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**The identity construction and representation of diasporic Chinese  
content creators on YouTube**

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The identity construction and representation of diasporic  
Chinese content creators on YouTube

**Chen Yang**

September 2022

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of  
the University of Westminster

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

## **Abstract**

A significant number of diasporic Chinese content creators have emerged on YouTube in recent years. Unlike their parents, these Chinese diasporas in Western world spend most of their time in the receiving countries and have been marginalized by the mainstream society during their growing up period. With the intention to represent their own diasporic identity, a series of videos were made to share various cultural related content ranging from ethnic food preparation, generational relationships, and heritage language practices. Many of these videos have already received hundreds of thousands of views, showing its potential to have a large social influence. Thus, this study decided to examine how Chinese diaspora construct and represent their cultural identity on this platform, with a specific focus on the Chinese in Western countries.

To understand the topic, this study will combine theories such as diaspora and transnationalism, cultural identity and semiotics, representation and power relations while also considering YouTube's outstanding "participatory culture" and its commercial attributes. In terms of methodology, this study will treat YouTube's environment as a whole and it has adopted a series of methods from online observation, semi-structured interview and textual analysis. The findings will be divided into three chapters with each chapter focusing on one cultural element (Chinese food, parents and heritage language) and the influence of these elements on Western Chinese identity construction and more importantly, how they represent these symbols online. During this process, power relations behind the representation process will be carefully investigated to understand how a hybrid identity was formulated through these online practices.

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## **Introduction**

The idea for this project was first conceived in 2017. At that time, I had just left China and had been studying in the United Kingdom for approximately one year. At this time, I was beginning to gradually build up the habit to watch videos on YouTube. YouTube's recommendation system often pushed videos of ethnic Chinese living abroad and this made me realise that their life and their ways of thinking were very different from I imagined. As a Chinese who lived in China for just over twenty years, I had never hesitated to answer questions such as 'where are you from?' or 'what is your name?' but when I heard the stories from the Chinese living in the West, I was surprised by the complexity of their feelings and the various memories behind these two seemingly simple questions. It has made me curious about their way of life as an ethnic Chinese who may have never visited China. The British YouTuber Nicole discussed that she found herself isolated when she was growing up, so a few Chinese YouTube creators became the people that she looked up to. Similar expressions have appeared repeatedly in many videos, which has made me consider the role YouTube plays in their life, especially when they are attempting to define their identity.

Castells (2001) in his work highlighted that the Internet provides diaspora with a 'symbolic belonging'. It serves as a significant space for identity formation, especially for diaspora (Gibb 2002; Granham and Khosravi 2002; Clarke, 2004). As a part of the Internet, social media provides an interesting starting point to look into this group as both of them share the feature of the 'time space compression'. YouTube, as one of the most prominent social media platforms allows for a diverse transnational network to negotiate various global discourse and present a constructed imagined community online.

Tsagarousianou (2020) has suggested that media products in today's era have facilitated diaspora's cultural and identity refiguration through the construction of transnational imagination. The most obvious example is the rising global interconnection and also the awakening of identity pursuit by ethnic minorities. As Pramod K. Nayar mentioned (2010) 'the quest for diversity in cyber culture demands a retention of black/ brown identities for some

subjects'. Thus, this study has decided to look at Chinese diaspora in Western countries and how they fight for the visibility through identity practices on YouTube.

### **Background information: The Western view on China and Chinese**

This research focuses on the Chinese diaspora content creators who identify themselves as American Chinese, British Chinese, Canadian Chinese or Australian Chinese. I adopted Huntington's definition of 'the West' (discussed in further detail in Chapter 1) and categorized them within the concept of 'Western countries'. To fully understand the situation that Chinese diaspora find themselves, I will briefly introduce the views from a Western perspective.

The Western perception of China and the Chinese has undergone several changes over the last few hundred years. Some views have been warped by racist understanding; some also represent the changing history of Chinese diaspora. From the early sixteenth century, two dominant representation on China have held very different opinions. One sees China as a very prosperous country and the Chinese as intelligent and combative people who have the capability to control the whole of northern Asia. The other one describes China as an unpleasant place with little civilization, 'the grossest and simplicity' people (Harris, 2015). In the nineteenth century, when feudal China first opened its door, the views on China and its people remained complex. Also, with the first group of Chinese workers immigrating to Western countries, racist concepts such as 'yellow peril' started to circulate in the Western societies. These Sinophobia ideas perceive people from East Asian countries as a threat to the white citizens (Waller, 1985). These kinds of discriminatory views against China and ethnic Chinese people changed during World War II, partly because China was allied with the Western powers. Another reason is due to the need to justification the war against Nazi Germany (which in some regards was a war fighting against racism). However, after the communist party took over China in the late 1940s, the Western countries' perception of China soon fell into the 'Red scare' trap due to the campaigns ran by mainstream media. This opinion towards China were also influenced by the Chinese diaspora in Western countries (discussed in Chapter 5). In the West, Chinese people have been portrayed as 'model minority' with silent and ambitious character who have a strong desire for success. Also, due to the influence of early discrimination policies, Chinese people were often treated as a cunning or unmoral competitors to the dominant white group. Chinese culture was also represented as 'exotic and mysterious'.

Since 1980s, due to China's 'opening up' policy and economic growth causes an influx of students and professional experts to the Western countries. China has been portrayed as a powerful state and a potential threat to the democratic world. In the meantime, after many years of immigration, some of the Chinese diaspora have settled in their hosting country and many of them have developed new roots in these areas. However, their newly changed identity is not recognised by the mainstream media. For quite a long time, Chinese people were a marginalized group who rarely had the chance to appear in television series or films in their host countries. The remaining characters were either portrayed with strong stereotype, or there were often instances where they would play insignificant roles where they would 'stand at the back of the scene'(Han,2016; He,2010; Jakubowic & Seneviratne,1996) . This phenomenon has only started to improve in recent years, the number of Chinese or East Asian characters has increased in the mainstream media but many of them still carry the stereotype placed upon them by the dominant society.

### **Main research questions**

Because of the significant misrepresentation and the underrepresentation of Chinese diaspora in the mainstream society, the emergence of YouTube has meant it has become an important place for Chinese people to build connections and seek visibility (Guo & Lee, 2013). Thus, there are three important reasons which should mean this research is a significant contribution to the literature. Firstly, the online self-expression activities of Chinese diaspora on YouTube have not featured in many studies to date. The existing studies have mainly focused on Asian Americans, which ignored the cultural differences between ethnic Chinese and other Asian ethnicities while overlooking the existence of the shared experiences across geographical boundaries. Secondly, because Chinese diaspora have remained marginalized for a very long time, understanding how they represent themselves may help formulate a comprehensive view of this group. Lastly, investigating their strategies to form a transnational diasporic community on a visual platform adds value to the diaspora studies.

A principle aim of this study is to examine and explore how Western Chinese video creators identify the differences and connections between themselves and other cultural groups through their online practices.

The main research questions are:

How do the Western Chinese YouTubers understand themselves? How is the diasporic cultural identity of Western Chinese presented on YouTube?

Four sub-questions were listed based on the given topics:

Sub-question 1: How do Western Chinese YouTubers negotiate their identity between Chinese culture and the culture of their receiving country?

Sub-question 2: To what extent does transnational experiences effect their understanding and the representation of their diasporic cultural identity?

Sub-question 3: How do Western Chinese YouTubers utilize their transnational imaginary to construct an online community?

Sub-question 4: How does YouTube, as a commercial platform, encourage or constrain their representation activities?

To fully investigate the above questions, the literature on representation and cultural identity provides the necessary theoretical basis. Cottle (2003) pointed out how media influences the representation and cultural power. The first point is that media provides a crucial space for people to understand the differences between 'you' and 'me', 'us' and 'them'; media also is used to affirm social and cultural variety, as well as offer a crucial space for identity negotiation though challenge, resistance and evolution. Because of the emergence of new forms of media, the 'participatory culture' further empowers the marginalised to some extent (Burgess). Thus, the roles of Chinese diaspora play in identity construction and negotiation are all investigated within the virtual community.

Under the framework of representation and cultural identity, the concepts and existing literature of diaspora and YouTube as a commercialised platform were also introduced to help form a

better understanding of this specific topic. Because of the transnational movement in today's world, the identity formation of diasporic group has also undergone fundamental change, which has formed a 'hybrid identity' as a lubricator to blend and transform two or more cultures and this opens up the possibility to create something new. However, when this hybrid identity is represented on YouTube, the economic forces behind the platform cannot be ignored. The self-branding motivation has turned this seemingly 'democratic' platform into a profit-driven platform, and the identity representation also has become part of the authenticity performance.

## **Research Methodology**

Identity construction and representation is well-known for its fluid and changing nature. Also, considering the complexity and the variety of the source materials that this research has collected, a qualitative method is adopted in this study. The author draws on the ethnographic tradition to design the methods by combining online observation with semi-structured interviews during the data collection stage. However, because of the research aims and the difficulties encountered during the research conduction, this research cannot strictly fit into the ethnographic regime (further details explained in Chapter 3). However, as McKee (2001) suggests, Media and Cultural studies prefers not to enforce a rigorous set of guidelines to the methodology as 'if you only ask the same questions in the same way, you will continue to get very similar answers'. Thus, the author has combined a variety of different methods together in order to consider YouTube as a whole and place all of the collected materials under the social and historical context and then investigated with textual analysis.

## **Chapter Outlines**

Chapter 1. starts with a discussion of the concept of 'diaspora'. Three forms of diaspora have been reviewed from social, awareness and culture perspectives. Then, a developed understanding of diaspora has been formulated. Transnationalism will also be discussed as this term has become popular after the increase in the number of diaspora due to transportation improvements. The continuing evolution of this term is discussed also and compared and contrasted with other similar terms such as 'assimilation'. The concept of transnationalism points out the cultural, social and political forms have been reformed and reconstructed at an

unimagined speed and scale due to the emergence of new technologies. Thus, this study has decided to adopt 'transnationalism' to explain the research questions of how these Western Chinese understand Chinese culture and how they represent their diasporic cultural identity based on their transnational experiences. As a significant form of transnational practice, the literature focusing on the internet use by Chinese diaspora is also reviewed at the end of the chapter. In addition, the definition of the terms 'China' and 'Chinese' and 'the West' were carefully selected through reviewing the past definitions. Also, the history of Chinese immigration to Western countries is listed in order to provide the historical context of the Chinese diaspora's activities.

Chapter 2. This chapter systematically reviews the significant theories about 'identity', 'culture' and the meaning of the term 'cultural identity' within many intellectual and academic disciplines. Among them, Hall's theories related to cultural identity and representation have been specifically reviewed as they provide an important theoretical insights for this study. Both the concepts of 'culture' and 'identity' experienced the 'discursive turn' and changed from an essentialist conception into more complex, fluid ideas which are always evolving. The discussion of 'hybrid identity' will also be critically reviewed as it serves an important function when considering the Chinese diaspora's situation together with similar concepts such as intercultural identity and intercultural personhood. Apart from theories relating to identity, another important theoretical foundation is representation. The importance of semiotics on representation will be reviewed in detail. Then, the relationship between representation, power relationships and cultural identity will be discussed. In addition, stereotypes, the concept of 'other' as part of the important term in this study will also be discussed together with the power logic which was inspired by Hall's theory.

After reviewing the significant theories, this study will introduce the specific 'field' which this study will focus on: YouTube. The emergence of YouTube has seemingly changed the power relationship between those in a dominant position or 'advantaged' and those who may be considered marginalised or 'disadvantaged'. However, this change is limited due to the platform's commercialised attributes. On YouTube, the low barrier to entry and the simple user interface makes it very easy to access, which give rise to the concept of 'participatory culture'. This democratic 'vernacular creativity' has made Chinese diasporic content creators much more visible than in the traditional forms of media. On the other hand, this 'participatory culture' itself was built through the competition of attention seeking. On this platform, high visibility

is closely correlated to financial performance. Thus, the identity construction is not a purely ‘vernacular practice’ but a performed authenticity aiming to prioritise growing a significant market share. Because of this reality, the identity construction and representation on this platform must fit into a certain mode in order to ensure the visibility of the videos and the content creators.

In the end of the chapter, this study will attempt to combining the theories and concepts with this specific topic and identify the principal research aims.

Chapter 3. This chapter will introduce the methods which facilitate the exploration of Chinese diasporas’ online activities. Based on the research questions, this study has decided to use online observation and interviews to explore the content creator’s activities on YouTube, their identity representation, interaction and their motivation behind the creation. Because this study sees the YouTube environment as a whole, the web design and its function are also carefully introduced together with how they could facilitate the study. The YouTube channels and main research themes is chosen during the process of observation (Chinese food, parents and the heritage language). After collecting data, all of the information will be coded and analysed through the textual analysis approach. The reason to select this method is based on the complexity and variety of the research content. Curtin’s textual analysis procedure will be adopted as a guideline to analyse the data. As a result the ethical issues relating to anonymity and privacy consideration of internet-based research is also discussed at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 4. This chapter focuses on how the meaning behind the term ‘Chinese food’ has been constantly negotiated when it was presented on the public screen. Ethnic food, as a cultural symbol, has changed its meaning when they were brought from the domestic space to the public space, from being offline to being online. There are four layers when Chinese diaspora present their relationship with Chinese food. One is their memories from the past when they started to realize that Chinese food as a cultural symbol presented a different meaning within and outside their ethnic community. The second level is using food as an element to present a feeling of ‘home’ and historical past. This unique and authentic self-revealing has also built up their connection with other Chinese diaspora. The third layer is the introduction of ‘unusual foods’ on to the Western-dominant platforms. Chinese diaspora understand that these food will be treated as ‘unpleasant’ or ‘unclean’ things by the dominant society, and instead of challenging this way of thinking, they introduce these food with a carefully arranged narration. On the other

hand, Chinese food also serves as a symbol for them to show their authenticity. Highlighting what is 'real' and what is 'fake' is a way for the video creators to demonstrate their authority on ethnic culture and to satisfy the touristic gaze of most of the viewers.

Chapter 5. The way of representing generational relationships between Chinese diaspora and their parents will be the focus of this chapter. The main feature of their representation practice is through identifying differences. The first difference is in their social behaviors, Chinese diaspora present their parents as a 'foreigner' who do not understand the Western manners in contrast to themselves being presented as someone who is 'in the group'. The second way is challenging the stereotypes of the mainstream society of the Western countries while reinforcing the stereotype towards their parents. Acting as their parents is often presented in an entertaining style, which is a way for them to soften the aggression hidden behind the content and a therapeutic process to cure self-hate. Apart from identifying the differences, Chinese diaspora also attempt to bring the Western social norms into the interaction with their parents and present them on YouTube to be more authentic as well as fitting the entertainment nature of this platform. Lastly, with the intention to gain more visibility on YouTube, they have tried to expand the concept of 'Chinese parents' to 'Asian parents' or 'immigrant parents' through identifying the similarity between themselves and the potential audiences.

Chapter 6. The use of diasporas' heritage language on YouTube is an interesting topic to focus on. It is closely connected with their migration history, their experiences growing up and their changing attitude towards their culture of origin. The stories which relate to the heritage language often fit into a similar narrative structure, from the childhood drama to embracing the heritage culture and then feeling proud to speak out. The strong emotion involved in the story telling process have served as a 'hook' for creators to strategically build up a connection between themselves and their audiences. Apart from that, creators have successfully established an online community with audiences through creating a unique way of using their heritage language, presenting their shared migration history and Chinese popular culture. All of these items serve as a boundary for the young Chinese diaspora to celebrate their common experiences and facilitate themselves in being able to take pride in their diasporic cultural identity.

The conclusion chapter will revisit the entire study and summaries the main findings through three perspectives. 1. The changing meaning of cultural symbols. 2. The identity construction

through identify differences and connections. 3. Representing hybrid identity through negotiating power relations. The limitations of research have also been identified together with the possible future research directions. The main contribution of this research is also listed from the theoretical, methodological and findings perspectives.

## **Chapter 1. Literature Review**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Diaspora and transnationalism have become very important concepts when it comes to investigating the topics related to immigrants. This chapter will look into the development of these two terms and also further define ‘China’, ‘Chinese’ and ‘the West’ in the globalised era. This study will conceptualize the term ‘diaspora’ with the help of Vertovec’s form. Because of the increasing cross border interaction, transnationalism is closely related to diaspora. This study has identified three features of transnationalism, especially how transnationalism is able to facilitate the culture reproduction. Because of the complicated background of YouTube content creators, this study has adopted ‘Greater China’ alongside the study. After carefully defining ‘the West’ based on Huntington’s theory, the footprint of Chinese immigrants to Western countries was presented to form a better understanding the Chinese diaspora from the historical perspective. In the last part of this chapter, the author will discuss the influence of Internet to diaspora and review the current research about Chinese diaspora media use in order to identify the research gap.

### **1.2 Diaspora**

The term ‘diaspora’ originates from the Greek language, which emphasised ‘scattered’ condition. The early debate relating to diaspora focused on migrants and their ‘myth memory of homeland’ (Clifford, 1994) while the contemporary diaspora draws attention to the changing patterns of immigrants communities (Baily, et.al, 2007). With the attempts of conceptualizing diaspora, scholars have tried to explain the term based on their own travel and migration experiences (Cohen, 1997; Edwards, 2021). Because of the implication of globalisation,

diaspora has become an important aspect to investigate the migration, cultural change, identity construction and transnational communication.

Steven Vertovec (1999) listed three forms of diaspora which developed from his ethnographic work. The first one is 'diaspora as a social form', which placed emphasis on the social recognition and interaction based on the place of origin and the migration history, the conflicts of attitude as to whether they should be loyal to their homeland or to the receiving countries, the capacity to organise collective resources in certain diaspora community and to utilise economic and political strategies which allow the collective actions, such as the Western Chinese online self-representation in this study.

The second one is 'diaspora as a type of consciousness', which indicates the awareness of stereotypes or discrimination regarding their diaspora group, cultural habits, homeland or religion while also positively recognising and identifying with their cultural of origin. The 'double consciousness' allows the diaspora to establish a bond with people who share similar cultural 'roots'. Just as Cohen (1996, p.156) argued, the connection between diasporas is not based on the geographical location, but rather it is connected through the cultural products and the shared imagination.

When referring to the status of diaspora, Vertovec (1999) described it 'as a mode of cultural production', which is always fluid and lives 'in-between' spaces and cultures. With the help of the global media which provides different types of culture forms allows young people to select which one they want to identify with (ibid). Fazal (2007) further pointed out the mobilization of human traveling resulted in the emergence of different identities and various cultural phenomenon within single-cultural settings. Also, the 'home desire' for the members of diaspora does not necessarily means the willingness to return home, but more to rely on revisiting the established imagination, memories or stories (Brah, 1996, p.197).

The aforementioned concepts emphasis the main points when it comes to the diaspora conceptualisation. However, scholars like Virinderet al. (2005) and Axel (2002) doubt the value of this term, because it makes no effort to make any practical change to the current social problems faced by diaspora. Although they argues the notion does not significantly distinguished itself from the conception of multiculturalism, the term still challenges the old notions of nation and identity. Brah (1996) pointed out the concept of diaspora involved the

old views towards identity, which enables us to look at ‘the historical and contemporary elements’ in a fresh way, not just the human migration.

From the discussion related to diaspora, it is possible to extract out two main points. Firstly, Vertovec’s theory draws attention to the recognition of various identities in a multi-cultural environment. Secondly, the current debate places emphasis on the ‘historical and contemporary elements’ between diaspora and their identity construction. This has led this study to adopt the concept of diaspora with the purpose to examine the establishment of diaspora identity with the recognition of these diverse cultural elements.

### **1.3 Transnationalism**

The concept of diaspora has been popular in the last two decades and with the development of new technology, the transportation between different places has become much easier than ever before. The interactions across physical locations are now more frequent than ever, which also generated the concept of ‘transnationalism’. ‘Transnationalism’ in the early days referred to the simple assimilation pattern. People tends to believe migrants will automatically be assimilated into their host countries and accept the new culture, habits, language and other social norms. However, Basch (1994) argued that the settling process of immigrants does not always fit into this idea. Alternatively, this process is significantly more complex. Diaspora will swing between their ancestral homeland and their host countries all while forging connections to both places (Basch, et al., 1994). He also tried to define the transnationalism as:

‘The process by which transmigrants, through their daily activities, forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic, and political relationships that link together their societies of origin and settlement, and through which they create transnational social fields that cross national borders’

(Basch et al., 1994, p. 6)

Transnationalism drew attention to the intercommunication and interaction between people, commodities, culture and signs caused by transnational immigration (Çaglar, 2001; Yildiz & Hill, 2017). It mainly focuses on understanding normal people’s daily life and the implications after they elected to leave their place of origin and settle in their host countries. Levitt and

Waters (2002) carried out a study which focused on the immigrants to the United States. It not only focuses on how the immigrant behaviour was influenced by their transnational experiences, but also focuses on how these experiences have helped construct their identities through exposure to different social, political and cultural values.

To avoid confusion of the use of the term 'transnational', Portes (2001) listed four cross border activities: The first type is 'national states' activities, which are the political institutions represented by governments such as embassies. The second type refers to activities done by companies or organizations which are based in one country but conduct international business. The third type refers to the international companies which have multiple offices in different countries. Finally, activities done by 'non-institutional actors from civil society' refers to the various social cross broader activities organised by diaspora who do not register with any institution. According to Portes (ibid), he uses the term 'international' to describe government activities, the term 'multinational' to describe institutional activities, and the term 'transnational' for individual activities. This study mainly focuses on how individual diaspora conduct transnational practices, which is the fourth category under this criterion.

However, one major concern for transnationalism is that it could fall into a dichotomy trap. Transnationalism should not be treated as the opposite of assimilation, it is more like a single possible solution when looking at the migration issue (Kivisto, 2001). Because there have not been a significant number of studies which have focused on the second generation of immigrants and how much they have been influenced by their host countries and their ancestors' homeland (Vertovec, 2009). It is important not to ignore the political influence on the migration activities. The increasing cross border activities poses the challenge to the national defined community. According to Wakeman (1988), the relaxing of ties between humans, goods and geographical locations with the newly established networks has changed the foundation of many global interactions and challenged the traditional definitions of the nation. Thus, nationalists have shown their hostile attitude towards globalisation and transnational interactions. For example, the rising xenophobia in the United States and China due to the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Despite the criticism it has received, it is still necessary to place emphasis on their influence within the field of diaspora and immigration. According to Tölölyan (1991: 5), diaspora as the typical group in transnational activities had built a close relationship with the term

transnationalism. When looking at the diaspora, it is important to take the three 'triadic relationship' into consideration. 1) A scattered physical condition but with a shared collective identity. 2) Where the diaspora come from. 3) Where they settled.

It is obvious that the formation of new social-economic and cultural relations is based on the various layers of transnational connections between diasporas. This diverse connection has helped create new boundaries and break old ones (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). As mentioned before, the newly established networks have challenged the traditional definition of state and identity, it may not be welcomed by nationalists, but it opens up possibilities for new social, cultural, political and economic relationships (Wakeman 1988).

