In conventional framing contexts, such as news media or cultural  
485 diplomacy campaigns, frames are often designed to provide interpretive coherence,  
486 historical continuity, and ideological alignment. In contrast, TikTok-based framing  
487 operates under conditions of brevity, algorithmic visibility, and continuous content  
488 circulation, which prioritize immediacy, recognizability, and emotional resonance  
489 over narrative completeness.

490 Within this environment, Chinese national culture is framed less as a historically  
491 layered system of meanings and more as a collection of accessible cultural moments.  
492 Everyday cultural practices—such as food preparation, street scenes, and casual  
493 lifestyle representations—function as low-threshold entry points for audiences  
494 unfamiliar with deeper cultural contexts. These frames align with TikTok’s emphasis  
495 on sensory engagement and rapid comprehension, allowing cultural content to  
496 circulate widely without requiring prior knowledge.

497 At the same time, symbolic heritage frames rely on condensed visual  
498 cues—architecture, traditional attire, or iconic imagery—that signal “Chineseness”  
499 through instant recognition. This form of framing reflects what can be described as  
500 symbolic compression, where complex cultural histories are reduced to easily  
501 identifiable markers. While such compression enhances platform compatibility and  
502 transnational legibility, it also limits interpretive depth, reinforcing surface-level  
503 cultural understanding.

504 These findings extend framing theory by illustrating how frames are not only  
505 communicative choices but also structurally conditioned outcomes of platform  
506 environments. Framing on TikTok is shaped as much by algorithmic circulation logic  
507 as by creator intention, highlighting the need to understand framing as a dynamic  
508 process embedded within digital infrastructures.

## 509 5.2 National Culture Communication Beyond City Branding

510 One of the key theoretical contributions of this study lies in demonstrating how  
511 national culture communication on TikTok operates beyond the logic of city branding  
512 or institutional promotion. Although urban symbols associated with Xi'an appear  
513 frequently in the dataset, they do not function as strategic branding tools aimed at  
514 promoting a specific city identity. Instead, they operate as culturally recognizable  
515 resources within broader narratives of Chinese national culture.

516 This finding challenges conventional assumptions in cultural communication research  
517 that associate cultural dissemination primarily with state-led initiatives or coordinated  
518 branding strategies. On TikTok, cultural meaning is produced through dispersed,  
519 creator-driven practices, where national culture is assembled through everyday  
520 experiences, personal encounters, and platform trends. As a result, national culture is  
521 not communicated as a unified narrative but as a fragmented and negotiable set of  
522 meanings, continuously reshaped through circulation and repetition.

523 Importantly, this shift does not imply the absence of cultural significance. Rather, it  
524 suggests a transformation in how cultural authority is constructed. Instead of relying  
525 on institutional legitimacy, cultural meaning on TikTok gains visibility through  
526 affective engagement, algorithmic amplification, and audience interaction. National  
527 culture becomes meaningful not because it is officially endorsed, but because it is  
528 repeatedly encountered, shared, and reinterpreted within everyday digital practices.

529 This perspective contributes to ongoing debates in national culture communication by  
530 highlighting how digital platforms enable alternative modes of cultural transmission  
531 that coexist with, but are not subordinate to, formal cultural diplomacy or branding  
532 efforts.

### 533 5.3 Cross-Cultural Interpretation in Southeast Asian Digital Contexts

534 The Southeast Asian context, particularly Malaysia, provides an important lens for  
535 understanding how platformized cultural frames are interpreted across cultural  
536 boundaries. The findings suggest that TikTok-based representations of Chinese  
537 national culture resonate most strongly when they emphasize experiential accessibility  
538 and cultural proximity, rather than abstract historical narratives.

539 Everyday cultural frames—such as food, street life, and informal social  
540 interactions—allow audiences to engage with Chinese culture through familiar  
541 sensory and emotional registers. This form of framing reduces cultural distance and  
542 facilitates cross-cultural interpretation without requiring extensive contextual  
543 explanation. In contrast, heritage-oriented frames that rely heavily on symbolic  
544 imagery may generate recognition but offer limited interpretive engagement for  
545 audiences unfamiliar with the historical background.