Another important point for diasporic transnationalism is that it has challenged the way of looking at the process of settling into a new place. Social assimilation treats the settlement process as accepting the social and cultural forms in the host countries while abandoning those forms in the place of origin. However, Ports (2001) pointed out this process varies between immigrants as well as their offspring. There are two possibilities, the first is that after many years of living abroad, the diaspora return to their place of origin. This fits with many early Chinese diaspora's 'sojourner' dream: 'to earn money outside and return home to enjoy a peaceful life' (Gao, 2017; Yang, 2000). However, there is no clear evidence which has shown what percentage of diaspora finally return home. The other one is that after many years of staying in the receiving countries, diaspora eventually become integrated into the society and develop new roots.

The final point is that the process of transnationalism influences the cultural reconstruction and reformation. According to Vertovec, (1999), transnationalism may combine unstable, hybrid and changing social structures, organisations, and behaviours as a result of constantly being influenced by various cultural patterns and is often linked with concepts such as 'syncretism, creolization, cultural interpretation and hybridity'. The daily experiences could be the results of these transnational cultural practices. For example, media representation, language use, generational interactions or even food practices. Consequently, the concept of 'new ethnicities' was introduced based on the identification of hybrid cultural constructions, which is especially apparent in the young generation of diaspora as they seem to be more adaptable to new cultural norms and surroundings. For these younger generations, their identity was not inherited directly from their parents but constructed through active choices among various

cultural elements (Hall, 1991). Additionally, the massive advance in communication technology has facilitated the reproduction and reconstruction of culture forms. As Appadurai and Breckenridge (1989) pointed out, the multi-layered complex information spread may result in the biggest disjuncture among diasporas due to the gap between imagination and heritage, desire and nostalgia in the electronic media. Thus, the bonds between diaspora rely on the personal, cultural, national, economic and political boundaries. Scholars have tried to observe the cross boarder living experiences and develop sociological and cultural methods to facilitate the investigation into the transnational capital flows, the newly emerged political systems and the transnational lifestyle of various diaspora (Appadurai, 1996; Hannertz, 1996; Sklair; 2000; Held; 2003; Bailey et al., 2007). Many studies have agreed that the transnationalism has facilitated the connection between the individual and institutions across national boundaries. With the development of new technologies and forms of media communication, the cultural, social and political forms have been reformed and reconstructed in an unimagined speed and scale. Thus, this study has decided to adopt 'transnationalism' to attempt to explain the research questions focusing on how these Western Chinese understand Chinese culture and how they represent their diasporic cultural identity based on their transnational experiences.

#### **1.4 'China', 'Chinese' and 'Second-generation Chinese'?**

Before investigating the transnational practices of Chinese people, this section will define the concept of 'China' which will be adopted in this study. The debate about the definition of 'China' has existed since at least the 1980s when the interaction between Chinese society and other part of the world become more frequent. There are two concepts raised by scholar which have been widely accepted when referring to 'China and the Chinese' in the transnational context. One is 'Greater China' and was used in various contexts but mainly indicates the cultural, political and economic connection between 'Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and mainland China, others incorporate Singapore and still others include the overseas Chinese living in South-east Asia, America and Europe' (Harding, 1993). However, some scholars criticised the term and considered it to be too general which introduces difficulties when referring to specific perspectives (Carstens, 2003; Cieslik et,al.,2009). Thus, Tu (1994) suggested a new concept 'cultural China' to contest the previous one and redefine the term 'Chineseness'.It aimed to challenge the cultural authority of geo-political China while

redefining the term ‘Chineseness’ beyond the cultural centre. This concept attempt to recover the ‘true and core’ values of culture that have been ‘lost’ by the mainland China. However, the desire to keep the ‘true Chineseness’ also falls into the essentialism trap. Considering the historical background of this concept was proposed when China was facing political crisis in the 1980s, it does not reflect the changing reality of today’s situation. Also, this notion did not consider the transnational cultural forms which developed by the young Chinese diaspora in recent years, which makes it difficult to fit into the ‘true and core value’ they claimed.

At the same time, it is difficult to define the concept of ‘China’, mainly due to the geo-political conflicts between mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. After China regained sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, their relationship have experienced constant changes. In the first fifteen years, there has been an increasing trend of integration from both sides. However, a series of conflict have occurred in recent decades, for example the 2014 Umbrella Protest and more recently the 2019 to 2020 Hong Kong protest. After the People’s Republic of China (PRC) replaced the Republic of China (ROC) in 1949, members of Kuomintang fled to Taiwan. Since then, the PRC has regarded Taiwan as a province that will ultimately become a part of the nation, while the Taiwanese sees themselves as an independent country. The majority reason for people from Hong Kong and Taiwan to deny themselves as part of China (PRC) is due to political divide (Chun, 2017). Most of them still identify them as ethnically Chinese (huaren 华人) (Chow, 2011). Thus, this study adopts the concept of ‘Greater China’ and since all of the creators already self-identified themselves as Chinese in their videos, this makes it much easier to carry this term alongside the study. On the other hand, although identifying the differences is important, but the diverse cultural habits, dialects/languages, social-economic background also happen within mainland China. Additionally, the migration history of diaspora themselves or their parents’ could also distinguish the individual’s experience and identity with others.

Because this study focuses on the content creators on YouTube, most of them grew up in their host countries and some of them were even born there. Thus, how to define these people poses a challenge for the author. Within the study of migration, many scholars decided to use ‘second-generation immigrants’ to describe children who were born in the host countries, others use this term to only refer to children who have two foreign born parents (Rumbaut, 2002). However, during this study, the complicated backgrounds of the video creators meant that they hardly fit into this concept. For example, one creator who was born in Canada but moved back

to Taiwan at the age of one. Five years later, she returned to Canada along with her parents when her family officially immigrated to Canada. Should she count as first-generation or second-generation? There is a British Chinese creator who was born in the United Kingdom but move back to Hong Kong after she graduated from the university. Should she count as a first-generation or second-generation? Another girl whose parents are ethnic Chinese but was born and raised in Vietnam, then her parents moved to America, can she be considered as second-generation Chinese or Vietnamese? Also, some people's parents came from different ethnic groups or racial groups, which makes the categorisation even harder to define. Thus, this study use 'diaspora Chinese' or 'Western Chinese' to refer to the video creators who identify themselves as ethnic Chinese but who grew up in Western countries.

## **1.5 Chinese immigration history to the Western countries**

This section will start by identifying the concepts of 'the West' or 'Western countries' and then introduce a brief history of Chinese immigration to the West. The migration process will be divided into three stages indicating the three major policy and population changes which happened from the 1840s to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **1.5.1 Defining 'the West' and 'Western Countries'**

'Western country' as a concept serves to divide 'the West' and 'the other', from historical, cultural, geographical, economical and ideology perspectives (O'Hagan, 2002). Europe used to be the heart of the West but the center has shifted to the United States after the end of World War II. During the Cold War, the term 'Western countries' referred to the ideological disjuncture with the communist East. In this era, the phrase 'West' has a philosophical as well as a geographical connotation, which indicates a community of liberal and capitalist countries. However, the idea of the West is often used to construct the term 'the Third World' as its opposite. Under this perspective, the West represents the wealthy, developed and industrialized societies. Many scholars have tried to give the cultural definition of what it means to be the 'West'. Francis Fukuyama treats this term as a model of modernity, which 'at the forefront of universal, civilizing process'. Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* (1978, p.6) highlighted the imperial power of the West and the boundaries between the West and non-West are constructed through the interactions between the governments. Huntington (1996, p.162) sees the West as

a unique community in the world's cultural order, mainly because its incommensurable feature. Although Ajami (1993) criticized that the term West is still left unexamined in Huntington's work, it is still worth to draw attention on his discussion about the territorial conception of the West. In his work the geographical boundaries between the West and the other nations were marked based on the different cultural, political and historical factors. In this map, the North American, Western and Central Europe, Canada, Oceania are considered as 'the West'. The Chinese, together with the Buddhist, Hindu, Japonic civilizations form the 'The East'. It is important to point out although Huntington's notion of the West is founded on geographical cohesiveness in Western Europe and North America, his initial purpose was not to objectively define the territorial borders but, in the history, various religions, and shared culture that has remained within these areas.

This study has selected Chinese diaspora creators who lives in four Western countries: the United States (America), the United Kingdom (Britain), The Commonwealth of Australia (Australia), and Canada. These four countries share close economic, political and cultural relationships and, more importantly, their policy towards Chinese immigrants is very similar from 1840 to the twenty first centuries. This section provides a brief introduction to the Chinese immigration patterns to these four countries. The purpose and routes of each migratory wave will be explained with the historical background and the policy of China and the receiving countries. The features of the immigration backgrounds will be highlighted at the end of this section.

### **1.5.2 The first stage: From 1840 to the World War II**

The immigration history of Chinese people to Western countries can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, especially after the 1840s, when the Opium Wars<sup>1</sup> and numerous treaty ports along China's southern coast were forced to open up because of a series of unequal trade deal were signed between the Qing China government and Western countries. The unstable political and economic situation in Southern China pushed many people out of the country, mainly from Guangdong province<sup>1</sup>. Most of these Chinese people were homeless, impoverished men who ended up having to leave China reluctantly and try their luck in the West.

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<sup>1</sup> There were two Opium Wars between Western countries and Qing China. The first one happened between 1839—1842; the second war happened between 1856—1860. Both of the wars forces Qing China to open treaty ports along southeast China.

A number of these Chinese men were recruited by the East India Company<sup>2</sup> because the trading activities between China and Britain surged after the Opium Wars which led to an increase in demand for seafarers. Since then, A significant number of Chinese seafarers came from Guangdong province to Britain. During the First World War, the British government hired a large number of contract Chinese labourers (华工 huangong, also known as 苦力 coolie) for front line duty. After the war ended, the majority of these people returned to China but a small number remained in the United Kingdom and formed the first few Chinese communities in cities including London, Liverpool and Cardiff (Nyíri, 2002).

The early Chinese immigrants to the United States shared a similar background to those migrated to Canada and Australia. The majority of these people also came from Guangdong province and spoke the Cantonese dialect of Chinese. In the United States, with the discovery of significant amounts of gold in California in 1849, many Chinese labourers came to work as contractors. One decade later, a group of Chinese people also came to Australia for another gold rush. Between the 1860s to 1870s, the American government and Canadian Confederation both announced large railroad construction projects which significantly increased the demand for Chinese labour. To encourage the recruitment of Chinese labour, the American government signed the Burlingame Treaty in 1868 with the Qing Chinese government to lift restrictions regarding the Chinese immigration to the United States (Holland, 2007). In Canada, aiming to reduce the cost of the railway projects, again, they recruited Chinese workers paying only one-fifth of the wage compared with the white workers doing the same work. Apart from the five thousand Labors who were employed by California, nearly five thousand people travelled directly from Guangdong province with several thousand more arriving over the next few years (Holland, 2007).

However, the demand for Chinese workers declined dramatically after the railway projects finished. Thus, many Chinese workers started to seek other opportunities in the local labour market in order to survive having to accept significantly lower wages compared with the same level native workers. Their actions quickly upset the local people, which led to an anti-China riot in Los Angeles leading to around twenty Chinese being killed. Quickly, the United States

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<sup>2</sup> East India company is a British company formed in 1600, it serve as a trading body for English merchant within East India and later with Qing China.

Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. The act prohibited Chinese workers from entering China until 1943. Since then, a series of discriminatory laws was enacted to stop Chinese from entering into the United States, even if only visiting. In 1924, the federal government extended the ban to all Asians. Also, there were a series of racial segregations to reinforce the discrimination against Chinese and the whole Asian ethnic group. For example, Asian children was separated from their white peers in school in San Francisco and women who married the Chinese immigrants automatically lost their US citizenship.

Similar as the United States, Canada also launched the Immigration Act right after the railway projects were complete. Any Chinese citizen who entered Canada had to pay 50 Canadian dollars after 1885, a significant amount at the time (Holland, 2007). This amount was increased to 500 Canadian dollars after 1904 (ibid). In 1923, all Chinese were prohibited from entering Canada and the Chinese Canadians were not allowed to vote after 1896. In Australia, Chinese were treated as ‘interlopers and intruders’ (Ip, 2013). Australia launched its Immigration Restriction Act once they were federated in 1901 with a series of ‘White Australia policy’ to prevent those ‘yellow men’ being able to settle down (ibid). Chinese had no access to pensions or social welfare and were required to pay the poll-tax for their entry into Australia. Stricter laws were introduced to stop the further arrival of Chinese women, with the concern that those women would give birth to new babies and form a local Chinese community. All of these restrictions and the highly unbalanced gender ratio made Chinese men unwilling to stay, many of them returned to China after only a few years of working in the West.

### **1.5.3 The second stage: World War II to 1980**

Chinese diaspora were recruited to support Britain, America, Canada, and Australia in World War II. In Britain, the majority of the Chinese who participated in the war were from eastern China. Many of them were sent back to China after the war finished and only a small number remained in Britain (Benton & Gomez, 2008). China and the United States fought against Japan from 1941 to 1945, which put the federal government in an awkward position needing to reconsider its discriminatory regulations towards their Chinese nationals. In 1943, the United States enacted the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Acts, which finally allowed immigration from China for the first time since 1882, though many restrictions remained in place. Around 15,000 Chinese people were granted citizenship during the war in the United States (Holland, 2007). Canada also stopped the Exclusive Act in 1947 and the Chinese immigrants were allowed to

vote in elections from the same year even though they still could not stand as candidates themselves for another twenty years. Similarly, Australia also changed its immigration policy in 1947 and granted the long-term Australian settlers' wives and children who were impacted by World War II to stay. However, this friendly attitude towards Chinese people did not last long, the post-war immigration policies were still very strict to the Chinese community. This situation did not change for another 20 years until the 1980s.

In 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded, which led to the Kuomintang government of Republic of China being replaced by Chinese Communist Party (CCP). After the Kuomintang retreated to Taiwan there was no political communication or migration between mainland China and Taiwan for another twenty years and the complicated political relationship remain until the present day (2021). Because there was no diplomatic relationship between the PRC and the United States, Canada or Australia before the 1970s, most Chinese people who immigrated to these countries were from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia (Wang, 1991). In 1960s, the United States and Canadian governments both removed the race and 'place of origin' restrictions from their immigration law. This resulted in a large number of Chinese people coming to North America and settling down in different Chinatowns in metropolitan areas, mainly in the large cities. These people were largely illiterate, speaking Cantonese or Hakka with little English ability (Yang, 2013). In contrast to the early Chinese workers, they were not forced to immigrate to these countries but had a 'sojourner's dream', which is to achieve success through hard work and then return to their homeland to enjoy a peaceful life (Tan, 2013). Immigrants from Taiwan, on the contrary, came as students with a decent level of educational background and a better financial condition than other Chinese immigrants. They did not speak Cantonese, which was the dominant dialect in Western Chinese communities, so they did not settle in Chinatowns but instead elected to gather in suburban areas in metropolitan areas (Kwong, 1996).

Although Britain recognized the PRC since 1950, because of China's restricted foreign travel from the 1950s to the 1960s, the majority of the Chinese immigrants were from Hong Kong during that period. One major reason behind the influc of Hong Kong people was because the British government regained the control of the New Territories in Hong Kong in 1945 after Japan surrendered. In a similar way to the immigrants to North America, many Hong Kong villagers came looking for better opportunities with low English proficiency and barely any formal education. Between 1962 and 1981, the British government announced the British

nationality law to restrict people who were non-white Commonwealth citizens immigrating to the United Kingdom. These restrictions directly influenced the expansion of the Chinese takeaway restaurants because of the labour shortage. The Chinese takeaway restaurant was a popular business among Chinese immigrants since the 1960s (Benton & Gomez, 2008). Consequently, a large number of immigrants who were from the existing immigrants' extended family were imported into the country to fulfill the labour shortage. Between 1962 to 1973, around an additional 10,000 people came and the so called 'secondary immigration' made up one-sixth of the Chinese population in the United Kingdom (Watson, 1977, p. 188).

Apart from directly moving from China to Western Countries, ethnic Chinese also migrated between the countries and areas for several hundred years. After 1967, Canada introduced a point-based system into their immigration regulation, which meant all applicants competed equally without the restrictions cast by their ethnicity or nationality. As a result of this liberal law, many Hong Kong immigrants elected to move to Canada at first and then settle down in the United States afterwards. A similar point-based system was also introduced in Australia in 1991, which also led to a dramatic increase in the number of Chinese immigrants. During the period of the Vietnam War (1955 to 1975), a significant number of ethnic Chinese moved from Vietnam to refugee camps in southeast Asia, and finally settled down in North America, Britain, Australia and many other Western countries. Those refugees established distinctive communities in Sydney and Adelaide in Australia. They also led to an increase in the number of ethnic Chinese in other Western countries. In a similar fashion as most of the Chinese immigrants during that period, these Vietnamese Chinese were mainly farmers or fishermen with low professional skills and lacking any formal education. They gradually settled down even though they faced various difficulties, many of them worked for Chinese employers because of the language barriers prevented them from integrating into the mainstream society, and a number of them remained unemployed (Shang 1984).

#### **1.5.4 The third stage: From 1980 to the present day**

In 1978, the People's Republic of China relaxed the restriction on foreign trade, international travel and study. This 'opening up' policy (改革开放) resulted in a large immigration movement from mainland China to Western Countries. Compared with the previous

immigrants, the ‘new migrants’ (新移民) were highly professional, most of them having a university background compared with ‘Overseas Chinese’ (华侨 Huaqiao) and ‘ethnic Chinese’ (华人 huaren).

After Hong Kong was returned to the PRC in 1997, many Chinese moved from Hong Kong to the Western Countries. About 26,000 Hong Kong Chinese arrived in Britain between 1980 to 2003 (Luk, 2008,p.265) and 30,000 immigrated annually from Hong Kong to Canada (Holland, 2007). These people quickly made up a significant proportion of the Chinese immigrant in both countries. Different to the ‘old’ Hong Kong immigrants, most of them has received a formal education with managed to accrue a significant amount of wealth. After the political state became stable, many of them returned to Hong Kong after obtaining permanent residency in one of those Western countries. Some of the businessmen went back to Hong Kong themselves and left their wives and children in the host countries to continue to live and study (Wang, 1991).

However, there was still a large demand for the low paid workers in the Western countries. Although there were more professional immigrants arriving in these countries, many of the uneducated, low skilled and poor Chinese also moved from Fujian province in China to the West (Djajić,2005). In the 1990s, a few thousand Chinese moved to the Western countries illegally (ibid). However, due to the strict border controls in China and the economic development in recent years, significantly fewer people have been willing to travel aboard through the illegal methods (Nyíri, 2002).

Since 2000, the number of Chinese immigrant from the PRC has surpassed Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia in all of the above mentioned countries (Suryadinata, 2017). The majority of them are students, professional workers or business workers. Their arrival has benefitted the receiving countries economic development. In Canada, these ‘new immigrants’ from China were encouraged to stay considering the lower birth rate of the local women and much lower immigrant importing number compared with the United States. In 2021, because of the political disagreement on the issue of Hong Kong, the British government granted British National Overseas visas to three million people in Hong Kong, which may cause an increased influx of Hong Kong Chinese over the next few years.

The migration patterns of Chinese to overseas countries is highly influenced by the political and economic conditions between their homeland and the receiving countries. Because this study mainly focuses on the Chinese creators who have grown up in Western countries, the majority of them are in their 20s to 30s, thus the time when their parents moved to the receiving countries was between the 1960s and early 2000s, which is from the beginning of second stage to the beginning of the third stage. There are several features that need to be noted during that period. The first one is that the Chinese people who moved to the Western countries were mainly Cantonese speakers during that time; the second one is that their migration background can be complicated; some of them may have moved from China to Southeast Asia, and then to the Western countries; the third one is that the most common occupation of these workers is related to the Chinese community, for example, running Chinese supermarkets or Chinese restaurants. These features fit into the majority content creators' background, many of them came from a Cantonese speaking family and their parents were mostly working class people who is not fluently with English. Reviewing the migration process has helped the author to understand the Chinese in Western countries from an historical perspective and it also has validated the choice of the sample selection based on the similar political, racial, cultural and economic situations in the four selected countries.

## **1.6 Transnational imagination: 'digital diaspora' and Chinese diaspora online**

Because of the migration and experience growing up of Chinese diaspora, they formed a special memory to their culture of origin and experienced cultural shock when trying to integrate into the mainstream society. The sense of isolation in the host countries and the memories of their cultural of origin is tied closely with their personal identity, which also works as an important motivation to build a community (Jacobsen, 2002). Thus, for a diaspora community, the cultural identity, interests and internet use can somehow merge together. Investigating how they represent their transnational experiences, cultural symbols and interactions can help to understand their ways of negotiating identity. Although the migration has led to Chinese diaspora being scattered across different geographical locations, their online activities have led to them forming a virtual community, thanks to the technology development. This section will discuss the concept of 'digital diaspora', the influence of the Internet on diaspora, and it will

also review the current research which focuses on Chinese diaspora their social media usage in order to identify the research gap in the existing literature.

Many studies have attempted to give ‘digital diaspora’ a definition, but the explanation remains uncertain. Since the rise of satellite TV and the Internet, immigrants have a reduced interest in the media from their receiving countries, this change has encouraged the emergence and spread of the de-territorialised identity formation. As Huang (2020) mentioned in their article, there are three different perspectives to understand the meaning of the Internet to diaspora. Firstly, the Internet has kept the ties between them and their home country and thus united the scattered individuals into a “imagined transnational community” (Xie, 2005); Secondly, the Internet has facilitated immigrants established connections with receiving country. Thirdly, the Internet has empowered the marginalised population and helped them create their own discourse.

As mentioned above, the transnational activities of diaspora do not follow the one-way direction but keep moving back and forth to establish a connection between the host countries and their country of origin. The research into the internet usage of diaspora suggests that although diaspora cannot physically visit their culture of origin, but they will virtually visit there frequently (Hiller and Franz, 2004). Apart from connecting to their culture of origin, diasporic groups extensively take advantage of the internet to form a close relationship with other members around the globe. They learn to build a space for people from similar backgrounds in order to find a sense of belonging. It is the internet who provided these opportunities to help construct bonds which can transcend time and place without considering the financial costs and other difficulties.

Haythornthwaite (2005) and Hiller and Franz (2004) further pointed out that the internet does not only pull the existing physical relationships between people closer together but also helps build an emotional bond during online interactions. The other important, yet very well-known feature is ‘disembodied’ and ‘asynchronous’ (Demarchou et, al., 2019). Because the information can be obtained online across national boundaries and time zones, the basic motivation to form an online community comes from common interests rather than having to rely on the physical connection (Meyrowitz, 1985). As Georgiou (2013) states ‘diasporic populations are not contained within nation-states even though they live within them’. Because of its mobility and complex nature, it is important to examine the diverse media usage that

diasporic people have adopted in order to understand the significant influence that media has on their ‘cultural and political representation’ (ibid).

There are many studies which have drawn attention to gender, race and identity issues about diasporic communities online (Elias and Lemish, 2009). People who are within the same online community, following the same social media accounts probably do not know each other in the physical world. Thus, it creates new possibilities to form new connections which may never have been possible in the pre-internet era. For example, because of the scattered location of Chinese diaspora, they are very likely to have not known each other before they moved out from their place of birth or their country of origin, but because of these shared experiences, they have been able to establish new virtual communities which span across the territorial restrictions.

### **1.6.1 How Internet build the ties**

Many studies have discussed the potential of the Internet and its influence to change the meaning of the nation and diaspora. When it comes to the relationship between diaspora and the nation, it is often contradicted. On the one hand, the conversation between cultures are increasingly frequent with the large scale of mediated communication across borders, it challenges the nation states to retain its power. Thus, to retain its legitimacy and authority, nation states try to reinforce the singular ideology and controlling the human subjects through promoting their allegiance commitment. The personal experiences of diaspora have made them difficult to fit into the mainstream value system which has been constructed by the nation states. In the modern era, apart from social and economic stability, the cultural assimilation of the population has become a significant aspect to form a nation-state. In this case, the mobility of diaspora cannot meet this requirement and it is why they often considered as a minority-culturally, ethnically, and ideologically.

However, no matter what role nation-states played in influencing the experience of diaspora, it is still a significant part in the process of the diaspora identify construction. Just as Georgiou (2013) argued, identity formation does not only influence by the positive experiences such as participate in a community or a group, but also influenced by the negative memory such as “exclusion, marginalization and exposure to regressive ideologies”. The later experiences exist in the mainstream ideology of diaspora’s receiving countries and natal country, and sometimes

within their community as well. Thus, the meaning of space for diaspora is always changing and never stable.

After Jennifer Brinkerhoff (2009) pointed out how digital diaspora's communities encourage the construction of hybrid identities and promotes solidarity, many scholars within the field of migration studies have focused on the online community through discourse analysis (e.g., Bernal 2014; Trandafoiu, 2013). Because the discussion around digital diaspora has shifted from physical movement to online communication, the significance of the homeland to the migrants has become questionable. Hanafi (2004) in his work questions whether the Palestinians abroad can be treated as diaspora as it is difficult for them to be recognised in the receiving countries and they have also failed to establish networks among other diasporas ('partially diasporised people'). Thus, the new media does not really create a new bridge between diaspora but a de-territorialized homeland both, visually and physically.

According to Bernal (2014), Diaspora can now build up the connections with their homeland through the ways that were previously impossible to realise, such as the Jews who escaped political persecution. Das and Poole (2004) used the term 'margins of the state' to describe diaspora as it provides opportunities to remake the conceptual boundaries of the nation.

In the article about the Persian diasporic bloggers, Zare pointed out that weblogs provided a unique chance for Persian diasporic people to recreate a 'dowreh' (social circle) in a virtual setting where people may get together and practise ethnic identities while living between two cultures (2018). Because of the online community, culture and information from the home country could be promoted, practiced, and globally spread. After studying the bulletin board system (BBS) located in mainland China and North America, Yang (2003) argued that there is an emerging online Chinese cultural sphere in the global context. How has this space become possible and how has it been able to attract Chinese people from around the world? Yang thinks it is through the shared common history and expressive symbols (culture repertoire). Although Chinese people in America and Southeast Asia do not share common goals, but the shared cultural repertoire could make the bond online possible somehow.

In the study of the global Armenian community, scholars found the new media are not treating their home country as the central place but using their imagined homeland as a reference point (Snisarenko, Hayrapetyan & Khashkovsky, 2021). People who find it difficult to assimilate the culture in their homeland and find it difficult to integrate into the receiving society have the

freedom to build their own community based on their identity, just like Castells' "network society" (1997). Global digital social communications make it possible to maintain a richness and intensity of contacts, including the exchange of information and the maintenance of an ethnic cultural identity, regardless of location. Apart from functioning as a place to reinforce their cultural heritage, diasporic social networks work more as a tool that can help them build up the worldwide connections beyond their daily life.

Different from the opinions above, Hongming Li (2011) found the homeland plays an important part in formation of the identity of Chinese diaspora. The Chinese community in San Francisco has showed their significant support for the Beijing Olympic torch relay. Isaacs (2016) also argued that the homeland of diaspora's early life stage is still a significance which influences the identity formation of young diasporic women together with their mediated experiences. Similarly, the motivation to deal with hardship in the receiving countries of Eritreans are closely related to the conflict with the dictatorship in their homeland the Eritreans received online (Dubinsky, 2020). Sun's article highlighted how Chinese-language digital and social media in Australia helped retain diaspora's connection with their homeland and make their integration into the receiving countries much slower compared with previous generations.

Alonso and Pedro Oiarzabal (2010) in their book "Diaspora in the new media era" discussed how a Basque diaspora community could use the new media to retain their identity and reinforce their cultural ties to the wider Basque community throughout the world. "Digital diaspora" here was considered as a term for people who shared common interests, discussed political issues regarding their home country and receiving country, reconstructing an identity and communicate culture heritage using electronic devices. Digital diaspora not only increases the communication between diasporas across cyberspace quantitatively through various platforms, but also greatly enriched the qualitative side of the connection through multi-dimensional activities (Oiarzabal, 2012).

The fast-growing technology and information society has also triggered a heated discussion about the consequences that this change poses to identity construction and the process of citizenship construction (Manshell, 2010; Couldry, 2012). For the diaspora community, the increasingly frequent use of technology has played a significant role in not only facilitating the shared narrative and memories, but also cumulates in the 'diversity within diasporas, in their cognitive and affective mapping' (Tsagraousianou, 2020, also see in 2001, 2007). The sense of

empowerment in the online diasporic media has created ‘an emotional shelter’ for diaspora to share their traumatic experiences which they have encountered in their daily lives and also a forum to discuss their views on issues which have occurred in the dominant society (Tsagraousianou, 2020; Georgiou, 2006). Additionally, studies have also shown that the internet could help ethnic peers to establish various ‘ethnic ties’ with people who share a common ethnic identity, with families and friends from their culture of origin and with people which they may have lost contact with before but are rebuilding a connection through the use of search engines and social media recommendation systems (Jain, 2019; Scuzzarello, Carlson, 2019). However, the study conducted by Smets (2018) showed that social media does not only build ties between them and their ethnic peers, but also results in tension between ethnic groups. Because social media is a space which allow people to ‘meet other cultures online’, the increasing cross-cultural connectivity results in many possibilities of social interaction, including the conflicts and disagreements between ethnic groups. Additionally, studies have also shown that young diaspora use social media platforms in different ways to fulfill their various needs. Facebook and Twitter are often used for their political demands and activism while as Instagram is mainly used for showcasing their daily lifestyles (Hossain, Veenstra, 2017; NurMuhannad, et al., 2016; Diminescu & Loveluck, 2014).

### **1.6.2 How the Internet empowers the Chinese diaspora**

Ponzanesi (2020) argued that there are three paradoxes which “digital diaspora” needs to tackle. Firstly, the ambiguous but flexible definition could “undermining its potential to signal injustices and give a voice to marginalities”. Secondly, it lacks a systematic methodology to understand their “articulation” within and across platforms. Lastly, the differences and diverse motivations, intentions between global North and global South remain unclear and it is very rare that studies have paid attention to the differences within the community.

Thus, Candidatu, Letus and Ponzanesi (2019) tried to use relational approach which inspired by Edouard Glissant ([1990]1997) to understand the dynamic relationship of diaspora in the new media. The approach sees everything is connected while also keeps their own features. ‘This relational category is particularly apt for rethinking digital diasporas as constellations within the digital firmament, rather than a technological matrix of connectivity. ’It offers a new perspective to identify multi-layered imagination beyond the technology and operates around

the new identity and virtual community. These new identities supported by the newly emerged communication forms which, in turn, reinforced the mobility and hybridity.

Digital diasporas create a place for people to identify and position their relationship with the world both locally and globally while also remaining open to the flux formations.

‘The notion of the digital diaspora furthermore allows different scripts to be envisioned for the politics of emotion that is essential to the understanding of the motives, nature and impact of the migrant experience, as well as the possibility for negotiating multiple belongings.’

(Ponzanesi,2020)

The question is, has the technology really changed everything? Mattelart (2022) argued that the emergence of new forms of media does not really challenge the traditional power structure social-economically. Although there are many changes which have happened in the media industry in recent years, sometimes the larger players have become even more powerful than before (Fuchs, 2011). Hassan (2008) also pointed out that the new media does not create a forum which allows the new way of representation construction, they tended to reproduce the old system instead. This idea reflects what Murdock pointed out in 1993, the complexity of the media environment has made this industry very difficult to evolve further in one direction. The old forms of media have not been replaced by new ones, instead they now coexist and sometimes recreates the similar agenda. In this case, the stereotyped ideas of diaspora which were created by the traditional media could appear again in the new media.

On the other hand, the development of the new media also caused the drastic expansion of transnational conglomerates. Some studies, such as Matterland (2022), raises concerns of these transnational media corporations (TMCs) as they could further squeeze the diversity of different ideas and free expression.

The surviving space of diasporic media and the culture objects, language and identity formation which associate with them have become less and less

Many diasporic media and the culture objects, language using, identity formation which associate with those media have less and less space to survive.

As Georgiou (2013) pointed out; because of the consequences of how the new media influences the free communication it cannot be measured quantitatively. Looking at how people use the different types of media communication technologies qualitatively could be very insightful.

In the research done by Georgiou (2013), it was argued that the use of media by young diaspora is very complex. The old and new forms of media co-exist in their life and play different roles in shaping their sense of cultural and political belonging, and their understanding of local, national and transnational experiences. When young people are with their grandparents or parents, their use of media is often influenced by these elder generations. However, the media choice may be very different when they are with their peers or when they are alone. This is reinforced by another research conducted by Shi (2005). The Internet usage of young Chinese diaspora is higher than the other ethnic groups in the United Kingdom, they are also more likely to access social media sites such as YouTube when they are alone in their bedroom.

Because of the complex cultural environment diaspora live in, their use of media is also complex and multi-layered. Early studies argued that one important reason for diaspora to use internet is because it can give diaspora a sense of power to control what kind of information they are exposed to (Wong, 2003; Hiller & Tara, 2004). Also, the Internet provides a platform for diaspora to construct their sense of self and citizenship across age, gender and class differences. This argument does make sense to some extent, as the sense of being able to control the information and communication gives diaspora the ability to construct and mediate discourse subjectively based on their own de-territorialised experiences.

However, with the development of social media, internal differences such as age, gender and class between individuals has made choosing their preferred media more divided. One reason behind this is due to the imbalanced discourse power. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2014) in her article pointed out that YouTube content creators often come from a middle-class background, which would rarely reflect the thoughts and needs of the lower-class immigrants. Another reason is because the platform's algorithms are becoming increasingly personal, the creators can rarely get out of the "echo chamber" which these media companies build. Thus, the "sense of power" to control the information flow is just an illusion. What role does media play in this imbalanced environment? Will social media help to advance the representation and expression of minorities within and across different social groups?

There are many studies such as Olken(2009) which have argued that the social capital has experienced a decline in the digital era because the public's interest in participating in the political events and civil activities are reducing. However, many other studies have shown that the rise of the social capital has a close relationship with the Internet and its ability to encourage civil activities (Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2012). In a study focused on British Kurdish diaspora, Keles (2016) argued that the Internet not only offers people who share a similar identity to exchange information, it is also a source of power that builds upon the social networks. Instead of forming a collective identity, many studies have found that the connections built up online are more personal, which is also called 'individualized society' (Bauman, 2001; Barney, 2004). This does not however indicate that the communication between individuals has been established solely because of the technology affordance, but also it suggests that even public figures like YouTube content creators are able to build up an 'intimate relationship' with their followers using various strategies, mainly authenticity of their performance as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6. Similarly, Xinyu Zhao conducted a study focusing on Chinese international students in Australia and their use of social media. The study found that the reasons for using Chinese social media platforms, such as WeChat, is to help Chinese students to maintain an intimate relationship with their family and friends in China while also managing their relationship in a way in which they feel comfortable.

Modern technology has changed the traditional idea of the 'relationship' and has made the online space 'connected' for a certain reason (Diminescu, 2018; Nagel and Staeheli, 2020). It has helped migrants to strengthen both their pre-immigration network and the new communities through multi-layered media use (Kissau, 2012; Nedeciu, 2012). The information exchange is significant for migrants to gain 'social capital'. The concept 'social capital' means that the resources (information, knowledge, ideology and economic support) individual can get through participating in the social activities with other social members. Normally, social capital can be more easily acquired when the individual is connecting with people who share a similar identity, values or experiences. The term has become more popular thanks to Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). Bourdieu adopted 'agency' and 'structure' to analyse people's intention and field, while Coleman talked about the influence of social capital at both the macro and micro level. This concept was introduced to migration studies in the early 2000. Erel (2010) and Lancee (2012) have used this term to explain how migrants integrate into the receiving countries culturally, economically and politically. The studies treat these integrations as a result of building multi-layer network resources through intra-community ties and extra-community

ties (Portes, 1988). Migration studies highly values the power of network in dealing with the marginalisation and isolation which are the normal difficulties that the diaspora communities continuously face (Erel, 2010).

The interactions between diasporas mainly happen in two spaces. The first one is in their living spaces where they can have physical contact with others. The second space is the virtual space where they can realise the transnational connection to form an imagined homeland. For quite a long time, studies are stressing the importance of achieving social capital through physical interaction (Olken, 2009). Scholars such as Putnam (2000: 213) believe that the social activity in modern days is strongly influenced by the invention of the Internet as people's leisure time has become fragmented because they are now consuming different forms of digital media. However, there is an increasing amount of studies which argue that the development of the Internet has actually helped individuals and social groups gain social capital (Rainie et al. 2011; Spiegel et al, 2016; Ma & Leung, 2019) not only in participating in political activities but also the economic and cultural events. Brenner and Smith (2013) in their article discussed how social media platforms like Facebook enhance the trust among younger generations and helps them to construct the social capital online beyond the socio-economic and geographical barriers (Steinfeld et al. 2018; Keles, 2016). Based on the previous findings, this study will further explore how younger generation diasporas could achieve not only social capital through participating in these activities happening online, but also by generating emotional and economic capital by becoming opinion leaders within a constructed community, such as YouTube channel.

Thus, by using the Internet, diaspora have the ability to accumulate social capital and further advance economic and political benefits because of the connections these networks provide. Just like Jonston (2013) argued, migrants' benefit from the Internet to create virtual relationships with people who share similar identities, memories and experiences. Through providing the public sphere and virtual supports, the network can be seen as the 'bonding capital' that serves to improve the living condition of the 'connected migrants' (Putnam, 2000; Diminescu, 2008). In addition, Keles (2016) also highlighted that Anderson's opinion regarding the passive attitude of diaspora in integrating their settlement countries should be rethought.

Similar research on YouTube has also found that the diasporic groups such as American Hmong use YouTube as a primary source for ethnic music recording, which in turn, make their

offline musical community more sustainable (O'Brian, 2015). The influence of YouTube is highly valued by scholars within the field of Asian American media studies because Asians, especially East Asians are particularly active on this platform. The studies vary in their linguistic use and cross-ethnic embodiment (Chen, 2013), gender specific ethnic beauty practices (Tran, 2020; Chang, 2014; Markova & Azocar, 2018), contesting racial stereotypes (Kim, Johnson, 2018; Tulin, 2013), to transnational popular cultural circulation (Nagatomi, 2019; Jung, 2014). Guo & Lee (2013) pointed out that Asian Americans were systemically ignored by the mainstream society, which has made this group extremely vocal on social media platforms such as YouTube. Their identity formation has been largely based on setting boundaries between themselves and different social groups (Helen, 2016). Current studies tend to argue that the sense of 'Asianness' has replaced the ethnic differences within the members of the group (Guo, Lee; 2013). Based on this theory, it is rare that studies focus on the circulation of cultural symbols which belong to a specific ethnic group and how they make sense of their cultural identity through reconstructing or deconstructing the meanings behind those symbols. However, It is important to focus on the specific ethnic groups when considering the various cultural tradition within the Asian society, such as foodways, social manners and use of language. There is also the potential to extend the research to a wider society considering YouTube as a global platform which contains user-generated content from across the world.

When referencing the media usage of Chinese diaspora, it is inevitable to discuss the Chinese diasporic media. The Chinese diasporic media is mainly Chinese language based and organized by the Chinese ethnic community in the hosting countries (Sun,2021). Because of the increase in Chinese migration and the flow of money, the Chinese diasporic media has been established across many countries and regions. The focus of the Chinese diasporic media is highly location-based and focuses on the native issues relating to the Chinese diasporic community. The place-specific content enables Chinese diaspora to perceive themselves as a member of the Chinese diasporic group on a regular and even predictable basis (Ma and Cartier, 2003). Also, Chinese diasporic media has played a crucial role in resolving tensions between 'divergent views and interests within Chinese communities, representing and communicating the sentiments of those communities to the government and mainstream society' (Gao, 2006). The early age of Chinese diasporic media was mainly print based but has gradually transitioned to digital media and this has given rise to a 'diasporic Chinese global digital network' (Sun, 2002). On the other hand, Chinese diasporic media has bonded closely with Chinese social media platforms. The studies

of Yu and Sun (2021) has found that many subscription accounts in Australia has provided many local news, events and services and their main target group is Chinese-speaking diaspora. Apart from that, studies have also found that young Chinese diaspora show significant interest in joining entertainment social media platforms such as Douyin<sup>3</sup> or RED<sup>4</sup>. The research conducted by Zhang and Wang (2019) on subscription accounts on WeChat shows that it has played a significant role in recreating Chinese diasporic spaces in Australia.

As Anderson (1991) proposed that the construction of ‘imagined community’ was based on language, ethics, and culture, it is evident that Chinese-language use in diasporic media has been an important way to connect this ethnic group together. Also, it emphasises the activities of Chinese diaspora on the platform which are dominated mainly by people with Chinese ethnicity. In addition some questions need to be asked here, how is the imagined community is constructed if the ethnic group is not fluent in their ethnic language? Also, how do they practice their identity representation if they are on a diverse social media platform? Studies conducted to date have not researched the key aspects regarding these issues. As part of the diaspora, the Chinese immigrant who moved to the host countries at an early age or were born in their host countries typically face many difficulties when trying to systematically learn their heritage language, which presents an obstacle for them if they wish to access to information relating to their ethnic culture (Lee, 2013). Contemporary studies focusing on this specific group (or the so-called ‘second generation Chinese diaspora’) have mainly focused on the identity construction in their daily life, especially from their immediate family (Louie, 2006; Huang, et al., 2015; Tao, et al.,2013). Studies which have focused on other second-generation immigrants have suggested that the use of social media could facilitate the construction of a ‘plural identity’, a hybrid identity which merges the culture from both sides (Alinejad, 2013; Bouma, 2018). However, it is hard to find any empirical evidence on Chinese young diaspora or second-generation immigrants to prove these theories can also be applied on this ethnic group as well.

Therefore, based on the above discussion, the gaps in the current research have been identified. Firstly, this study aims to break the national boundaries in order to understand the cultural identity formation of Chinese diaspora across various Western countries. Secondly, this study will look at how a sense of Chinese cultural identity is constructed on a global based media

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<sup>3</sup> Douyin (抖音),also known as TikTok, is a Beijing based internet company

<sup>4</sup> RED (小红书),is a Chinese Shopping and social media platform

sites which is not dominated by ethnic Chinese. Thirdly, this study places specific attention on YouTube because of its visual content and the increasing number of vocal Chinese diaspora content creators across Western countries active on the platform.

## **1.7 Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the basic concepts of this study. Firstly, it conceptualised the term ‘diaspora’ using Vertovec’s three forms. It highlighted the importance of recognizing the complicated identity of diaspora within multi-layered and multi-dimensional cultural relationships while also considering how the historical and contemporary elements functioned during the process. Modern technological development has given rise to the concept of ‘transnationalism’. Compared with the previous concept of assimilation, transnationalism sees the settlement into the receiving countries as not simply a one way process but involving many complex procedures. The diaspora will develop multiple connections not only with the receiving countries but also their country of origin. Another important point is that transnationalism influences culture reformation and reproduction. The online practice of Chinese diaspora in the Western countries has reflected this theory. Because they are constantly experiencing the different cultural elements online, their exposure to the diverse cultural forms make their identity formation process much more complex. This process will be discussed later in the finding chapters (Chapter 4,5,6). Also, as a transnational practice, the literature related to diaspora’s media practices will also be reviewed in the next chapter.

If the transnational connection becomes much more frequent, then how do we define the concepts based on national boundaries? Thus, this chapter has attempted to adopt a term which can refer to the whole Chinese community beyond the geographical and political restrictions. Because the creators this study has selected, no matter their specific migration background and history, all identify themselves as ethnic Chinese, the author has decided to use the term ‘Greater China’ as a definition of ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’ used in this study to refer to the entire Chinese community and the term ‘Chinese’ to refers to individual’s ethnicity instead of nationality. Additionally, considering the complex migration history of the creators, although many of them grew up in their host country, it is still difficult to place them into the traditional second-generation immigrant category. Thus, this study will use ‘diaspora Chinese’ or

‘Western Chinese’ to describe these Chinese content creators who lives in the Western countries.

After defining the terms ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’, this chapter further defined ‘Western countries’ by adopting Huntington’s territorial conception of ‘the West’. Then, the brief history of Chinese immigration to the Western countries has been presented. Understanding the historical immigration will help the author to understand the historical reasons behind the online representation practices of Western Chinese.

Lastly, the literature gap has been identified with a careful review relating to the internet, social media platforms and Chinese diaspora’s media usage. The aim of this research is to understand how Chinese diaspora construct the transnational cultural identity on a global based media site.

## **Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter critically reviews the significant theories about ‘identity’, ‘culture’ and the meaning of the term ‘cultural identity’ within many intellectual and academic disciplines. Both the concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ experienced the ‘discursive turn’ and changed from the essentialist conception into more complex, fluid ideas which are always evolving. The most significant motivation for this change is globalisation, the distinct social and economic changes which led to the rapid development of new theories in the fields of social science and the humanities (Appadurai, 1996; Giddens, 1996; Held & McGrew, 2003; Tomlinson, 2003). The concepts of identity, nationality and place of birth will not solely define a person’s identity anymore, and the social space will not be as easily understood as the differences between cultures from different global regions. The assumptions in identity research have become more complex and now tend to focus on the new direction. From exploring ‘who am I’ to trying to determine how an identity is constructed followed by an in-depth investigation to analyse language and look more closely at the meaning-making process. In terms of the ideas of culture, after the ‘discursive turn’, rather than an idea that is produced and rooted deeply in people’s minds, culture is planted in the social relations and established in the public symbolic forms.

Meanwhile, because of the time-space compression, increased interconnectedness and deterritorialization, the studies of cultural identity in the age of globalisation have become more complex and the term ‘hybridity’ and ‘a third place’ have started to attract more attention in social science research and how subjects from two different cultural backgrounds negotiate and reconstruct their identity while facing political oppression, racial stereotyping and cultural asymmetry (Bhatia and Ram, 2004) from one side or the other.

How is cultural identity delivered and circulated within human societies? The answer is through representation. According to Hall, representation is the production of meaning that occurs in

our minds. It builds a connection between symbols and objects from outside world. However, once the cultural identity has to be represented through languages and other signs, it will unavoidably have ‘lost some parts of the picture’ in the meaning making process. In order to solve the questions of how representation is defined through cultural meaning, the power relationships within the representation practice and the struggles of representation between the dominant society and ‘the other’, this research draws on Hall’s main theories which have transformed the term ‘representation’ from the philosophical epistemology to the integration of structuralism semiotic and cultural studies.

Cultural representation is not only a field of knowledge production, information communication, and aesthetic entertainment but also a field full of conflicts of interest and contradictions from different power groups. As two fields which interact, the conflicts and choices which happen in real life are often reflected in the cultural representation. By discussing the relationship between power groups and cultural representation, the influence of the innovations in digital media can be better understood.