546 These patterns underscore the importance of localization in cross-cultural digital  
547 communication. Rather than translating national culture into region-specific messages,  
548 TikTok-based cultural narratives adapt by foregrounding universally relatable  
549 experiences. This strategy aligns with the platform's transnational circulation  
550 dynamics, where content must remain legible across diverse cultural contexts to  
551 achieve visibility.

552 The findings therefore suggest that effective national culture communication in  
553 Southeast Asian digital media does not depend on cultural completeness or historical  
554 accuracy, but on the ability to activate shared experiential reference points that allow  
555 audiences to situate unfamiliar cultural elements within their own interpretive  
556 frameworks.

#### 557 5.4 Platform Affordances and the Simplification of Cultural Meaning

558 A recurring theme across the findings is the simplification of cultural meaning. While  
559 simplification is often viewed critically as a loss of cultural depth, this study suggests  
560 that simplification should instead be understood as a structural condition of  
561 platformized communication. TikTok's affordances—short duration, algorithmic  
562 ranking, and emphasis on visual appeal—encourage cultural representations that are  
563 concise, repeatable, and emotionally engaging.

564 Simplification, in this context, enables cultural content to circulate efficiently across  
565 linguistic and cultural boundaries. Repetition of symbolic elements, such as recurring  
566 food imagery or iconic visual motifs, contributes to cultural visibility and recognition.  
567 However, this visibility comes at the cost of narrative complexity, as nuanced  
568 historical or social contexts are often excluded.

569 Rather than framing simplification as a distortion of national culture, it is more  
570 productive to view it as a trade-off between reach and depth. Simplified cultural  
571 frames allow national culture to enter everyday digital environments, where it can be  
572 encountered casually and repeatedly. Over time, these encounters may serve as  
573 gateways to deeper cultural engagement, even if the initial framing remains  
574 surface-oriented.

575 This insight highlights the importance of considering platform affordances as active  
576 participants in cultural communication processes. Cultural meaning on TikTok is not  
577 merely communicated through the platform—it is co-produced by the platform's  
578 technical, algorithmic, and interactional structures.

## 579 **6. Conclusion**

580 This study examined how Chinese national culture is framed and localized in  
581 Southeast Asian digital media through TikTok-based short-video narratives  
582 circulating in Malaysia. By applying qualitative content analysis and framing analysis,  
583 the study identified four dominant cultural frames—everyday cultural practices,  
584 symbolic heritage, experiential and tourism-oriented narratives, and simplified  
585 cultural identity—through which cultural meanings are constructed, circulated, and  
586 stabilized in a platformized media environment.

587

588 The findings demonstrate that Chinese national culture is communicated less through  
589 comprehensive historical or institutional narratives and more through selective,  
590 visually driven, and experiential representations. Everyday practices such as food and  
591 lifestyle function as primary entry points, while symbolic heritage operates as  
592 condensed visual shorthand. These framing patterns reflect both creator-level  
593 adaptation and platform-level constraints, highlighting how digital platforms actively  
594 shape cultural meaning rather than merely distributing it.

595

596 Theoretically, this study extends framing theory by illustrating how frames operate  
597 within short-video, algorithmically driven environments, where repetition, visual  
598 immediacy, and narrative brevity are central to meaning construction. It also  
599 contributes to research on national culture communication by demonstrating how  
600 national identity is recontextualized through everyday and localized narratives.

601

602 From a regional perspective, the findings underscore the importance of localization  
603 and cultural proximity in cross-cultural digital communication. In the Southeast Asian  
604 context, particularly Malaysia, culturally accessible and experiential framing  
605 strategies facilitate engagement and interpretation, suggesting that effective national  
606 culture communication in digital spaces depends on alignment with everyday cultural  
607 sensibilities.

608

609 Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focuses on a single platform  
610 and national context, and the analysis does not include audience reception or  
611 engagement metrics. Future research could extend this approach by comparing  
612 multiple Southeast Asian countries, incorporating audience interpretation, or  
613 examining longitudinal changes in cultural framing across platforms.

614

615 Overall, this study highlights the growing significance of short-video platforms in  
616 shaping contemporary cultural communication and offers insights into how national  
617 culture is framed, simplified, and localized in global digital environments.

618

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