The dominant position of the traditional media has been replaced in the era of Web 2.0, which means the power of representation has been transferred from the mainstream media to the ‘common’ people. To fully understand the complex relationship between social media and identity construction, YouTube as a social media platform will be introduced in this chapter.

As a distribution platform, YouTube challenges the traditional mass media and has given opportunities for people in marginalised positions, such as the Chinese in Western countries, to be seen. However, how and to what extent can this commercial online streaming website challenge the hegemonic discourse? The idea of ‘self-branding’ and ‘authenticity’ will be introduced in this section to further explore this question.

After reviewing the important theories, this study will attempt to understand how the Western Chinese online cultural identity is constructed and represented on YouTube and try to identify the core research focus through combining the theories with the specific topic.

## **2.2 The conception of identity**

Many people from different disciplines have tried to define the concept of identity, including anthropologists, psychologists and those focusing on cultural studies. After experiencing the ‘discursive turn’, the studies of identity have changed from examining what is identity to how identity construct within the discursive formation (Wetherell, 2010). Additionally, the concept of identity is defined as a fluid, unstable and never complete rather than stable and fixed (Hall, 1990).

### **2.2.1 The development of identity theories**

The clearest early definition of social identity was self-given by Williams James in *Principles of Psychology* (1890) ‘properly speaking a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him’ (James, 1982). The concept of identity only emerged after the nineteenth century because the power of the sovereign society did not provide enough support to maintain the individual independence. In fact, the external cultural life and moral guidance in the sovereign society went against the existence of individualism (Durkeim, 1897). This concept has only existed in the modern social environment (or, as Georg Simmel said, metropolis) as the primary condition of self-identification in order to define differences between individuals.

From William James’ definition, the concept of identity starts from how other people recognize an individual (Comello, 2009). However, this definition is problematic: after many layers of recognition, the question of who he or she really is becomes complicated to answer if they have many social identities. James tried to define a theory of ‘spiritual self’ but it was a repeat of Plato’s theory of soul, which simply defines the soul with three different types: knowledge of wisdom, anger among the passions, and appetite.

Following James’ idea that the way an individual recognises the internal ‘I’ is to rely on others, Charles Horton Cooley proposed the idea ‘the Looking Glass Self’ (Cooley, 1902). At the same time, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about the self-consciousness as defined by the historical conditions according to the research of ‘American Negro’ (Aboulafia,2008).

The identity theory has become the core concept in the social science discipline since the 1950s after modernity was constructed in a number of studies and observations (Gleason, 1983; Burkitt,2008; Gergen,1991; Seigel,2005; Taylor,1989). Initially, this was the theory of 'names and looks' (Avatar Brah, 1996). According to Gleason, identity means the solid element that a person or a group of people holds. This definition was carried forward from the 1950s when the concept of identity first started to emerge. A series of studies were carried out at this time and started to explore the relationship between the individual and society. Between the 1950s and the 1960s, identity studies split into two branches — one investigating personal identity while the other investigated shared identity in a social group. The most popular theorist during the 1960s was Erik Erikson, who was interested in the coherent, solid self-identity which might develop over the course of an individual's lifetime (Wetherell, 2010). In order to construct an identity based on dialogue within the social context, Erickson combined biological, social and reflexive aspects of human psychology. He claimed identity was a stage-based process. Individuals achieved their periodical identity by solving the difficulties and problems at different stages of their life. Erikson's stage theory has had a significant influence on the field of anthropology and the empirical research carried out to study different ethnic groups. However, the main part of the idea is now considered obsolete as it is far too utopian, and it is very difficult for an individual to define themselves in this specific way (Skegges, 2010).

At the same time as when the personal identity theories were being developed, identity within social groups, social categories, and the social location was also the focus of academic studies. This development was motivated by the civil rights movement of the 1960s. These studies put significantly more emphasis on ethnic identities, national identities, racial identities and other group identities (Gleason, 1983). An individual in a group could be defined by the characteristics of the group and this led to the research of the 'national personality' and 'national character', the new features of group identity that were defined by place and character. From this point forward, the definitions of identity became increasingly complex. Norbert Elias's 'society of individuals' argued that the whole of a social group could define the identity of individuals within the group and have more significance than the sum of the individuals in the group. Elias also wrote that the subtle social order always exists underneath the chaos. Although his earlier work showed a functionalist style which was common at the time, the more complex group identity concepts directly related to 'the other anthropological concepts, such as worldviews, values, ethos, and last but not least, culture, all of which suggested a certain kind of homogeneity among members of a community' (Van Meijl,2010).

Another important area to examine is the link between subjectivity and identity. Relationships between individuals and society may have been the most important factors in the 1960s. In 1971, Berger and Luckmann explained this as a dialectical relationship. They suggested an endless process which includes two elements: the movements of internalization and the movement of externalization. The material was internalized by the individuals who absorbed the content from the outside world and then externalized by reproducing and representing it in new social activities. The new productions come from reproduction and then became the regulations and notions which are ready to be re-internalized. The circle divides the 'exteriors' and 'interiors' clearly which makes this a profound binary theory which ignores the ambivalent part of the identity. Henri Tajfel (1982), John Turner and his colleagues developed the following answer. They suggested that when individuals and social groups interact people's psychological condition might change, which could cause collective action or even conflict. Individuals may act very differently when identifying with a group or social identity compared with a personal identity as the latter was constructed with more individual uniqueness.

### **2.2.2 The complicating Identity**

After the 1980s, with the development of globalization created a number of new social concepts including time-space compression, increased interconnectedness and deterritorialization. The distinct social and economic changes led to the rapid development of new theories in the fields of social science and the humanities (Appadurai, 1996; Giddens, 1996; Held & McGrew, 2003; Tomlinson, 2003). Nationality and place of birth will not solely define a person's identity anymore, and the social space will not be as easily understood as the differences between cultures from different global regions. The assumptions in identity research have become more complex and now tend to focus on the new direction. From exploring 'who am I' to trying to determine out how identity is constructed followed by an in-depth investigation to analyse language and looking more closely at the meaning-making process.

It is very common that people in today's world is experiencing frequent travel, migration and other types of movement due to the transnational capital flows, cultural communications and the development of transportation. Gilroy (1997) pointed out the constant migration have made people exposure to multiple cultural elements, which may resulted into various conflicts and questioned the previous belief of the 'the dualism of genealogy and geography'.

Concepts such as ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnationalism’ do not mean that identity loses its meaning. Far from destroying it, globalization has become the most important force in proliferating and creating cultural identity (John,2011). Identity is not a fragile communal-psychic attachment, but has a considerable impact on the institutionalized social life in modern times—an imagination that is constructed through discourse. The term ‘imagined community’ was suggested by Benedict Anderson (1991) after locality could no longer be the primary factor to define identity. He claimed that after the decline of sovereign power, the religious community, the development of print-based media and capitalism have helped individuals from certain social groups build a subjective imagination and this imagination has become the shared point among members of the nation.

Like the imagined national community, each gender, race or class identity has its own norm and has developed its own ‘imagination’. When the media is controlled by certain powers, some social groups may be discriminated against because of the benefits that might be brought to those in power. However, as discussed previously, after the series of social movements which occurred in Europe and America after the 1960s, the identity of marginalized groups such as feminists, black people, civil rights campaigners, the LGBT community saw politics start to provoke the theoretical development and challenge the fixed feature of identity that resides with the ‘truth of tradition and roots of history’ (Hall, 1990, p. 28). ‘Identity Politics’ started to become a significant element in political mobilization for those who may feel marginalized or diminished (Woodward, 1997, p. 24).

### **2.2.3 Discursive turn**

It could be argued that the most important shift in identity research has been from the exploration of ‘what is identity’ and how to examine its construction discursively. Before the ‘turn of discourse’, identity has been treated as a universal and timeless core, an ‘essence’ of self that is expressed as a recognizable representation (Benwell and Stoke, 2006). However, the old theories of identity are no longer suitable to be applied to the complicated reality and were gradually replaced by newer concept which treat identity not as an internal, stable ‘being’, but as an always on-going process, ‘becoming’.

‘Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we represent ourselves.’

(Hall, 1996a, p.4)

Identity, as a fluid and changing concept, aims to achieve an internal coherence and a perpetual existence (Firth, 1996). Anderson (1996) suggests this can be realised through retelling historical tales and constructing a ‘imagined homeland’. Identity are constantly being transformed, becoming more fragmented and multiply constructed across various, sometimes hostile discourses, practices and stances (Hall, 1996a, p.4). Hall also emphasises that ‘difference’ is the most significant notion in identity (ibid). The existence of self-consciousness comes from interacting with others’ and recognising the uniqueness between ‘Us’ and ‘Others’. Also, because these ‘difference’ are given significant attention, Hall understood identity as subjective which can be interpreted between different social groups and individuals through discourse. As identity is reflected from the discourse, it is very difficult to capture the whole picture of the ‘real’ identity. Thus, Hall (ibid, p.6) suggested that the moment of identification is what identity studies should pay attention to. In Hall’s theory, ‘identification’ is a point of convergence that is ‘multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses practices and positions’ (ibid, p.4). Every instance of identification is a temporary moment and the identity then becomes the space where those identifications coincide and sometimes collide. Instead of holding a stable identity, individuals may identify themselves through different discourses or practices. Thus, identity becomes a process which is always evolving and is never finalised.

After knowing the identity was defined by differences, then the question to answer is how difference are defined? According to Avtar Brah (2007), individuals were tagged with certain labels. For example, American, European, man, women, white, black in specific contexts by those in power. An arbitrary signifier such as skin colour, body shape, a set of cultural practices can be vested with a particular meaning under certain historical circumstances and situations. These meanings are also the result of the asymmetrical power relations. In this light, the core arguments in the study of identity become how the signifier is presented with certain sets of meaning, how to represent and illustrate the differences between individuals and what the role of these differences are when constructing an identity.

#### **2.2.4 The discursive identity**

As identity is defined by difference, the classical version of identity studies often label the identity of an individual as an extreme form of its differences. For example, ‘us and them’, ‘men and women’, etc. However, as mentioned previously, globalisation and the contemporary civil rights movements have provoked the complication of the identity studies and require theorists to realise that identity can never be defined in a clear-cut way and is always ‘in-between’. From another perspective, Hall’s explanation of identity explains why identity is never constructed from binary oppositions. He emphasized the existence of subjectivity and that the subjects identify themselves with the discourse that can suit their positions. Hall borrowed the word ‘interpellated’ from Althusser (1971) to address why subjects associate with subject positions through identifying them within themselves (Woodward, 1997). The identities are not essential or concepts that exist but are constructed through discourse and meanings. Thus, it can be said that identity is given by biological makeup, however it is constituted, made rather than found by representations, especially language (Baker, 2007). Judith Butler (1990,1993) was proposed a similar approach. Based on the feminist scholars’ ground-breaking studies during the 1980s which concluded that gender was the outcome of the social relations that expressed in male dominant societies. Butler developed the idea and claim that gender ‘ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex ...gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established.’ In this light, she argues that any binary gender is prescribed from the biological sex. Because of the physical sexual characteristics, individuals are forced to reinforce their ‘acts, gestures and desires’ through heterosexual discourses. Butler (2004) also argues that some of the seemingly unavoidable gender norms might be interrupted by performativity. Butler’s work has had a significant impact on gender relations and the study of racial and ethnic identity.

A question is asked here: how and to what extent can an individual’s identity be influenced by differences which come from their body or their biological appearance? This question opens up the possibility of various answers and also allows for more flexibility for people who live between in the gaps of well-defined social groups or, as mentioned previously, the ‘individuals in-between’. This study focuses on Western Chinese online video creators; mostly a group of

young people with frontier experiences of the conjuncture of cultural values which might be the best representative of the in-between or hybrid identities.

## **2.3 Cultural identity**

‘Cultural identity’ was treated as an essential, ahistorical and stable concept before the ‘culture turn’. After criticism, researchers from different disciplines attempted to explain the concept of culture through a number of different approaches. In the age of globalisation, the studies of cultural identity have become complex and the term ‘hybridity’ and ‘a third place’ implies that immigrants will develop their own identity, which neither belongs to their home country or country of migration, but in a new space and is defined through interpersonal communication and intercultural construction.

### **2.3.1 The development of the concept of culture**

The terms ‘cultural’ and ‘identity’ are both widely used in the social science research area. However, unlike the concept of identity which has a clear definition, the meaning of the term ‘cultural’ has remained poorly defined. According to Bennett and Frow (2008), there are three major traditions concerning the usage of term ‘cultural’ within the humanities and social sciences which have appeared in history.

The first is the universalist tradition which was formed in the 18th century in France. In this tradition, the term ‘cultural’ is equal to ‘civilization’ and culture stands for a level of human perfection which is represented as a universal and outstanding achievement. According to the concept of social evolutionism, the hierarchical distinctions between cultures depends on their biological nature limits such as ethnicity, race and geographical locality (Bennett & Frow, 2008). This tradition has an enormous influence on the cultural differences between classes, races, genders, colonizer and colonised have been distinguished (Bourdieu,1984; Dias,2004; Schiebinger,2004; Fabian; 1983).

The second tradition is from Germany and also emerged in the 18th century. Unlike the first tradition, this tradition comes from Germany’s emphasis that the values of cultures are equal and all of them are relative to time and space. ‘Culture’ here was explained as a nexus which

connects customs, traditions, and behaviour (Kuper, 2000). This tradition treats culture as an independent and finished entity and the existence of each culture will stay fixed.

Finally, the third tradition was defined around the late 18th to 19th centuries and was called 'structural tradition'. To understand this tradition, a good starting point is Marx's famous base-superstructure metaphor, a theory which claims the social infrastructure and ideological superstructure is based on the economic substructure. 'Culture' in this tradition is treated similarly as 'ideology', which the functions in the system of values and beliefs stand for. The influence between economic productions and ideologies are unequal. The economic productions can deeply influence the formation of a new social class and their related ideologies but ideologies only have limited effect on economic productions and the formation of social hierarchy. 'Culture' here becomes a resource that is a reflection of a person's economic status and social class. It is defined by the different social forces and is further manipulated to achieve specific economic and social goals (Yudice, 2003).

### **2.3.2 The criticism of traditional cultural concepts**

With the development of the deconstructionist and poststructuralist theory, some studies began to criticise the concept of 'culture'. Brightman (1995) suggested that culture should not be formed within a certain space and time, reflecting the new requirement of theoretical change in the era of globalization. The second critique, which is also known as 'the most problematic connotation of culture' was mentioned by Abu-Lughod in 1991. He claimed that the traditional idea of culture assumes that the thinking is shared within a certain group of people and remains stable no matter what kind of external situation occurs (Keesing, 1990). This essentialist idea ignored the power of individual agents and the diversity they may demonstrate through discourse and practices. Meanwhile, this concept of 'culture' does not show enough understanding of the power relations and hegemonic agencies. In the studies of youth subcultures, which research carried out before the 1970s paid little attention to, showed a variety of resistant identities represented through different types of cultural forms such as music, painting and fashion (Buckingham, 2008). Meanwhile, in 1989, Rosaldo in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* criticizes the concept of 'culture' arguing that it is a notion that neglects the internal historical dynamics and also ignores the intercultural relations and cultural changes during the time. The term 'Culture' is treated as a self-governing production that controls and regulates an individual's mind.

### **2.3.3 Reconstruction after crisis**

After experiencing a theoretical crisis, some researchers started to look at different disciplines by using culture as an explanation. In this light, Raymond Williams (1961,1989) emphasised that different forms of media such as television and advertisement can be considered a reflection and expression of a human beings' living style and should share equal attention. Stuart Hall et al. started to focus on the popular culture which had not received as much attention by researchers as they deserved. Inspired by George Herbert Mead's work, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) introduced the 'thick description' from symbolic interaction into the study of culture. He analysed symbolic forms which should be considered as a vehicle that could transfer the meanings from the individual minds to the outside. Rather than an idea that is produced and rooted deeply in people's minds, culture is planted in the social relationships and established in the public symbolic forms. In order to look more closely into the culture details which may hide behind the daily trifles, as Geertz emphasized in 1973, 'thick description should be applied by researchers who need to pay attention to facts as well as the interpretations through symbols, behaviours and social orders of cultural categories.'. Under this light, this study have used multi-layered materials to understand the online activities of diaspora Chinese through treating food, parents and heritage language as cultural symbols.

### **2.3.4 'Hybridity' and 'a third place'**

Clifford Geertz (1988,148) wrote that our world is becoming a 'gradual spectrum of mixed-up difference', the theories of culture start to embrace a deterritorialized, anti-homogenized and historical based era. The term 'hybridity' comes from the field of biology and represents something that is a mixture. This term has started to be used since the 19th century and has since been applied in different academic disciplines. In the postcolonial discourse, hybridity represents something that is privileged ('gaining advantages from both sides') and has the ability to negotiate the differences between different contexts (Hoogvelt, 1997). 'Hybridity', in Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, was described as the unbalanced power relations between the colonisers and colonised. The representation of the cultural patterns that are controlled by the colonial governing authority established a new system which is positioned between the colonisers and the colonised. Bahabha (1990,1994) argues that, under these conditions, a 'third place' is a place which allows the negotiation to happen and breaks the

boundaries between an existing culture and identity categorizations. Identity as a lubricator provides the ability to blend and transform two or more cultures and open the possibility to create something new. The ‘third space’ represents cultural practices which are always ongoing and are renewed over time, especially in the globalization era. ‘All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity’ (Rutherford 1990). As Ang (2013) pointed out that today it is very difficult to draw a clear, distinct line between different cultures.

Then, if everything is ‘hybrid’ does the term lose its meaning? It is important to note that even if there is no pure culture existing in the world it does not mean all of them have to share homogeneous attributes. The power between the here and there, us and them, black and white, can still be unbalanced (Toninato, 2014). To those people who emigrated from China to Western countries, the old impression such as ‘Sick man of East Asia’ was tagged when they entered the Western world. During the time after they settled down, new stereotype such as ‘model minority’ have emerged as well. How to negotiate between affinity and difference, adopt Western culture as well as refresh their ‘Chinese side’ have all become their lifelong topics. This journey will be passed down to the next generation as the political and economic environment change over the following decades since their arrival. China has become the world’s second largest economy and the social class composition of Chinese people in Western countries has also improved. The new generation faces many new questions being asked which implicates the changing power relations between the two cultures. What is their strategy to adopt them and how do they represent themselves in the new context? Current studies rarely mention these new changes which have happened over recent years. With hybrid identity, like any other type of identity, it is important to capture the moment of identification when it is continuing to evolve along with the times. This work will attempt to offer a new understanding and perspective of the experiences of the Western Chinese and their identities with the changing immigration patterns and socio-economic environment.

## **2.4 Cultural identity, Power relations, and Representation**

This section will review some of the main theories from the leading researcher Stuart Hall. Hall has transformed the term ‘representation’ from the philosophical epistemology and integration of structuralism semiotic and cultural studies. The questions of how representation is defined

though cultural meaning, the power relationships within the representation practice and the struggles of representation between the dominant society and ‘the other’ will be considered.

#### **2.4.1 What is representation?**

When discussing when and where the cultural meaning comes from, Hall suggested that all of the meanings of the materials are constructed through language or signs or equally signifying practice. The question is how should representation be defined? According to Hall, representation is the production of meaning that occurs in our mind. It builds a connection between language and the conceptions. This connection can not only describe the world with ‘real’ people, objects and events but also describes the world with ‘imaginary’ things. Simply put, representation is a process that connects three elements: real and fictional things, the images in people’s mind and language signs.

There are two types of representation systems. In the first type, the images of concepts which exist in people’s mind represent different materials; in the second type, language signs and symbols represent images in an individuals’ mind. Meanwhile, the representation practice is to embody concepts, ideas, and emotions into a semiotic form which can be transmitted or explained. Meaning must be introduced into the field of practice if it needs to achieve a cultural circuit within a certain culture (Hall,1997). Words and signs represent certain things and also lead to the production of related cultural meanings and values of those people, objects or events. In addition, representation participates in the production, reproduction, exchange and communication of the cultural meaning and value system.

Using a sentence to comment on an event, produce knowledge about an object or creating a film and so on, ‘representation’ includes many types of languages and cultural practices. In Hall’s theoretical framework, there are three approaches to explain how representation work through language— reflective, intentional and the constructionist approaches.

The reflective approach treats the truth as fixed and stable. ‘Language works by simply reflecting or imitating the truth’ (Hall,1997). The intentional approach holds the opposite opinion and it suggests that the meaning is given by humans who uses the language. Different from the other two, the constructionist approach describes the existence of the material world but at the same time puts emphasis on the decisive role of the signification system in the representation process. According to Hall (1997), any representation is not merely a mirror

reflecting the material world, it is a process that selects certain meanings and excludes others. This approach has also been widely discussed in many other literature (Hall, 1997; Gillespie and Toynebee, 2006; Lacey, 2009; Macdonald, 2003).

By creating different types of media (literature, painting, film, and television), humans can reproduce, reconstruct and express their beliefs and values which they obtain and create in everyday life through semiotic representation practices. After the decoding process, the meanings and values that are created during the cultural representation action can be digested by audiences and transformed into their own conscious and practices. Their practices and opinions will influence the construction of the social culture and add other ingredients to this unfinished and always ongoing circle. From this Hall's representation theory highlights the importance of these signs and symbols in social life. Thus, I will address the use of semiotic, structuralism and post-structuralism when assessing the cultural representation within the global context.

#### **2.4.2 Semiotics and structuralism**

According to the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1974), language is a series of signs that are constructed from experiences. Semiotics is developed from Saussure's theory. Saussure offered a two-part model of a sign: signifier and signified. A signifier refers to the word or image that is related to the signified whereas the later one is the concept that appears in our mind. A sign must contain both a signifier and a signified but in different languages, one concept can have different signifiers. Also, the relationship between signifier and signified are not fixed. For instance, Hall (1997) mentioned in his article that the word (signifier) 'black' was related to things that are dark and evil for a long time. However, after the spread of the slogan 'black is beautiful' in the 1960s in the United States, the undertone of this word has changed to signify charming, stylish and 'cool'.

Saussure highlights the significance of difference within language in the meaning-making process. The meaning of signs is distinguished from one another and constantly changing. Signs never exists individually, but 'are members of a system' and correlate with other signs within this system (Hall, 1997). This feature of representation appears to be even more significant in the modern global era, when there are an increasing number of texts, images and

sounds which are signified as ‘others’ which appear in our daily life but are still important to us to some extent. The media constantly creates a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ through representation. Even though Saussure’s theory was put forward before the time when we continuously encounter various cultures from all corners of the world through mediated platforms, his theory about the significance of difference within language during the meaning-making process is still playing an important role in today’s cultural representation.

Semioticians point out that objects and people do not hold solid meaning, it is generated using different signs such as text, speeches or paintings. Also, according to Roland Barthes (1977) one sign can not only carry one meaning but multiple at a time, the concept of ‘denotation’ and ‘connotation’ was introduced under this context. ‘Denotation’ refers to the direct, objective and literal meaning of a sign while ‘connotation’ refers to the imagination that was interpreted based on the social value and ideology that the individuals hold. As a combination of a series of verbal, visual and auditory signs, YouTube video have a strong denotative level: it seems to be a documentary of reality which record things that appear in daily life. However, because the video creators, Chinese diasporas, have experienced different cultural settings which could result in different value system and beliefs, the objects and people which appears in their video could have different hidden meanings. This hidden meaning (connotation) is closely related to the specific context. Also, according to Orgad (2014), ‘representation draw on certain cultural repertoire of symbols, narratives, codes and conventions, which, in turn, they produce and transform’. This also indicates that there is an invisible line between different cultural representation, one cultural meaning which is understandable to certain groups may not be accepted by others. With the development of globalization, the communication between different cultures and traditions are becoming more regular, the images and stories transmitting across boundaries and physical distance, which indicates the connotation behind the representation could also be experiencing constant change. After all these cross-boundary communications, did the connotation behind those symbols change over time? How does the signifiers that came from a certain culture circulate across different geographical, cultural and political contexts generate new meanings? And most importantly, how those ‘hybrid’ representations were constructed by those people who directly face the globalized world? These are the questions that this thesis is going to explore.

To investigate these questions, it is important to point out that the discussion about representation in this thesis considered the contribution from post-constructivists’ perspective.

Post-structuralism argues that the media representation does not hold an essential definition for any objects or things, but the creation based on the understanding from the outside world. According to Orgard (2014), this idea does not recognise the existence of the 'reality' from the 'outside' which makes it varies from other constructionist: 'representations are not constructions of pre-existing reality, but a series of signs and symbols that pretend to stand for so-called reality' (Orgad, 2014). For example, in many Asian countries, including China, the food culture varies and has multiple styles. However, video blogger Celeste Noche mentioned in an interview for the BBC that Asian dishes always appears with 'bamboo mats or banana leaves with chopsticks' even some of the food which needs to be eaten with spoons and forks or their hands (BBC, 2017). In the globalised age, even though representation was meant to 'reflect the reality' but it still just the summery of the understanding of values, identity and subjectivity. Thus, it could produce the symbols which carry the social and cultural inequality in the real world.

However, it is still problematic to completely embrace post-structuralism as we may fall into a trap that the meaning will be endlessly negotiated and never settle. Then it will be quite confusing as we may never understand the issues represented by the storyteller apart from treating the media content as various 'truths' and we may never been able to distinguish between 'good' or 'bad' representations. According to Macdonald (2003, p.15), the inability to assess the legitimacy of media content suppresses the viewers' impulse to hunt for the power relations behind the representations, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Baudrillard (1995) used the Gulf War as an example to argue that signs that appears in the media could have no relations with real life. The information that is shown on the television screens about the Gulf War are 'branded faces' with programed order rather than witness-based story. There is no representation about the Gulf War but a series of reproduced symbols that have nothing to do with the reality. This could be true in the 20th century when Hollywood films created many exotic and unfavorable stories about Chinese immigrants because of the social panic among the white American community towards the growing Chinese population in the United States. The Chinese immigrants are portrayed as an uncivilised group of people and their culture is described as evil heathenism, full of gambling and opium (Gates, 2019). The representation of Chinese immigrants in the early years of Hollywood, like the Gulf War in American newspapers, indicates 'that signs are autonomous of any systems of reference, and bear little connection to everyday life' (Orgard, 2014).

The emergence of the new media platforms provides first-hand material and living experiences to challenge Baudrillard's idea. Instead of the controlled and filtered information created by traditional media, marginalised groups like Chinese diaspora could speak out about their own stories generated from their everyday life. However, it is still problematic how 'real' it could be, as Baudrillard may argue, people might fall into the 'illusion of the virtual' if they are too close to the event. Even though there are no difficulties to gain first-hand materials in today's world, how people process the information can still vary as Bossetta (2019) found that the technology protocols could shape user's behavior and influence their thoughts. Because the information on social media are mostly fragmented, how to actually 'read' the information can sometimes largely rely on hyper-active users. According to Papakyriakopoulos et al. (2020), video creators who have hundreds of thousands of followers could strongly 'influence the specific type of recommender systems' and manipulate users' views on certain discourse.

Although post-structuralism may not be the best way to understand the representation, this approach offers two extremely useful additions to the debate in this thesis. First, it points out the importance of the representation for us to understand the outside world. We cannot perceive and feel 'things out there' without the constructed information based on audio, text and images. Second, this approach emphasises the unstable and changing features of representation and how it is co-constructed by the meaning, identities and subjectivities through the combination of symbols (Gill, 2007, p.12).

Despite the fact that the various constructivist approaches differ in their theories, epistemologies, and methodologies, they all admit the representation is achieved through construction which means that research focuses on how representation is constructed rather than whether it reflects reality or not. Given the emphasis on cultural representation in this thesis, it is worth emphasising that the interaction that occurs between cultural symbols and social life is a significant component of the social meaning process. Certain social and historical cultural meanings and values always contain rich content, including political opinions, moral values, religious beliefs and so on. As the lubricant of social interaction, those cultural meanings not only exist within the social practice, regulation and people's spiritual life but also shows in the representation practice of cultural symbols. Thus, it is significant to observe how social members or social groups participate in the cultural production and interconnection between each other as it could help define rules and standards which can control and regulates people's everyday life.

Among those vast corpuses of study on cultural representation, the most important contribution maybe is they claim that all cultural representations are inherently and irrevocably embedded in power relations. That is why understanding the relationship between representation and power relations is significant to this study.

### **2.4.3 Representation and power relations**

Cultural representation is not only a field of knowledge production, information communication, and aesthetic entertainment but also a field full of conflicts of interest and contradictions from different power groups. Class, gender, race and ethnicity are all power relations which try to penetrate into the cultural representation process in many different ways. In reality, people always have to fight for the allocation of power and their own benefits, the conflicts between different values, the choices between the mainstream and those marginalised, obedience or resistance. As two fields which interact, the conflicts and choices happen in real life are often reflected in the cultural representation. Compared with power relations which exist in real life, the battle for cultural representation focuses on the battle for cultural leadership and covers monopolisation and anti-monopolisation among cultural concepts and the suppression and repression of discourse power. In summary, cultural representation is a place where battles are fought to define meaning.

During historical periods, cultural representation practices were always limited by the social power relationships and the democratic progress of the time. There are two main dimensions to the meaning conflict. From one perspective, the struggle involves the cultural meaning and ideological conflicts between the old and new and the mainstream or marginalised. To some extent, mainstream cultural values will decide the construction of the whole semiotic representation system. However, the new, marginal, and even rebellious concepts also resist sometimes in order to achieve a self-legacy and extensive recognition. On the other hand, the conflict about 'who' (class, gender, race, ethnicity, group) should be the one which 'deserves' to be represented. There are some past examples, after the capitalist revolution. French philosopher Denis Diderot advocated that literacy and film creators should give up content focusing on the noble lifestyle but instead they should focus on the civil class through 'serious drama'. Since the development of democracy, realistic literature has become popular in the late

19th century in Europe. Topics focusing on miners, beggars, farmers appeared in the paintings and fictional literature. These two examples are both about cultural symbols and should be given to a social category. In this light, development of digital technology and the internet has allowed the democracy movement to enter into a new era. Additional social categories which were largely neglected by the mainstream society have begun to fight for their discourse power on the internet and construct their own representation. The founder of the YouTube channel BAM & Beyond (n.d.) claimed that they want to 'represent the British Asian' and this clearly implies that Asians in Britain do not get enough representation and the emergence of YouTube has given them the chance and the power to be able to speak for themselves.

Hall's theories analyse the conflicts in the cultural symbols through the angle of the mainstream and the marginalised. Inspired by Roland Barthes, Hall revealed the phenomenon of encoding and decoding in the process of cultural representation. When discussing the relationship between the signs and the deep cultural meaning, Hall (2001) inherits the term 'code' which seems to have the linguistic attribute. Its connotation works as an interpretative cultural code - the values or ideology position chosen by the cultural representation practice. In *Encoding/Decoding*, Hall explained this kind of code as a 'deep semantic code of a culture' and points out that:

'Codes of this order clearly contract relations for the sign with the wider universe of ideologies in a society. These codes are the means by which power and ideology are made to signify in particular discourses.'

(Hall, 2001)

If the cultural representation practice uses a certain cultural code to produce a symbol sequence, it is actually using a certain kind of thoughts and set of values to create cultural signs that can be decoded. In other words, cultural representation is the process through which to produce or construct a particular kind of meaning or ideology through signs which are positioned in a specific place and time (Hall, 2001)

'Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a dominant cultural order, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested.' Hall (2001) suggested that the dominant cultural code is selected by the dominant cultural order and is the predominant expression of social order, the political-economic order in a certain society. It determines the production and communication

of the predominant values and cultures within the whole cultural representation system. However, within a certain historical period, apart from 'dominant code' which can produce discourse, 'negotiate code' and 'oppositional code' also exist at the same time. These different codes work in the same historical context and define the meaning production as being always in a conflict. Also, even those cultural contexts have been encoded with the dominant code it can still be decoded by the receiver through the oppositional code and produce a diametrically opposite meaning in the receiving stage. Hall (2001) also said that the purpose of cultural studies is to reveal the existence of code and the values and power relations it represents during the process of representation.

Richard Hoggart, one of the preeminent figures from Birmingham School, pointed out that arts reveal the existing cultural order by reflecting it or rejecting it to create a new order. In other words, a certain kind of art text participates in the whole process of production, proliferation and circulation of the cultural signs in that time. It either recognises or disagrees with the cultural order during that period. Moreover, we can understand the cultural representation practice among the whole cultural signs system and its social context and cultural order also share the same relationship, not only in literature but also in other forms of media such as film, television, painting and even advertisement.

The American post-colonist Edward Said used to claim that when describing 'what' and 'how' about a particular thing, even an individual is under a free environment. He or she can still be limited by the social conception. The research into how women's restrained cultural performance reflects the social pressure experienced by those ethnicities and people who are at the bottom of the social class. There is a close relationship between cultural representation and cultural power. Under a certain historical condition, there are either clear or subtle rules about who can be represented, who deserves to be represented, who can be represented and how to represent.

#### **2.4.4 Representation and cultural identity**

When talking about cultural identity, Hall still holds an anti-essentialism opinion.

'Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not

something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history'

(Hall, 1990)

The meaning, behaviour, and ethics that belongs to any kind of cultural identity, such as women, always change with time and the historical context. Those cultural identities are historically constructed in a specific social structure and there is no essential or fixed identity. Hall's ideas have a close relationship with subjectivity theory. Structuralism and post-structuralism develop this constructivist subjectivity concept. They believe that a subject is not a free consciousness or some stable essential but instead it is a concept that is constructed by language, politics, and culture. For example, Jacques Lacan (1968) believes that humans are forged into a subject through the symbolic structure of language. Foucault (1991), though, holds the opinion that subject is constructed through discourse practices under specific historical contexts. This constructivist subjectivity concept contradicts Descartes's fixed subject idea ('I think, therefore I live') and points out that a subject should experience a period of socialization once he or she enters into a society. Only when the individual can 'internalise' all of the social regulations and ethics is this person able to become a legal subject that is recognised by the society. Therefore, any subject is not a fixed attribute inborn but is constructed by a specific person who has a particular social status. Men and women, white and black, noble and civilian, these social identities indicates the styles and ways about how social subjects establish their own subjectivity. They are also constructed through certain social contexts and are open to historic change. Hall (1989) disagrees with the idea of finding the nature of a race, gender, ethnicity and trying to represent them. When discussing the cinematic representation and cultural identity, he says:

'We have been trying to theorize identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak.'

(Hall,1989)

The idea of 'the other' in a specific social and cultural context, groups such as women, black people, colonised nations and ethnic minorities are always in a disadvantaged position and are always 'represented' by those in power. They do not have the right to represent themselves but can only become the 'object' written and spoken about by the mainstream consciousness. 'The other' is a disadvantaged social and cultural identity, there is a large amount of passive and oppressive ideas and values that accumulate around this stereotype. The term 'stereotype' was introduced to social science by American news commentator Wart Lippmann. This term in media and cultural studies usually implies a highly simplified and generalized social categorization to specific groups or individuals, which shows a series of hypotheses about their behaviour, personalities, historical values and so on. The cultural context which operates the mainstream discourse always stereotypes those images as disadvantaged and gives them a negative or obedience meaning rather than making it become natural. Hall (1996b) believes that stereotyping is a symbol of violence. It naturalizes the identity which is constructed through culture and history. Behind it, is the logic of power. If the differences between white and black, man and women, coloniser and colonised is on the 'cultural side', then those cultural identities will be open to change and alteration. If those differences are 'original' and 'essentialised' then the cultural identity of 'the others' are fixed, perpetual and a-historic concepts. Thus, stereotyping or naturalisation is a representation strategy. It is used to regularise the difference between different identities and essentialize historical representation of certain cultural identities and never changes. Therefore, establishing a stereotypical representation towards those marginalised and minorities is a part of the social order control and symbolises the order by those in power. It establishes a boundary to distinguish what is normal, what is abnormal, what is acceptable, what is unacceptable and what is regular what is irregular.

The existence of a large number of stereotypes often leads to identity difficulties and identity anxiety. Thus, people from oppressed genders, ethnicities and social classes will always try to fight for better treatment and make an effort to construct a new self and subject position. Although the mainstream consciousness is always in the dominant place through cultural representation practices, those discourses which speak for more marginalised people are able to gain more power with the development of technology, social movements, and education. Among this progress, social media plays an important role in giving minorities the opportunity to speak against the hegemonic consciousness. Social networking sites (SNS) and other digital

media technologies enable minorities to provide positive self-representation and build support and also boost visibility to the public (Seif, 2011). For example, in the spring of 2006 thousands of Latino young immigrants started the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) act in the United States and one important part of the movement occurred on MySpace (Costanza-Chock, 2008). A significant number of YouTubers using this platform came out publicly as lesbian or gay (Lovelock, 2017). American Asian influencers such as Higa and Wu challenged the stereotypical images of Asians and American Asians as well as building their own vernacular rhetoric using YouTube (Guo& Lee, 2013). However, the power relationships between different social categories online are very complicated. Although digital media and communication technologies offer more space for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to construct their identity, the offline power dynamic between different social groups have persisted and those relations have been brought online and makes the process of cultural identity equality an uncertain process (Herring, 1993; Nakamura, 1995).

## **2.5 YouTube: from ‘Participatory Culture’ to ‘Authenticity’**

Unlike the other SNS created in Web 2.0, YouTube is not the one that aims to maintain the existing social networks but is ‘a combination of the mass popularity of particular user-generated videos and the uses of YouTube to distribute broadcast media content that captured the public imagination’ (Burgess, Green, 2018). YouTube.com was founded in June 2005 with the purpose of providing a friendly environment for users to share digital videos across the globe. It soon attracted Google’s interest and YouTube was acquired for 1.65 billion dollars in October 2006. By 2021, the number of users on YouTube had reached to 1.86 billion and there were 500 minutes of video uploaded to this platform every minute and among them, 70% of the views came from mobile devices because of the ease accessibility (Statista, 2021a; Statista, 2021b). The impact of YouTube has also grown rapidly during the last decades, some scholars even argues that YouTube may have a much deeper influence than television on things such as on people’s identity formation and political opinions (Cutter, 2012; Kim & Johnson, 2018; Borah, Fowler & Ridout, 2018; Zimmerman et al. 2020).

### **2.5.1 Participatory culture for self-expression**

The slogan of YouTube changed from 'Your Digital Video Repository' to 'Broadcast Yourself' meaning that the role of YouTube has changed from being a personal video storage website to a platform for public self-expression. Therefore, YouTube provides opportunities for videos to be discovered, widely spread, and made popular. When the content producers get attention from the public and from the moment people click the 'subscribe' button it turns the video creator from a 'nobody' into a 'celebrity' which then gives them discursive power. Thus, there are two functions behind this platform: a 'bottom-up', vernacular creation system and a 'top-down' popular cultural distributor. Jenkins (2006a) uses a term 'participatory culture' to describe the power relationships between the media industries and their consumers in the digital era. Burgess and Green (2009) also adopted this idea and acknowledged the central role of participation on YouTube. This concept has developed from John Fisk's 'cultural economy' theory, who drew emphasis to the active action on the audience involvement and new meaning will be created during the interactions between the producer and consumer (1987). According to Jenkins, the definition of 'participatory culture' refers to 'fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content'.

Jenkins (2009) suggests the participatory on social media general included five characters.

- 1) Relatively low barriers to artistic expression
- 2) Strong support for creating and sharing one's projects
- 3) Informal membership
- 4) A belief that contribution matter

One important reason that makes YouTube a widely acceptable space for ethnic identity formation is that it has minimal entrance criteria and a progressive participation trajectory. Most of the users are unregistered but their views will still be counted into the view numbers which will make the video become popular. Sometimes, users feel the need to comment or rate the videos that they watch so they will register their own account with a few, very simple steps. These all help establish the community in a very accessible way. The 'comments', 'likes' and other feedback mechanisms encourage video creators and these interactions are also significant for content circulation within the community. Jenkins (2006) uses the term 'user-empowerment' to describe this feature and has highlighted how fans are able to contribute to the democratised space after they are empowered.

The concept of ‘user-empowerment’ can be traced to the 1980s when Toffler emphasised how television consumers are able to participate in the content production process and suggested this concept as ‘prosumer’ (1981). However, because his theory was proposed before the emergence of social media, the consumer’s influence on content production was very limited and the majority of the content creation was controlled by the large production companies. With the development of the Internet, the boundaries between producers and consumers has become very vague. Thus, focusing on this, Jenkins in *Convergence Culture* (2006) pointed out the important role users play in the content creation process as ‘active consumption and grassroots creativity... the web has brought these consumers from the margins of the media industry into the spotlight’. Even though Chinese diaspora are recognized as a ‘marginalised group’ in their host countries, YouTube has provided them opportunities for ‘grassroots creativity’. There are many well-known accounts by Chinese diaspora, such as RocketJump<sup>5</sup>(9.07 million followers), Wong Fu Productions<sup>6</sup>(3.27 million followers) and Bubzbeauty<sup>7</sup>(2.82 million followers). The large number of followers that these accounts have been able to attract shows the tremendous benefit of setting up low entrance barriers. It gives everyone a chance to participate at very minimal cost and in turn, allows people to gain significant attention.

As a content-sharing platform, the design of YouTube’s user interface is easy and simple with instruction videos to provide extra guidelines and tips for users at all experience levels. YouTube also makes their content very easy to access and share. Popular videos are featured on the home page based on individual user’s personal interests and other trending topics within the community. Videos hosted on the platforms can also be shared to other social media platforms with a single click or an automatically generated links. In addition, the website’s search engine provides the users with another way to access to relevant content very quickly. Or, if the users are just browsing the platform in general, the recommendation list could guide them to explore the content which probably could attract their attention. As Chau (2010) argues, the accessibility to different levels of context and how much users can ‘operate within these contexts and contribute to the community’ become crucial to YouTube’s development. All these different ways to approach the YouTube dataset is significant for establishing a user’s sense of belonging and, as a result, loyalty to the site.

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<sup>5</sup> RocketJump: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDsO-0Yo5zpJk575nKXgMVA>

<sup>6</sup> Wong Fu Productions: <https://www.youtube.com/user/WongFuProductions>

<sup>7</sup> Bubzbeauty: <https://www.youtube.com/user/bubzbeauty>

The emergence of YouTube offers a platform for unconventional cultural communication, which assist the growth of popular culture from minorities. Hall (1981) claims that popular culture is an important place to fight against the hegemony and is also 'an arena of consent and resistance'. There are two different ways to understand this term. On the one hand, to consider popular culture as a consumer culture which is distinct from high culture through its capitalist production and consumption features as well as its aesthetics. On the other hand, 'the culture from common people' implies that the culture comes from different ethnicities and geographical locations with a long tradition and is different from high culture and the commercial culture. However, because of the rising awareness across all social classes, social networks rely on user-generated content, and a bottom-up marketing strategy in Web2.0. More and more common people have become involved in politics and social issues. Previous private types of 'vernacular creativity' have grown dramatically as a part of public culture (Burgess, 2007). YouTube is one of the social networks which has mediated so much symbolic material from ordinary people based on their everyday life. Because of the understandable and enjoyable information sharing, Chinese diasporic content creators have become much more visible than before, and it is also one of the reasons which make this platform successful. Furthermore, these kind of informal participation practices provide an easy access format for minorities to share their struggles and receiving spiritual support from the platform (Burgess, 2020). Leading content creators are creating their own diasporic culture through music, film and daily video blogs (vlogs), sometimes their thoughts and feelings about being from an ethnic minority could trigger robust discussion. This type of mentorship is informal and unregulated, but it provides opportunities for minorities to embrace their identity and challenge the old norms (Cummings et al., 2019).

Users are highly appreciated on this platform because any activities are considered a contribution, from viewing content, leaving comments, rating videos to making new and original videos. The database accurately counts all views, and those which are popular (having a high view count) get put onto platform's homepage. The website's design and layout also show how much this platform emphasises the amount of 'interaction': YouTube placed the number of view a video received next to the video, which allows everyone witness the changing of these figures during the time; 'Comment sections' are just below the numbers of views which makes it quite easy for creators and viewers to communicate (see chapter 3). The frequent interaction allows the participant to establish an intimate and strong connection with the content

as well as the people on this platform and it motivates them to transfer from being the ‘passive consumer’ to ‘active generator’ (Jenkins, 2006)

The last point is the social interaction and collaboration feature proposed by Jenkins (2006;2009). The ultimate goal for any social media platform is to ‘connect’. However, there are some differences between YouTube and other Social Networking Sites (SNS). As a video-sharing platform, YouTube offers limited functionality for members to ‘connect’. For registered users, there is a subscription list for them to receive notifications of new posts from their subscribed content creators. Even though users can send private messages on the platform, YouTube does not prioritise synchronise interaction like Facebook. However, connections and collaboration in different ways have been invented by users in this platform. One of the widely welcomed practices is joint channels. Because there is no function on YouTube to merge their online space together, content creators have registered joint accounts and shared the responsibilities of managing the account and creating content. This co-creation process was described by Pierre Levy as ‘Collective Intelligence’ (ibid, p.4) which changes the relationship of creators from ‘isolated individual’ to ‘socially connected’ (ibid, p.9). The famous channel, Wong Fu Productions, is a successful example of this. It was founded by the Chinese Americans Wesley Chan, Ted, Fu and Phillip Wang and the channel focuses on creating short films with all Asian casts. The joint channel provides a space for collaboration around certain topics and expands their influence by sharing attention (followers from personal accounts) with the other creators on this channel. Apart from creating joint accounts, there are also many other practices to form connections such as leaving comments and creating response videos as mentioned above. All of these activities favour public sharing rather than private communication, which provides a natural environment for cultural content circulation and identity formation. Additionally, we can also see the activities of co-production, creating response videos and follow-up videos as an example of ‘collective intelligence’ or ‘co-creativity’ as suggested by Axel Bruns (2008).

Although it seems a quite comfortable arrangement, because of the creation of the new forms of digital technologies such as YouTube, ‘participatory culture’ becomes disruptive when facing the economic and cultural reconstruction. Jenkins (2006, p.19) admitted that the convergence of cultures cannot thoroughly empower the users as it is still under ‘the shadow of commercial culture’ and he sees this as ‘both a top-down corporate driven process and a bottom-up consumer driven process. Corporate convergence co-exists with grassroots

convergence’. However, as Simonsen (2012) pointed out ‘It is worth noting that creativity and innovation are completely reliant on the empowered minds of the customers, whereas commercial businesses profit from this grassroots creativity in the majority of instances.’

### **2.5.2 YouTube as a commercial ‘platform’**

What shouldn’t be ignored is YouTube, from the moment it got acquired by Google, is a commercial company focussed on generating revenue and profit. After the first video went viral in 2005, the two founders Steve Chen and Chad Hurley rejected the requirement from advertisers to place ads before videos. Interestingly, the viral video was about the football player Ronaldinho’s training clip with soft implementation from Nike. Although the advertisement placement would benefit the founders monetarily, the decision helped YouTube form a community with high customer loyalty.

However, after Google acquired YouTube, the community-driven priority was replaced by the desire of monetization. Google showed its ambition to make YouTube as a ‘new models for advertising’ on the internet (Wasko and Erikson, 2019, p.374). They also changed their search system by linking certain keywords with sponsored videos. For the first two years, the main advertising style was through professional content made directly by the advertisers and search engine optimization (SEO). However, in 2009 when the first channel on this platform reached the milestone of one million subscribers, advertisers started to change their strategy to sponsor amateur content creators as they had gained trust from their followers and their content appeared to be more authentic than traditional advertisements (Gerhards, 2019). As Morreale (2014, p.114) argues that YouTube cause the ‘hegemonic tension’ between new media companies and traditional media institutions, and between amateur creators and professional creators.

It is interesting that YouTube chose the term ‘platform’ to describe their position in the world. As a world-leading content provider, this label gives YouTube a neutral appeal and helps it achieve a balance between users/content creators, advertisers and policy maker. Gillespie (2010) argues that the term ‘platform’ contains four levels of meanings: ‘computational’, which indicates the technology base of YouTube; ‘architectural’, emphasising the intention of its design is to facilitate open and equal expression and challenges the discourse hegemony caused by technical restrictions; ‘figurative’, creating a visibility mechanism which is different from

television and Hollywood; ‘political’, as ‘a place which to speak and be heard’. This view helps create a negotiable space for YouTube to its clients: advertiser could demonstrate their products to their target costumers and improve their brand awareness; the content creators could improve their own visibility by creating enjoyable video for those people potentially interested through technology; the general users also have a space to hear, speak and be heard which they may have never experienced before. It looks like this ‘platform’ could be a perfect democratic space that fulfill everyone’s expectation. However, after many years, it has proved that in practice the commercial attributes and the technology features have made YouTube a neoliberal platform which encourages the content creators to embed the high-value products in their video to serve the need for monetization.

It is noticeable that because of the monetization strategy, creators tend to create content which favors the needs of advertisers. Studies have shown that content with a high video and audio quality are easily sponsored by advertisers and are popular among creators (Bishop, 2018). Successful channels also give detailed information to help the platform’s content algorithms to push their content to a more appropriate set of audiences (Bishop, 2018). To help creators understand which kind of content can attract more attention and how they can generate increased revenue from advertisement, each channel has access to a tool called the Creator Studio to provide different data to help inform the content creator on how best to optimize their content. This portal also includes instructions that encourage users to maintain a good relationship with their fans or ‘build a company and receive assistance to develop’, pushing users to post videos in the hopes of gaining new followers and converting their channel into a commercially successful enterprise (Hou, 2018). Sarah Banet-Wiser (2012) pointed out this Partner Program makes the self-expression another form of commercial labour. In this case, video content is a ‘lucrative form of labour rather than an amateur pursuit’ (Lovelock, 2012). Their self-making videos were vernacular content constructed by semiotics on the surface, but actually they have established a close connection through embedding valuable products which benefit from YouTube’s commercial system. Because of this business direction, YouTubers who view their content creation as work achieve the highest level of income as well as influence and receive more attention than those who use the platform just to ‘play’ (Törhönen et, al.2019). Because of this phenomenon, the most widely spread opinions come from the creators who best fit into the commercial model and understand how to produce the discourse using a certain successful ‘formula’ (ibid).

### **2.5.3 Self-branding and authenticity on the digital commercial platform**

Even though YouTube is positioned as a commercial platform, amateur content is still ‘buried deep into the DNA of the brand’ (Burgess, YouTube and the formalisation of amateur media 1). Creators produce many informal styles of video such as vlogs (video blogs), ‘get ready with me’, ‘Q&A’, etc. All of these types of videos require minimum editing skills but can help build a direct and authentic connection between the audience and the creator.

Performing as ‘the real self’ can be traced back to before the emergence of the internet, and it is a commonly occurring situation during performance to benefit audiences. What makes this different is the combination of demonstrating the ‘self’ with the marketing and self-branding values based on the commercial strategies developed on the technological platforms (Riboni, 2020). The newly emerged social media platforms, such as YouTube, encourage the users on their platforms to create self-made content and also influence users to refusing the content that is already made by the big production companies. This culture was partly formed by the hegemonic Net discourse but also originally embedded with anti-capitalist ideas behind them. Marwick (2010) sees the ‘doing it yourself’ practices as ‘the creative fabric of Web2.0 at the same time depoliticized’ its ethics.

The media discourse culture was highly influenced by the libertarianism ideas mainly due to the creators of these platforms and their political sensibility. They encouraged self-achieving, meritocracy and a middle-class, liberal lifestyle. At the same time, social media platforms are still influenced by capitalist factors because of their commercial attributes. Under the implication of these ideology, platforms such as YouTube have turned the practice of self-expression into an attention seeking competition: creators have to develop a strategic self-revealing marketing plan in order to increase their public awareness and visibility (Kim, 2015). As mentioned above, because this activity takes place on a commercial platform, the visibility does not only bring fame but also it can often financially benefit the creators. Thus, to gain fame, creators have to carefully achieve a balance between performing sincerely and make their content recognized by the audiences. The difficulties of maintaining this balance have triggered the questions related to authenticity.

Authenticity as a significant concept is not only closely associated with the studies relating to social media, marketing, self-branding, but also shows its implication to human relations in

everyday life (p19,2). It is also the core value of YouTube which is recognized by many scholars (Michael, 2008; Kennedy, 2019). According to Taylor (1992, p.17), authenticity is often described as something which is thought or acknowledged to be genuine or real. Duffy (2013) pointed out that authenticity in the digital media era refers to ‘the incorporation of ‘real’ people as agents in the mediated public sphere’. Senft (2008) further combined the idea of the ‘micro-celebrity’ with authenticity. ‘Micro-celebrity’ refers to the systematic methods individuals adopt to turn him/herself into a commodified entity online in order to achieve popularity and attention. Marwick (2013b) argued that authenticity has become a tool for individuals to distinguish themselves from others. All of these discussions have pointed to the core of authenticity: ‘a sense of performance’.

Under this light, the relationship between authenticity, self-branding and online success have become obvious. Hearn (2008) in their work gave defined self-branding as ‘the construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream cultural industries’. This definition highlighted the relationship between the ‘entrepreneurial self’ with cultural practices, which exactly fit into Chinese diaspora’s online identity practices. Hearn also pointed out that self-branding is constructed with rhetorical practices with the purpose of obtaining benefits. This idea allows the individual to become a brand through ‘liking, commenting and sharing’ activities of their followers and fans (Khanmis et al. 2017). The process of becoming a ‘brand’ requires the creators to make the identity construction as a consumable product which can be accepted by the audiences. Also, creators need to form a connection between themselves and consumers in order to achieve the business benefits (Khanmis et al. 2017). Marwick (2013a) referred to this carefully monitored and highly commercialized self-branding as ‘edited self’. The authenticity plays an important role in achieving a successful self-branding (Kennedy 2019; Genz, 2014). Thus, this is why Sarah Banet-Weiser concluded that the features of self-branding/celebrities on social media as the process of creating a sense of engagement that seems authentic while still prioritising benefits to the market.

Additionally, YouTube has become a particularly fertile space for those YouTube creators giving them the opportunity to talk about their class, gender and race especially when they are in a ‘disadvantaged position’. Nelson and Franta made the ‘coming out’ videos and talks; Weylie, an American Chinese uploaded a video about their struggles growing up as an American Chinese; Cornyco, a black American girl shared her work and life experiences of

being black in Japan. This kind of self-identity revealing videos will often attract tens of thousands of views online. The reason behind this is that the ‘disadvantage position’ narrative fits within the logic of the self-branding YouTube economy through revealing the authentic self (Lovelock, 2017). According to Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) self-disclosure is very important when building a close relationship. Andrew Tolson (2010) and Emma Maguire (2015) pointed out that compared with the celebrities in traditional mass media, YouTube celebrities, the video generators who have a considerable number of subscribers, often act in a more authentic manner because of the lack of gatekeeping during the production and distribution process of their video content online.

This section provides a review of the relationships between self-branding, authenticity and the success of cultural activities online. As Meyers (2009) suggests, because of the logic of self-revelation functions, the personal identity of the video creators’ is constructed step by step with more and more personal information exposed to the public. By doing this, the lifetime as a YouTube celebrity could be extended and the relationships between creators and their audiences can be improved gradually (Lovelock, 2017).

## **2.6 How Western Chinese construct their cultural identity on YouTube**

As Hall emphasised, identity is constructed through representations. YouTube as a space for ‘vernacular practice’ developed from ‘grassroots creativity’ and is influenced by the participatory culture and commercialised environment in the age of Web 2.0. In this light, this study has two research aims. Firstly, this study focuses on how identity was constructed. As discussed before, identity planted in social relationship. Thus, looking at the experiences of content creators and their interaction with other social groups is the way to identify their identity construction process. Also, another important aim is to understand how the identity is represented online. Thus, semiotic practices of content creators should be carefully analysed together with the ‘social order of cultural categorise’ (Geertz,1973). As discussed in section 2.4.2, the process of representation is the process of combining a series of symbols to make sense of the objects and people from the outside world. Thus, when looking at the identity representation practices on YouTube, focusing on how cultural symbols are presented online is essential to the study. Additionally, as signs do not hold solid meanings and have been

influenced by different cultural repertoires, it is possible to identify how the meanings behind cultural symbols have changed during the representation practice and how it can reveal the process of people who experience diverse cultural elements construct their identity in order to achieve a balance between different cultures. The result of this negotiation process always derives a 'hybrid identity' and something 'in-between'. In a similar fashion to other identities, cultural identity is identified through the differences between 'us' and 'them', 'here' and 'there'. For Western Chinese content creators, these differences can also mean 'culture of origin' and 'culture of residence', 'past' and 'present', 'ethnic community' and 'mainstream society', 'private space' (offline life) and 'public space' (YouTube). Thus, the core focus of this study is to investigate the differences and connections between Chinese diaspora and other cultural groups from their online representation activities.

What should not be ignored is the power relations which attempt to penetrate and battle against each other during the cultural representation process. YouTube, as platform which encourages 'user-empowerment' has offered Western Chinese an opportunity for grassroots creativity and has challenged the mainstream discourse. On the other hand, the participatory culture on YouTube highly values the interactions between users and this was encouraged through a series initiative such as the YouTube Partner Program, thus, this 'bottom-up' creative system and the 'top-down' cultural distribution have influenced the creators representation process. With the desire to gain visibility on this platform as a marginalised group as well as the intention to pursue financial benefits, a series of strategies was developed during this time. Performing 'authenticity' is the central to 'self-branding' on this platform. The representation process under this context is not only a pure cultural activity but also a careful self-revealing strategy to achieve a balance between business profit and audience recognition. Thus, to understand the online practices of Western Chinese, it is also important to look at their strategy to combine their representation practices and establishing a community with viewers and achieving market goals.

As a result, this study will combine the above-mentioned theories and concepts to examine the Western Chinese cultural practices on YouTube, with a specific focus on the process of identity construction and representation under different power relations.

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter has reviewed a series of theories and concepts which could help investigate this study's research topic. Firstly, the author has identified the fragmented and changing nature of cultural identity. Then, the concept of 'hybrid identity' has been introduced based on the transnational practices of diaspora in the globalised era. Thirdly, this chapter has also discussed how identity can be delivered into the human society through the practice of representation and also it has introduced the role that semiotic plays in this process. As an important factor which can symmetrically influence the representation process, theories about power relations were introduced in detail. Considering the main research field is YouTube, the features of this platform have also been reviewed with a specific focus on its 'participatory culture', 'self-branding' and 'authenticity' features due to its democratic while commercialised attributes. Lastly, the author has combined all of these theories and concepts to discuss this specific topic and help identify the research aims.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

After developing a thorough understanding of the related literature, concepts and theories relating to the topic, this chapter will introduce the research methods that will be used in this study. The research questions are listed at the beginning of this chapter and the chosen methods have been selected based on the research aims. This study attempts to combine online observations, semi-structured interviews and textual analysis in order to understand the formation of identity and the representation activities of Western Chinese video creators on YouTube. By drawing attention to established an in-depth understanding of the identity formation and representation actions of Western Chinese, this study is determined to explore their own ‘voice’ on a commercial based platform.

Methods have been chosen to solve four sub-questions raised at the beginning of this chapter. Firstly, online observation is applied to investigate the video content, video creator identity practices within YouTube videos without interfering with the subjects’ behavior. Interviews took place in parallel with the observation in order to help understand the motivations and reasons for them to produce these videos. Also, the comments left on these videos, video descriptions and the creators’ other activities on YouTube or on other social media platforms will also be taken into consideration but are not however the main focus, instead these items will be used as an additional reference to support or be used to make sense of their practices. Because of the features of YouTube and also the cultural backgrounds of the author, the data has been carefully selected based on the background literature and researcher’s own judgement.

After collecting the data, all of the information has been analysed through the textual analysis approach. The reason to select this method was based on the research content. Firstly, this study attempts to understand the identity formation of Western Chinese from their own ‘voice’, using textual analysis to centralise the marginalised people and transform those devalued categorises

of otherness into a newly esteemed ideals of selfhood. Secondly, mixed methods can systematically explore and address the multiple layers of meaning in the digital media stories. The data analysis has been inspired by Curtin (1995)'s work and followed the process he suggested.

Additionally, the ethical consideration related to anonymity and privacy in the Internet research will also be discussed later.

### **3.2 Research questions**

This thesis proposes to contribute to the knowledge of the online identity formation of diaspora video generators on YouTube. The principle aim of this research is to explore the diasporic cultural identity formation and the representation of Western Chinese video creators and how they have created the community online.

From one perspective, the Chinese diaspora generate their cultural experiences through the interaction between their ethnic communities and the mainstream society, within their home and in the outside world. On the other hand, video creators on YouTube (known as 'YouTubers') from this ethnic minority expresses their daily experiences online with specific video editing techniques.

Those mediated identity will be internalised and absorbed by other Chinese spectators and other video creators. Also, the communication and interaction between Chinese diaspora across different locations should not be ignored as YouTube is a platform with global engagement, it will help to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind the online representation movement of Chinese ethnicity under Western culture.

The core research question is: How do the Western Chinese YouTubers understand themselves? How is the diasporic cultural identity of Western Chinese presented on YouTube? This topic is split into four sets of research sub-questions, which serve as the basis for the three empirical chapters:

Sub-question 1: How Western Chinese YouTubers negotiate their identity between Chinese culture and the culture of their receiving country?

Sub-question 2: To what extent does the transnational experiences effect their understanding and the representation of their diasporic cultural identity?

Sub-question 3: How do Western Chinese YouTubers utilise their transnational imaginary to construct an online community?

Sub-question 4: How does YouTube, as a commercial platform, encourage or constrain their representation activities?

To develop an in-depth understanding of these content creators' cultural identity, this study will treat YouTube's environment as a whole and use non-participant observation to investigate creators' online activities and attempt to develop a deep understanding of this group. Then the data will be collected from the website, including YouTube videos, information from the description section and video comments. An online interview will also be conducted which will mainly focus on their production experiences as a creator on YouTube.

### **3.3 From research questions to methodology**

Based on the research questions listed above, this study needs to identify the behaviours of content creators and critically interpret the data using a range of methods. Considering the complexity and variety of the group in the central of the study, a qualitative approach will be conducted in this study. According to Wilson (1970), using qualitative research methods to investigate a phenomenon can be 'more open' and 'more involved' than when dealing with large amounts of data. Thus, the online observations and semi structured interviews will have been conducted during the data collecting stage and textual analysis will be adopted as an approach in the data analysis stage.

Although recent studies of Chinese diaspora have been increasing in number, there have not been a significant number focusing on diaspora who grow up in the host countries and their identity representation practices (see details in Chapter 1). Secondly, with the development of this community within their host countries and the changing political and economic environment in east Asia especially in China, the population structure of the ethnic Chinese in Western countries has undergone tremendous changes in terms of social class and educational level over the last few decades (Poston & Wong, 2016). Also, the new generation of Chinese diaspora also seeks to cultivate mutual understanding and cooperation within the Chinese

community and the wider Western society, but these changes have attracted limited attention from current discourse. The current studies of Chinese diaspora have mainly focus on their identity formation through consuming media products or social media usage of exchanging fragmented information, but they have rarely focused on their experiences of producing the cultural products and representation practices (See Chapter 1). To attempt to address this situation and develop a thorough knowledge of both the products (discourse on YouTube) and experiences of the producers (Western Chinese), this study sets up its aim to examining the identity formation of Western Chinese and representation in their ‘own field of action’: analysing the videos created by them, examining their own stories and observing their activities in the natural settings.

Under this light, this research draws attention to systematically understand the identity formation from the representation actions of Western Chinese in order to explore their own ‘voice’ and ‘needs’. A principle aim of this research is to understand the identity formation through exploring the *relation settings* of Western Chinese video creators. Sub-question 1 will look at the diasporic cultural identity of Western Chinese through understanding the differences and commonality between them and their cultural of origin. Sub-question 2 will explore how their past experiences influence their identity construction. Sub-question 3 will attempt to understand how the diasporic cultural identity circulated within the online community. Sub-question 4 explores the identity formation constraints by the commercial attributes of YouTube. The core focus of these questions is to examine and explore how Western Chinese video creators identify the differences and connections between them and the other cultural groups through their online practices. Based on the research aims, there are three main stages to conducting the research. The first stage is online observation on YouTube. This will help to construct a general understanding of who these Chinese diasporas really are, the topics that they are discussing and their main interest points regarding their cultural identity. At the same time, online field notes will be taken, with a focus on exploring their activities on this site.

As the YouTube videos are divided into different topics, after a period of familiarization, three elements those content creators have been identified which focus on a strong relationship with China and Chinese culture and often involved in their representation activities online. The first topic is food, the second topic is parents, and the third topic is their heritage language. After identifying the topics, YouTube videos related to this topic were selected and collected. These videos contain rich information of Western Chinese performative and constructivist aspects of

identity work. In addition, this research also collected video description, comments and interviews to help construct a better understanding of the process of online community building through identity circulation. In parallel a set of interviews with YouTube content creators was conducted to help understand the environment and its attribute as commercial media platforms are also taking into consideration. All the information will be collected, coded and analysed using textual analysis. Through deconstructing the layers of texts and activities of Chinese diaspora video creators will be broken down and then viewed as a whole under social and historical settings.

Stage	Research methods	Materials	Purposes
Stage 1	Online Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-YouTube video,</li> <li>-YouTube environment</li> <li>(Mainly focus on comments, video description and creators online activities)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Gaining initial idea of the YouTube site and understand the creators interest</li> <li>-Identifying the issue that worth research (food, parents and heritage language use)</li> <li>-Developing interview questions based on the information gained during the observation</li> <li>-Connecting with content creators</li> <li>-Collecting videos from the site</li> <li>-Collecting comments, video descriptions and taking notes of creators' online activities</li> <li>-Developing in-depth understanding about video production practices on YouTube platform</li> <li>-Investigating creators understanding regarding certain videos or certain issues</li> <li>-Deconstructing and reconstructing data</li> <li>-Immersing data within boarder context to identify the underlying meaning behind the data</li> </ul>
Stage 2	Semi-structured interview  Textual analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview answers</li> <li>-"Core data": YouTube video transcriptions</li> <li>-"Context data": Interview transcriptions, Comments, Video descriptions, Notes about creator's activities</li> </ul>	

Figure 1. Demonstrating the purpose of research methods

### **3.4 Conducting research on visually based platform**

In this section, online ethnography and its relationship with traditional ethnography will be carefully reviewed. This study has adopted the design from the online ethnographic approach especially on how to set up the time and space boundaries and the research methods that often occurs in many ethnographic studies. Although the study shared many similarities with online ethnography, it still not possible to be considered as an ethnographic work due the research aims and how the data was treated during the process.

Online ethnography is a social scientific research approach which applied the ethnographic principle to the online digital environment. The purpose of traditional ethnography is to observe, record and analyse the culture and shared behaviour of a certain groups of people (Wolcott, 1999, p.67). There are various terms which are used to conduct ethnography within the online setting 'that deal with the 'the Internet' as a topic or context of study', such as 'virtual ethnography', 'online ethnography', 'cyber ethnography' and 'netnothrography' (Beaulieu, 2004, p.142). They are all used in conducting how culture is developed online and how it is influenced by or shaped in the real world. Since the 1990s, online ethnography has been widely adopted by communication studies (Hine, 2008). Studies have used this approach to investigate either the single online immigration community (Johnson,2020), virtual cross-cultural communities (Hanna & De Nooy, 2009), and how offline interactions have influenced the online diasporic communities (Hosseini, 2017; Dong, 2017).

Hart (2017) pointed out that 'online ethnography's highly contextualized, richly descriptive, interpretive approach is a natural fit for exploring culture in an unlimited number of technology-mediated spaces'. Because this study is focusing on understanding how cultural symbols are produced and reproduced during the activities of the younger generation of Chinese diaspora online, online ethnography seems a natural choice as it could help when analysing the complex relationships between mediated information, technology platforms and cultural formation through connecting them with a larger context. However, no matter the traditional ethnography or virtual ethnography, they all emphasise the importance of getting close to the target group and study their interaction between each other (Creswell). Although this study does put some light on the interactions between the Chinese diaspora (the audiences comments to the creators), it is not the principle aim of this research. The main focus of this study is the video content produced by creators and the analysis are more about representation

activities and changing symbolic meanings of individual creators rather than the direct interactions between them.

However, as mentioned above, this study also shares many similarities with the ethnographic approach. One important idea this study adopted from online ethnography as a part of the research process is setting the research boundaries. According to Deniz and Parick (2014), time and space boundaries are two main fields that the researchers need to consider during the research. Because the online community is formed based on its symbols instead of physical ideas (Rheingold, 1993), it is difficult to define the space based on the geographical location. Instead, Ashforth (2000) proposed that the choice of boundaries should be determined between the ‘virtual life’ and ‘real world’. Some studies have separated the online spaces with the offline life while others have tried to discuss both dimensions and attempt to explore the relationships between them. This study has decided to focus principally on the representation activities of young Chinese diaspora online as activities such as the amateur video production all happen in the online space, especially on social platforms such as YouTube. However, this work has not ignored the influence of the offline world to the online activity, so the larger social, cultural and economic conditions of Chinese diaspora are also taken into consideration when analysing the materials obtained online.

Another space boundary this study must decide on is the location of the research field. Dodge (2005) proposed that online ethnography work should set up their online research field based on the social interaction patterns of the target group. This study has identified the close connections across the young Chinese diaspora within Western countries. Thus, instead of focusing on the single diaspora community which may be restricted by their geographical borders, this study has identified and analysed the ‘flow’ between Chinese diaspora beyond their physical locations.

Time boundary is another decision which researchers have to consider. Traditional ethnographers may face difficulties when documenting all of the materials which appear in their research as it is all happening in real time (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 128). However, online ethnography ‘breaks the linearity of time’ because researchers can always go back to review the pre-existing videos, text, pictures, audio clips published online. According to Hart (2017), researchers can either follow the latest uploaded posts and use them as a complement to the real time experiences or download all of the archived data at one time. The self-representation of young Chinese diaspora on YouTube started around 2010 and only

became popular after 2017. Considering the time when this study was conducted, it is difficult to download sufficient data at the beginning. Thus, I have constantly followed the newest videos and related content along my PhD journey (2017 to 2020). However, this does not mean this study treats the data as “real time experiences” because of the physical location and some of the content creators’ celebrity status, it is difficult to obtain ‘on-going’ in-depth interviews during the research period, which is also another element ethnographic researchers highly stressed. Thus, it is not possible, or suitable, to consider this research as ethnography. Instead, this study has adopted the design of ethnographic research and uses online observation and semi-structured interviews over other methods.

In the data collection stage, this study adopted online observation and semi-structured interview as research methods to understand the online diasporic activities of Western Chinese content creators. These two methods often fit into the ethnographic tradition. To some extent, it does share certain similarity with ethnography research, especially the virtual ethnography raised by Hine (2015), which is to study the online community and treat them not only as results of cultural activities of human beings but also sites where culture can be created. However, it still different from the online ethnography approach in terms of its research focus and how the data was treated during the process.

According to Hine (2015), there are two advantages to conducting online observation. Firstly, it allows gives the researcher access to underrepresented groups, overcoming difficulties like geographical distances and physical segregation. Secondly, conducting research on Internet material means that the researchers do not have to worry about missing the moment during the observation as most of the videos and data will remain online indefinitely. This allows researchers to be ‘in the moment,’ experiencing an event without being hindered by their collecting instruments, but yet guaranteeing the accuracy of their data. Because the online research allow researcher to observe the subjects ‘from a distance’ to avoid disturbing the subjects’ activities, so I choose to immerse myself in the environment but make sure not to interfere with the subjects’ actions so as not to influence their behaviors.

### **3.4.1 Online observation: treating YouTube environments as a whole**

Because of the reason raised previously, online observation is applied in this research in order to ‘read’ video creators’ own environment and understand the full picture of their situation from comprehensive perspectives without prejudice (May 2001). The YouTube platform has

created a community which has various functions and allows multi-dimensional interactions (this concept will be introduced subsequently) between users. Through comparing different text and combining them with the video content itself, it is possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the activities of these creators. Thus, using this website as a case to observe the identity formation and representation of Western Chinese provides a better opportunity to access affluent data. Also, new media platforms such as YouTube makes self-expression significantly easier, not only because it changes the way of communication from writing and reading to a more visualized presentation but also the amateur aspect of YouTube and the popularization of affordable video recording technology has allowed the digital representation to become a reality (Burgess, Green 2018). Through thoroughly studying the content available on this website, it has been possible to identify the range of topics which these video creators are interested in and the cooperation or subtle connections between video creators (eg, YouTubers who running different channels sometimes appears in one video together, one YouTuber will nominate another YouTuber's name in his/her video, etc).

Many studies isolated YouTube videos with the platform when conducting their research. However, it is proposed that it is necessary to put the material within the context in order to see the 'whole picture' of where that material comes from (Ayres & Knafl, 2003). Thus, although the main focus is on video content, this study will also address—the rest of the information (mainly about comments and video descriptions )which circulates around the platform.

### **3.4.2 YouTube environment**

#### YouTube video

As a visual platform, YouTube videos provide rich content and the fundamental information for this thesis. As of February 2020, YouTube generates 500 hours of video per minutes (Statista, 2021). YouTube videos are the main resources when conducting the study because as a video-sharing platform it contains the richest video content which will be used as the research material. Also, given that the goal of this study is to investigate the process of diasporic identity formation and representation, videos as a media format provide different layers of information (audio, visual and textual) which can be used to investigate the activities and social interactions featured in the video in a 'natural setting' (Jewitt, 2012). Jewitt (2012) argues that there are three advantages to using videos as a main source of data to for research material. The first advantage is that videos are a modern time technology which can capture 'temporal and

sequential structure' which allows the 'natural occurring event' to happen without disturbance; the second advantage is that videos can offer a multimodal report which contains all of the 'detailing gaze, expression, body posture, gesture' and many more, the sufficient data means videos can be reused across multiple studies, and sometimes researchers can discover new findings or identify things that they didn't notice before; the third advantage is that video as a media file can be saved, shared and reviewed repeatedly with various techniques (slowing the video down, fast-motion, skipping certain section, or pausing to review details contained within a single frame). However, there are also some disadvantages when using videos as the principle material especially existing videos (Jewitt, 2012): The first disadvantage is that the data contains too much information and sometimes it is difficult to process the oversaturated data and produce a meaningful summary. Also, it is difficult to understand the context of the videos when it was filmed and the production intention behind it, that is why response videos and interviews were taken into account during analysis.

On the other hand, the average length of videos on YouTube is about ten minutes, which is very different when compared to other social media platforms where the major content is fragmented. Although while it may be difficult to argue whether ten minutes is long enough to generate a comprehensive understanding of the target group, there are three ways to make the data 'thicker'. The first one is that creators prefer to produce videos on similar topics ~~content~~ several times. For example, the YouTube channel Fungbro produced 13 videos named 'Things Asian Parents Do' and the videos consistently followed one style presented as a series. In addition, this channel produced another eight videos directly related to Asian Parents. Thus, the habits of recreating similar topic videos from different perspective provided this study with opportunities to get rich data just from the videos themselves.

Apart from the video content, other interactions or activities based on the platform's functions, such as comments, video descriptions and subscriptions, will also provide many useful pieces of data and information to determine ~~out~~ the online behaviors of these video producers.

### YouTube video page display

To fully understand the functions of YouTube, the layout of YouTube website will be discussed here. YouTube has been designed with a hierarchical tree structure. After the visitor opens the home page (<http://www.youtube.com>), this site will navigate the users to the sub-pages (Figure

2). As illustrated below (Figure 3), you are looking at the ‘video’ page of YouTube. Even though it is called the ‘video page’, it still contains at least six sections. First, section A is a search bar. Users can enter keywords into this box and they will be led to another page. Section B is the video section, the video screen is presented together with the video’s title and the numbers of likes and dislikes which have been left by other users. Underneath the title is Section C, the name of the channel is located in the top-right corner followed by the number of subscribers of the channel. The subscription button is next to the name of the channel, which is also in the central part of the display. Viewer can click this button to follow the channel whereby they will receive notifications when new videos are uploaded to the channel and this content will be made more visible to them.

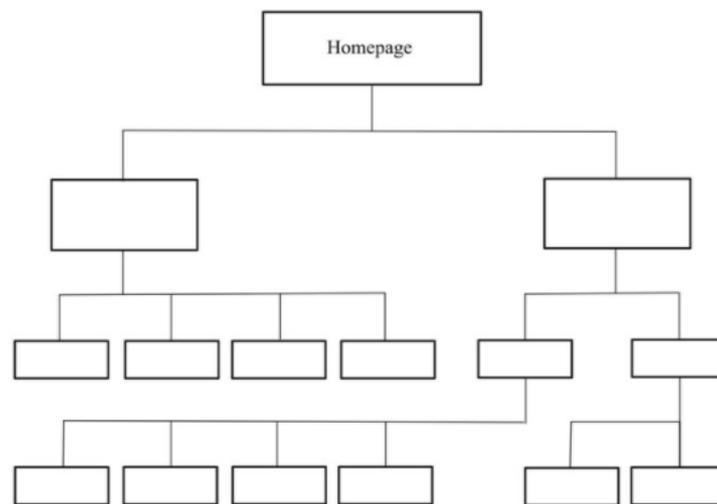


Figure 2. Website design of YouTube. From home page to different sub-pages. Source: Benson, P (2016, p.64)

### Description

Underneath is the description Section D, the video creators normally will put a brief introduction to their video and links which they mention in the video or on other social media account which they manage. This section often serves as another source to understand the background and motivation when the creators make their videos. For example, in the video ‘Day in the life of an Asian/ethnic name’, creator Steven Lim (2014) explained in detail the meaning behind his Chinese name, and this material was used as part of the context to understand the video content (See chapter 6). Also, popular videos are selected by the algorithm and listed on the left (Section F). The top item in the list is the video that normally is the most similar to the central video (the video which is being viewed at that moment), the other selected videos are based on the viewers preferences calculated by the platform.

### Comment

The comment section is placed at the bottom with two clusters. The first cluster is positioned to the right on the top of Section E, where viewers can submit their comments. Beneath are the already posted comments. The comment section is displayed in Figure 4 and it serves as a forum for communication between different users or between users and the video's creators. Creators and viewers can reply to each other's comments and 'like' or 'dislike' each other's comments. The number of 'likes' each comment receives will be displayed beneath it. If the creator likes the comment, it will show a red heart underneath. The most liked comments will be displayed on the top of the section, which is also another 'participatory' elements YouTube has adopted.

Comments play a significant role on the YouTube platform which cannot be ignored when discussing the identity construction. YouTube as a space whose most important feature is 'participatory culture' which indicates the inevitable power from the viewers. In Chapter 2 how viewers can influence the content generated by creators has been discussed. The website layout of YouTube places an emphasis on the interaction between viewers and creators. Creators will be rewarded with video views if they interact with viewers in the comments section. Also, during data collection, there are many valuable comments which the video have creators left underneath their own video or other people's video discussing cultural and identity related topics. Other Chinese diaspora who may not post videos but share a similar background can also be very active and willing to share their experiences, sometimes their words can lead to heated discussions in the comments section. A limitation of using comments as a research material is it could be a large data set if the video goes viral and additionally because of the informal style of the platform there may be some information missed in the sentences which could lead to a misunderstanding of the commentator's original meaning.

The image shows a YouTube video player interface with several red boxes and letters highlighting specific areas:

- A:** Points to the search bar at the top of the page.
- B:** Points to the video title "10 Signs You're An ABC (American or Australian Born Chinese)".
- C:** Points to the channel name "Off the Great Wall" and its subscriber count.
- D:** Points to the video description text.
- E:** Points to the comments section, specifically to a comment by "Chen Yang".
- F:** Points to the right-hand sidebar containing video recommendations.

The video title is "10 Signs You're An ABC (American or Australian Born Chinese)". The channel is "Off the Great Wall" with 753K subscribers. The video has 161,535 views and was uploaded on 28 Oct 2016. The description explains that ABC means American or Australian Born Chinese and discusses the "Displaced Asian Syndrome". The comments section shows several user experiences related to being an ABC.

Figure 3. YouTube website layout

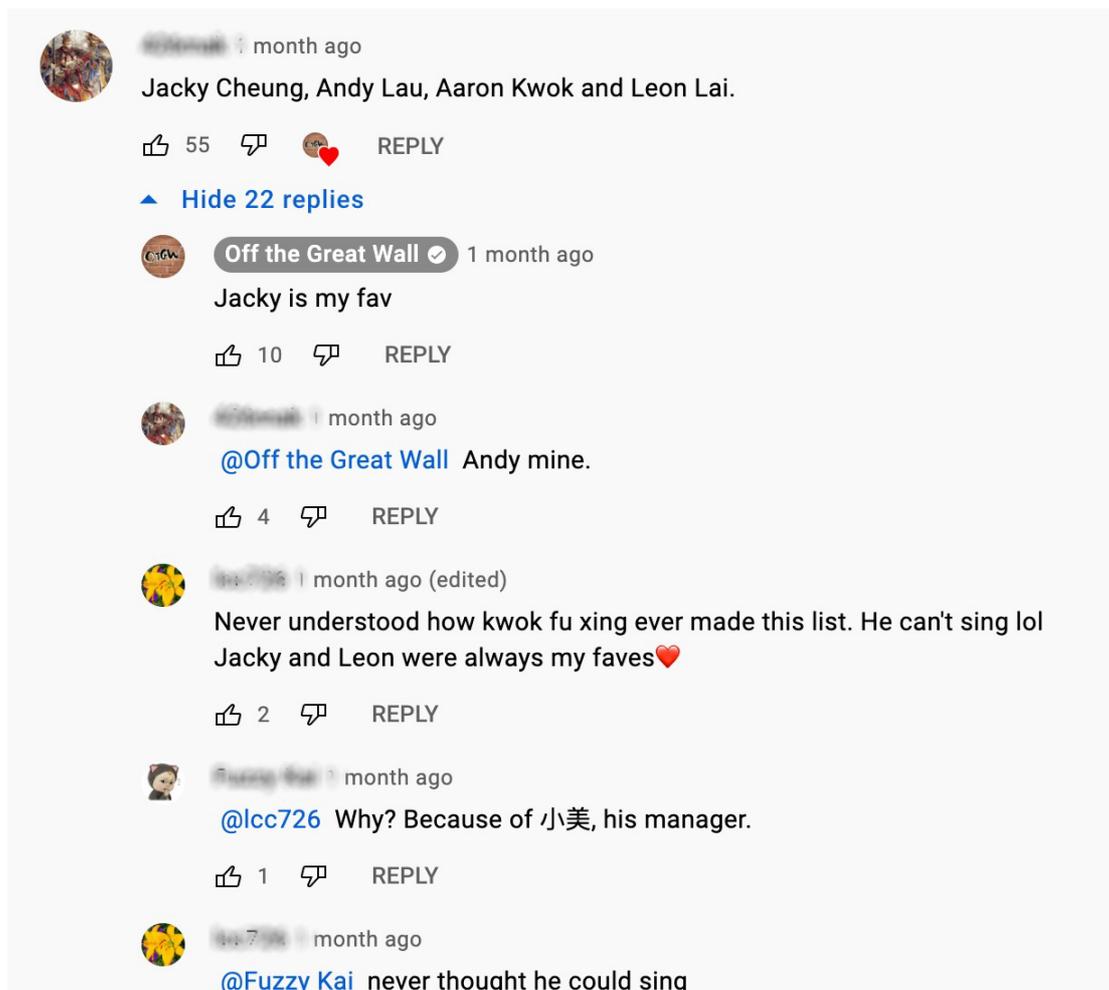


Figure 4. 'Comments' and 'replies' on YouTube's comment section

### Community

As a social media platform, YouTube creates its own community and its 'extreme usability' interface design provides opportunities to build up connections at different levels (Burges, Green 2018). In terms of the video level, YouTube has a 'COMMUNITY' tab which allows creators to post updates, create polls, tease the best moments in a short-cut moving images format, and interact with subscribers and visitors (As shows in Figure 4). Users can also comment, like or dislike on the post. In terms of the channel level, YouTubers can select the channels which they are interested in and the subscription information can be found in their 'CHANNELS' section and also the left column of 'COMMUNITY' section as 'MY FAVS' (As shows in Figure 5). This is also another way to find the Chinese video creators online and many of them featured one another on their channels.

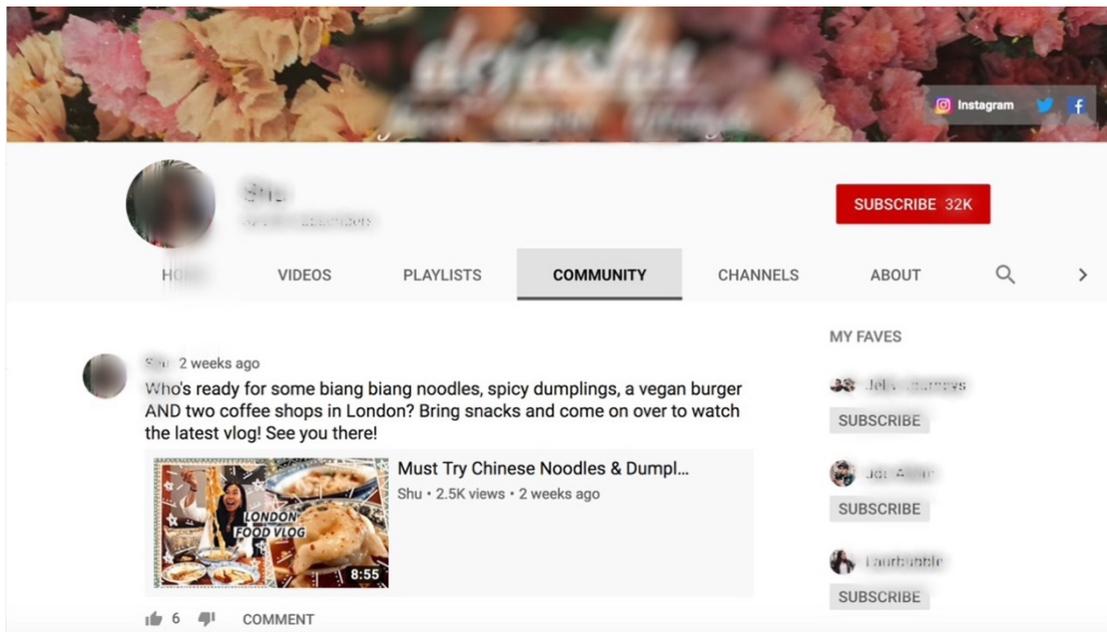


Figure 5. The display of YouTube 'COMMUNITY' section

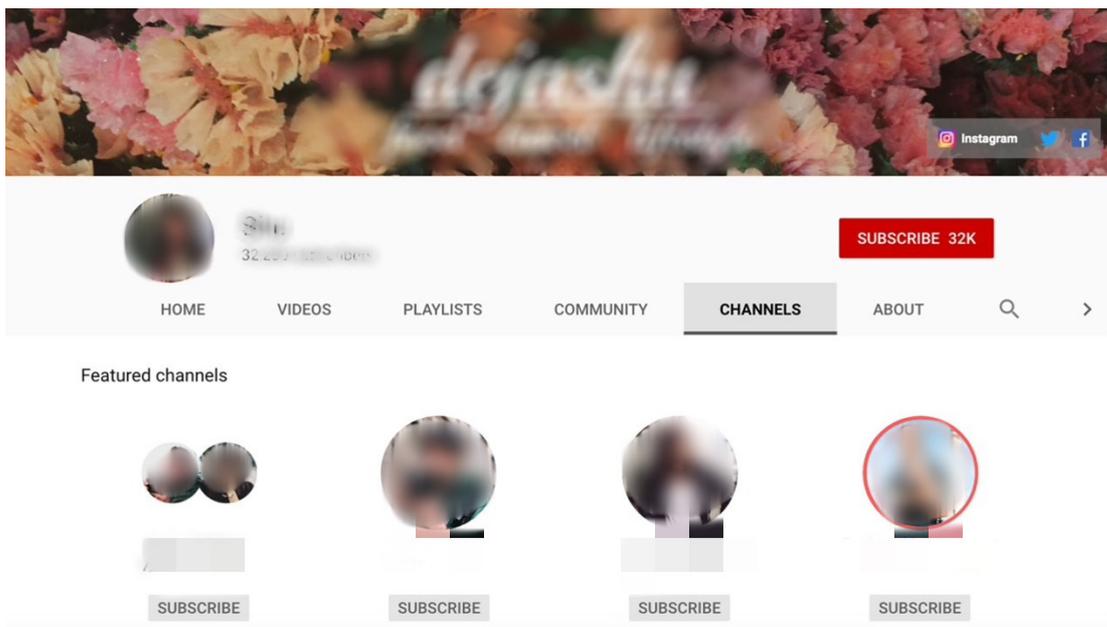


Figure 6. The display of YouTube 'CHANNELS' section

My main focus will be on the video content, but as illustrated in the figures above, the other data and information around the video cannot be ignored. As Fairclough (1992) mentioned, they will serve as the 'outside' information for me to understand the whole context and get close to the video content I need to analysis.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

#### **3.5.1 Finding YouTube creators**

To find Western Chinese's' YouTube channels, keywords such as 'American Chinese', 'Chinese Australia', 'British Chinese', 'British Asian', or 'Chinese living in Canada' were entered into YouTube search box to identify suitable videos. Based on the video content and also the creators' description which are shown on the video page or in the channel page, their background information can be determined. To confirm their ethnic identity, all of the selected creators must have at least once listed his/her identity as 'ethnic Chinese' living in a Western country. As YouTube has a very large number of channels it is important to select target channels in order to improve work efficiency and to ensure the research goes to the right direction. Considering the creators who have large number of followers are disproportionately distributed in different countries, it is problematic just to select the top Chinese diaspora YouTubers as most of them live in the United States. Thus, this study uses bespoke selection criteria. There are four standards which must be met to select the channel. 1. it is managed directly by Chinese diaspora (which excluded the channels managed by institutions); 2. the channel contains cultural and identity related content; 3. channels have already established some extent of visibility or 4. identity related videos have received a good amount of attention (views and comments). Based on this standard, 24 YouTube channels run by Chinese in different Western Countries were selected including the United States (9 channels), the United Kingdom (7 channels), Canada (5 channels) and Australia (3 channels). The number of followers of these channels ranged from four thousand to four million at the time this study was conducted.

#### Collecting YouTube videos

After selected the creators, their YouTube pages will be closely observed. The video collection and selection have gone through three stages: reviewing videos, reducing videos by summarising and categorising the theme of each video and identifying the connections between the categorises.

Because some YouTube channels contain many videos, and their topics varies, not every video is related to their diasporic cultural identity. Thus, all of the videos listed in their channel needed to be initially reviewed to identify the main themes which are frequently mentioned in

the video to determine whether they should be analysed further. Videos which do not contain the content related to China and the Chinese are eliminated in the first step.

There are 87 videos which were selected for the next stage: summarise and categorise. The videos were reviewed and tagged based on the main research questions. Then, the videos were also grouped with different themes such as make-up, food, clothes, travel, parents/family, school experiences, etc. The tags and categories are not defined at the beginning of the collection process but evolve, develop and change back and forth based on the understanding of the questions, the theoretical concepts mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 and the video content. Figure 7 shows some of the examples that tag different videos based on core research questions and how they are grouped.

Tag	Extract from Transcript	Categories
The differences and commonality between cultures	Today I will share with you two different make ups about Chinese look and Western Look	Make-up
	Weird things that Chinese parents do that just make sense	Parents/Family
Past experiences	I don't know if you ever experienced steaming something and then putting into a tight lunch box to then open up in the lunch time...it stinks ok!... Everyone was like 'eww, whats that smell!'.I was so embarrassed and this is the point I related to Weylie ridiculously. I am like 'yeah, been there'	Food
Cultural identity circulates within online community		
Commercial Attributes	I was surprised so many of you are interested in watching I speak Chinese. So today, I am trying to only speak Mandarin for a whole day, let's see how it goes.	Language

Figure 7. Example of tagging and categorising videos

It should be noticed that one video may contain many different themes and categories. Thus, this study also focuses on the relationship between different videos and categories. In this stage, the study found most of videos contained topics about Chinese food, Chinese parents and the use of language. The data of these three categories also provides various materials to understand the given questions from different perspectives. In the end, 53 videos which mainly focused on the above-mentioned categories were selected from the previous 24 YouTube channels. The methodology of the video transcription is explained in detail in the following section.

#### Taking field notes and collecting other information

Apart from focus on the video itself, I also act as a non-participant ‘lurker’ on YouTube to observe the activities of these group and take notes to record their interaction which are publicly visible. Some of the activities are identified through the video content. YouTubers can build connections through inviting video creators from other channels, nominating other YouTubers’ by name or using other symbols (like images of a YouTuber) to establish the links between each other. The other part is the activities outside of videos including comments, video descriptions and other activities which are related to the video. The comments, description, transcription have been saved together with videos under one folder in the initial data collection stage. The comments will be exported to Microsoft Excel using the ExportComments website. The description and other information have been saved to separate word documents for analysis.

As a Chinese who grow up in China, I have developed the understanding about Chinese culture, and I am also sensitive about the Chinese values. Additionally, because of my experience livings outside of China and my relationship with Chinese diaspora friends I am also very aware of how Chinese culture may affect a person’s lifestyle and their ways of thinking when they are living aboard. Thus, my background and the literature I have read before the field work has helped me understand the videos and the relevant data that relates to Chinese culture and identity construction.

The selected material only takes up small portion of all the diasporic cultural identity related videos, comments and information on YouTube. It is hard to defend the choice as the decision is made based on my understanding, but all of the materials have been carefully selected with purpose and contained the identity representation content which this study requires. At the same time, because the author sees the YouTube environment as a whole, the chosen material

served as the main focus, but the study also keeps an eye on the rest of the information which circulates around YouTube and puts that information in the data pool if they have a close relationship with the chosen material. For example, some of the creators' interviews might not demonstrate on his/her own channel but another channel, and this will be considered as useful data.

### **3.5.2 Semi-structured interview**

With the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding about the context of being a YouTube creator, the semi-structured interviews will be conducted. Semi-structured, as opposed to structured or open-ended interviews were considered to be the most suitable because they allowed the researcher to ask the participants with a list of pre-determined questions based on the research aims, while also conducting the interviews in a manner which was similar to a conversation. After comparing with other interview methods, semi-structured interview was used in this study because it allows the investigator to prepared before the interview to ensure the demand information will be collected while also open to more possibilities to explore new findings (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

In the perfect situation, the interviews were conducted directly with the people who worked for the channel, but because of the celebrity status of the selected YouTubers it has meant they are difficult to reach to. The author sent out the invitation to 24 chosen video channel, however only three of them replied. To further enrich the data, the author also interviewed another five people who were Chinese diaspora and also had experience working on YouTube channels. Because the creators lived in four different countries, it was not possible to conduct the interviews in person so most of the interview were conducted through video meetings, online text messages via social media account, or email depending on their willingness and availability. It is easy to follow the semi-structured interview during the video meeting but when the interview is conducted through text message and email, it is hard to follow the semi-structured protocol. However, because there are many existing videos uploaded by creators and some of them also accepted interviews on other YouTube channels, the data collected are considered to be more than enough for this research.

Researchers pointed out that the advantage of conducting online discussions is in minimising the expense and effort for researchers to travel and meet the interviewees in person. Also, it

lowers physical identification indicators such as age, class or cultural background, which may have a good or bad impact on the rapport. Interviews can be stored immediately in the application, eliminating the need for transcription. There are also some disadvantages, the first one is the technology demand when conducting the research. This is not a problem in this study but online interview can very easily be disturbed especially when conducted through text message or email. Also, unlike face-to-face interviews, it is hard for the interviewer (me) to accurately understand the meaning behind the written words as there is no body language, facial expressions or tone of voice to help interpret the meaning based on the context (Robson, 1993; Chen & Hinton, 1999).

The video interviews were recorded on a laptop then transcribed through the online digital application Otter and reviewed by me. The interviews included questions about the growing up experiences of the participants; the participants' view of China and the countries in which they live from a cultural perspective, especially about their opinions about food, language use and their relationship with their parents; their understanding of their own and other YouTubers' videos; their reasons for making certain videos and why they choose certain techniques when producing those videos; how they felt about the comments and feedback (details can be found in the appendix).

### **3.6 Understanding identity through textual analysis**

The emergence of various expressions of new 'politics of identity' which reflects the social movements which arose in the 1960s has driven the scholarly focus of social construction of identity to people who previously felt marginalized from dominant political channels and the more mainstream social movements (Aronowitz, 2014). Before the discursive turn, the putative universal theoretical accounts of social actors shared by scholars argued that it is 'in fact extremely particularistic--- namely, white, male and Western' (Somers, 1994). Thus, in order to understand the changes, theories of identity politics shifted explanation actions from 'interests' and 'norms' to identities and solidarities. Simply put, the identity politics emphasised 'I act because of who I am', not because of the given value or a rational interest.

Under this light, centralising the marginalised people and transforming those devalued categorises of otherness into a newly esteemed ideal of selfhood is to combine the social ontology and the social constitution of identity through a 'reframed discourse'. Thus, considering the material this study collected is complex and varied, textual analysis will be

adopted to analysis the data. According to McKee (2003), textual analysis has two key elements. The first one is to ‘embed social actors within relationships that shifts over time and space’, it does not treat identity as a fixed and stable status but it is constantly in flux. The second one is that textual analysis does not isolate the identity but considers it in a specific social setting which has complex relationships with different social forces such as institutional practices, organizational constraints, etc. As Stuart Hall (1995) emphasised, the identity of a subject formulated through interaction with social members. Thus, addressing the relationship between different social forces under certain social settings or ‘fields’ is necessary.

Also, it is worth noting that the text in this study not only refers to literary text, it also refers to various materials that collected from the study. It can be divided into two categories. 1) YouTube videos. 2) Information on the website. The text in YouTube videos contains human language, background music, subtitles, camera shots, body gesture, environments (the background settings) and different editing techniques. Information collected from the website are mainly in writing text but have to be analyzed within their context (for example which user commented underneath which creator’s video). The interviews conducted in video meetings have been transcribed from speech to text whereas the messages and emails have been saved directly as ‘written words’. All of these ‘text’ will be considered together with the social, cultural and economic background based on its ontological relationality. In contrast to other methods in social sciences, textual analysis does not have constructed form,

‘There is no straightforward attempt to describe what textual analysis is, how it works, why it is done, what kinds of knowledge it produces, and how one might proceed in the textual analysis of a text’

(McKee, 2001)

Hall (1985) attempted to give a theoretical structure when conducting textual analysis, which is language and meaning, ideology and myth and historicity. This research will mainly be based on these four theoretical dimensions

### Language and meaning

Building on the French structuralism, Hill (2018) suggests meaning exists within the interactive process between the text and the reader and has to be understood within the specific social and historical content. However, this concept does not strictly follow the structuralist rule because

it also treats media as a meaning constructor. Meanings can be mediated during the process of representation, or ‘signifying practice’ (Hall, 2005). Also, as text normally contains various meanings, it is important to ‘position the reader’ into the text analysing and developing a relationship with it.

### Ideology and myth

Ideology is the power of language which can shape people’s belief and make them believe the order of things in this world (Lukes, 2004). It also influences how media organises and represents news. Hall does not specifically talk about myths in his work but explains it as ‘the power to signify events in a particular way’. This power is often unconsciously embedded in the text. Thus, one goal for textual analysis is to question the myth behind the text.

### Historicity

Text cannot be examined alone because ‘the meaning produced in the encounter between the text and the subject cannot be gleaned from the text alone’ Curtin (1995). Thus, it is necessary that the reader takes the historical context into consideration from the time that the text was produced.

### **3.6.1 Curtin’s analytical process**

Based on the theoretical foundation, Curtin (1995) further developed it into an analytical process, which will be adopted in this study.

- 1) The analyst needs to first identify the category of the media. For example, a video blog should be considered distinct from the short film.
- 2) Examine the narrative structure of each story to determine how it contributes to the interpretation of the story. The narrative structure in this study can not only be restricted to the written text itself, but also can relate to how camera is used, or how the selected music is used to tell the story.
- 3) Identify ‘the metonyms (the whole hidden by the part used to represent the whole) and the synecode (the specific hidden by the whole) in the narrative’ and to examine what it represents.
- 4) If it is necessary, the analyst can deconstruct the text and pick out certain symbols and metaphors to make assumptions of the ideology hidden behind the text and then reconstruct it into the text to complete it.

- 5) It is important to also notice what is missing, because it is also ‘shapes the preferred reading of the event’
- 6) Finally, the analyst needs to put the text back into the context and to consider its historicity elements. At this point this study tries to consider how YouTube as a platform can shape the identity construction and representation and sometimes this consideration can expand to the social, political and cultural reasons which exist in the current society.

There are three main stages involved in Curtin’s process, which is ‘deconstruct and reconstruct the text and put them into the larger social context’. One may argue that textual analysis within Media Studies and Cultural Studies does not follow a rigorous set of rules, but the consideration behind it will limit the potential to identify new things. Because the research questions have to be investigated through a range of methods, it is problematic to adapt to follow a strict paradigm. Just as McKee (2001) stressed ‘if you only ever ask the same questions in the same way, you will continue to get very similar answers’. Thus, this study will adopt Curtin’s textual analysis framework as a guide to process the various data in the hope of identifying the identity construction and representation activities of the Western Chinese content creators on YouTube.

### **3.6.2 Analysing data**

After introducing the methods that will be used for data collection stage, this section will explain the procedures of the data analysis based on Curtin’s analytical process. Through repeatedly deconstructing and reconstructing the materials and immersing them into social contexts, it has helped to identify the underlying meaning from behind the text from a range of different perspectives.

The collected data has been separated into two layers. The first layer is the videos as they contain the richest data which has been collected from the visual based platform. It will be referred to as the ‘core data’. The second layer is the information collected from the YouTube website, including comments, interviews, video descriptions and other activities recorded during the observation. This will be referred to as the ‘context data’, which serves as the ‘context’ to help when analysing the ‘core data’.

Due to the above-mentioned reason, video content will be analysed first. The speech in the video will be transcribed into written words through online digital application Otter<sup>8</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> Otter Website: [www.otter.ai](http://www.otter.ai).

reviewed by me. As Curtin (1995) suggested to identify the structure of the videos, to understand which elements are contained in their videos and how they utilise these elements to represent their identity, transcribing the video content is also necessary. The transcript of the video content can have various elements. A researcher can decide to include the kind of items in the transcript which relate to the aims of their research (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 6). The transcript will contain various items and each item reflects a layer of meaning/ or part of communicative activity (Woods & Dempster, 2011). Based on the research purpose, the transcripts were divided into time segments and the on-screen image, camera angle/size of frame, dialogue/soundtrack, body movement/gaze, were all listed on the sheet (see below). Using this method, the structure of the video can be identified.

Time	1:06--1:15	1:15—1:20	1:20—1:25	1:25—1:27	1:27—1:28
Image					
Camera angle/ size of frame	Front	Front (Special effect)	Front/close-up	Front/ Close-up	Front/Close-up
Dialogue/soundtrack	Mike(M):Hello? Where are you?  Mike's father (F): We are walking back home right now  M: Oh, walking back home .... How far? F: We are at the Da Tong ...	M: Oh, ummm, I.I love you  Mother (talking in distance): I love you, what does this mean? What does this mean?  M: Ah, yeah..yeah it's.... ah, ummm, you are very good parents  (Suspenseful music playing)	Mother: What are you talking? What do you want?	M: I don't want anything. I just want to say I love you	F: What is the meaning of this "I love you" stuff?
Body movement/gaze	Mike lean forward Sheldon hand cover mouth	Mike lean forward Sheldon hand cover mouth	Sheldon cover mouth laugh quietly	Mike smile	

Figure 8. The Sample of video transcription

As mentioned before, the videos were selected based on three different themes: food, parents and language use. Thus, the videos collected were automatically grouped under these three themes. However, when analysing the data and carefully looking at the video, it was noticed that some of the videos contained several themes. For example, in Weylie's video 'Growing

up Chinese American | My struggles’, the video covered all three themes. Thus, sometimes the same video was grouped under different themes to analyse the meaning behind it. During the analysis process, some of the elements of the video will be deconstructed and picked out to make assumptions of the ideology behind the videos (Curtin, 1995). For example, various elements such as the choice of camera shots and the editing styles were picked out and analysed to identify how creator Weylie constructed a sense of ‘home’ in their video. After deconstructing the content, symbols and metaphors will be put back and analysed with the second layer materials. For example, the Chapter 6 analysed how IVY Li built up an online diasporic community through looking at how users in the comments section interacted with video content.

### **3.7. Ethical consideration**

One essential issue raised here is the concern of anonymity and privacy, which can become very blurred on the Internet. Herring asks: ‘should researchers thus be able to cite them [authors] without permission?’ (2004, p. 53). This question relates to how the content has been collected in this study. In terms of the video content collection, creators can select the degree of privacy when uploading videos. There are three options when video creators upload videos: ‘public’ means everyone can access the video; ‘private’ means only a limited set of people (under 50 usernames) who are invited to view the video. The video will not show up in any search results; ‘unlisted’ means the video will not show up on the search result and only people who know the link can view it. It was mentioned above that all of the videos selected for this research were found in search results, which means the privacy degree of these videos are all under ‘public’ status. Thus, the content selected were all intentionally public videos, which is a choice made by the author. In terms of people who comment underneath the videos, considering the username does not contain identical information for any individual, this study will directly quote the comments with people’s username. However, for the moral consideration, this study will not reveal the real username and the weblink of those channels which have under 50 thousand followers because their influence on the platform cannot be considered as a public figure. Thus, exposure of their content may cause unexpected difficulties to their life.

Also, as the opinions of the participants expressed through interview are not to be published to the public so even though all the interviewees are video creators, the content related to the interviewees will be handled following the rules of the *University of Westminster Code of Practice Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research* (2017) and the participants have been

informed that their data will be treated as confidential and it will not be traceable to them unless the participants explicitly allow. The participant information form and consent form was also be given and explained to the interviewees before the interviews were conducted.

### **3.8 Summary**

The core research aim of this study is to examine and explore how Western Chinese video creators identify the differences and connections between them and the other cultural groups through their online practices. Under this light, an online observation has been conducted to understand the content within the YouTube videos and the activities across the whole platform in order to further understand content creators' experiences on the YouTube platform and their general understanding of the chosen themes (Chinese food, parents and heritage language). After the research materials was collected, Curtin's textual analysis framework will be adopted in this study. Under Curtin's idea, the 'text' should be deconstructed, reconstructed and put into social and historical settings in order to understand the underlying meaning behind the text. Thus, this study uses YouTube videos as the main research material with the help of the information gathered across the platform to help further identify how Chinese diaspora make sense of their identify formation and representation by focusing on the aforementioned three themes. The next part will be the finding chapters.

## Chapter 4 Chinese Food

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how diasporic cultural identity was formed through foodways. As mentioned in Chapter 2, YouTube, as a platform promoting the armature practices as well as professional content, encourages various styles of content. Through looking at what people capture and talk on the screen; many pieces of evidence could be found which exhibit the connection between material goods and cultural roots. Among them, food is one of the themes which consistently always appears. Because ethnic food normally has been kept in the domestic environment, when it is brought into the public space, the symbols, norms and meanings which are usually attached to it before will be stripped and renegotiated. Foodways is an important cultural practice for immigrants to maintain their identity from their original country. The link between communities and cultural groups are also formed because of this practice. To some extent, the cooking styles and eating habits is also a type of cultural heritage, when the elder generation passes it down to the next generation, cultural identity is also formed in the process. There are many studies which focus on the relationship between food, eating habits and the ethnic identity of immigrants (Xu, 2008; Li, 2010; Bisogni et al., 2002; Devine et al. 1999). However, it is rare that studies pay attention to how ethnic food is presented on the public social platforms by those diasporas. Hall pointed out the importance of semantic practice in the formation of cultural identity, and this practice is unfixed and unstable. Developed from the core research questions, this chapter tries to solve the following sub-questions:

1. What are examples of foodways contributing to the diasporic identity formation of Chinese diasporas?
2. How do the Chinese diaspora negotiate their relationship within the cultural group and outside of the group through foodways?
3. To what extent does YouTube's environment influence food cultural practices?

Firstly, this chapter will examine how the idea of ‘family’ and ‘home’ is constructed through the making and sharing of Chinese food together; Then, this study will analyse how the Chinese diaspora video bloggers connect Chinese food culture with the historical past; Also, highlighting ‘Chineseness’ and performing authenticity on YouTube is a significant feature even though the Western Chinese video creators, have a mixed and complex identity construction.

## **4.2 From food to the identity formation**

According to Kittlet, Sucher, and Nelms (2012), human beings have a series of activities related to food, including selecting, buying, cooking, sharing and eating food. They name this unique activity ‘food habits’ (also known as ‘food culture’ or ‘foodways’). Studies have proved that there is a strong relationship between what people eat and how other people identify and how they think about themselves (Leavitt, 2013; Schermuly, 2016; Stano, 2016, Moreno,2021). The methods of selecting and cooking food varies in different cultures because food as a cultural practice has a closed connection with people’s beliefs, values and religion. Kittlet et al.(2012) pointed out that ‘Eating is a daily reaffirmation of one’s cultural identity’. The process of making food and Bennett (2007, p.135) believes it emphasises ‘becoming over being’.

Most of the Chinese diaspora which publish content on YouTube describe that there are not many other Chinese people who lives around them when they were growing up, sometimes their family were the only Chinese people living in that village. This situation limited their chance to access their ancestral culture. This situation serves as a reminder to the question that Stuart Hall (1994, P.392) posed to a Caribbean filmmaker: ‘From where he/she speaks?’

As the old saying goes ‘we are what we eat’. Every step of buying, cooking, serving and eating remind us of who we are, what we believe, how we socialize with others. In his work about food and signifying practices, Terry Eagleton (1998, p.204) argues that food is not just an objective, it always involves emotion and will always be interpreted by humans. In a well-established and healthy society, emotions are always affiliated with material. Benedict Anderson in *Imagines Community* (1991) argues that the existence of community highly rely on the ‘Imagined entity’, which means people are programmed to believe the existence of their

community members with imagination even though many of them may never meet each other in their whole life. Food, as a cultural symbol, not only represents a shared memory of the community, but it also provides a feeling of connection to one's ethnic identity even for individuals who are far away from their homeland. Edward Said argues 'a shipwrecked person who learns how to live in a certain sense with the land, not on it' (Bayomi & Rubin Eds, 2001). For immigrants and their offspring, embracing the strangeness is one of the difficulties that they always encounter when moving to a new land. Creating a sense of home is essential for them and food practices is one of the most significant ways to recreate the culture and memories and it is embedded deep into everyday life and is associated with many other cultural practices. For Chinese immigrants, food becomes more special especially for those who moved to a Western country between the 1960s and 1980s, the weak education and financial background encouraged most of these immigrants to start their own business --- opening Chinese takeaway for example (Watson, 1975 cited in Parker, 1998, p.77; Collins, 2002; Cho, 2010; Liu, 2015). Thus, Chinese food is not only a common lifestyle that connects people to their home culture, but it is also a means of survival and an opportunity to settle down in the new world for many of these immigrant families. There are many videos about food which have been made by the diaspora Chinese content creators as many people were born around and after 1980s and most of them have grown up in a family which runs a Chinese takeaway or Chinese restaurant. One of the video creators, Lam, explains in his interview 'Chinese food for me is the best. I mean, I do have complex feeling about it in the past. Because I had to work every day after school in my parents' restaurant. But now I love it, especially the one made by my mum'. Food is clearly connected to memory and the meaning of being Chinese but also as an ethnic minority in the country that they live. Thus, it is important to determine what Chinese food means to them. How they portray food as a cultural material on the public social platform? And finally what do they want to present through their performance?

#### **4.3 Cooking and sharing food with family members**

In many cultures, sharing food plays an important part in social activities. Also, solitary eating is an unpleasant, if not humiliating, practise in many societies. People tend to connect loneliness, social isolation, unpopularity and unhealthy lifestyles with eating alone. Lukanuski (1998, p.115), revealed in her work that most people are unwilling to reveal their loneliness because it represents a certain degree of failure in their social skills. People share food with the

people they love in the hope of being reassured in the different social relationships such as friendship, family, work colleagues. These activities can also create love and comforting feelings as human beings are essentially social animals. Lukanuski (1998, p.113) also argued that the sense of community are shaped constantly through food sharing.

In videos which have been published online, food often appears during a family occasion. Studies have shown that family meals are often associated with extraordinary food consumptions and sharing food strengthens the family connection and perpetuate the roles and norms of the member within the family (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Through sharing Chinese food together, a sense of togetherness can be formed during the process. For example, no matter whether they are celebrating grandma's birthday party or meeting with family members in China, there is a scene which always appears in Western Chinese creator's videos and that is people gathered around and making traditional foods. The process of making and sharing food makes an individual family member subjected to the prescriptive effect of the family dinner cultural ideologies (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012). It is very usual to see Chinese diaspora travel from place to place to meet their families. Because the living situation may vary between people, food is a key component which maintains the connections between family members and serves as a reminder of the cultural symbols that members share within this group. Ethnic food serves as a metaphor for the idea of 'togetherness'. Eating in a relaxing environment with close family members is valued in their culture because as immigrants they are otherwise unable to get this sense of experience from the outside.

Apart from meeting with their extended family, similar scenes such as core family reunions also appears in Shu's video 'London Cheap Eats & Traditional Cantonese Home Cooking'. In this video, Shu shows that she had lunch and dinner with her mother and sister who just come back to London from abroad. They had a Scandinavian lunch in central London and cooked food together at home for dinner. There is an interesting comparison between the content she showed for their lunch and for their dinner. For lunch, most of the time during the video the camera was focused on the food itself and the commentary was mostly about the food. For dinner, the content not only focused on the food but also captured a strong sense of 'home' established during the food preparation process. This part starts from Shu appearing in front of her mother's house when she is trying to find her key to open the door.

Shu (talking to the camera): uhh...I am so looking forward to eat Chinese food man. Love eating, love eating out, love takeaway, love English, love other cuisine, but the Chinese food, is the best.

(Shu opens the door)

Shu (talk to someone outside of the camera): (in Cantonese) 嘿, 嘿, 嘿, 靚女我翻黎啦[all you beautiful ladies, I'm back now]!

Cut to next scene, Shu sits in a sofa)

Shu (talk to the camera): I don't know about everyone else, but as soon as I'm back, it's always, like, bra off, cloth off, pajamas on, messy hair and get ready for dinner. I have a really really long Chinese playlist behind me. Those are the 80s classic bang and staff. I smell food! I can't wait! We are having 白切鸡, which kind of like a boiled chicken .... it is very very tasty...it's so good! And we will have steamed fish as a balance and yeah, I am so excited(laugh)

\*Text in () shows the shot, camera angle, gaze and body movement, and the dialect used in the video; text in [] shows the dialect translation in English

In this part, we are unable to see which people were talking to Shu at the moment when she opened the door, but from the context before and after, we know that she was talking to her mother and sister. The language immediately changes from English to Cantonese which is the language she and her family always speak at home. Shu used a very humorous and delightful tone since the moment she opened the door. Apart from the change of language, she also spoke directly to camera to reaffirm the idea about what 'home' means to her—a relaxing, comforting and warm space. Shu also mentioned the music she was playing — Chinese pop music from 80s. Then she expressed her excitement for having Chinese food including body language to highlight her feelings. Also, compared with the previous 'eating out' clip, Shu also highlighted that the eating habits at home are much more casual and do not involve the manners when eating in a social space. Shu gradually builds up an atmosphere of home in the video through her use of language, background music, being together with food and by establishing a close connection between the concepts of 'home' and 'home cooking'. Shu continues to talk when her mother is cooking behind her.

Shu (talk to the camera): I think mum's cooking is always the best type of cooking. You can go to the best restaurant than ever, you can eat around the world but there is nothing quite like home cooking and my mum's is the best.

(Cut to next scene, Shu is wondering around the room and singing along with the music with subtitle on the screen: 'obviously my mandarin needs a bit of work' )

(Cut to next scene, Shu and her mother is standing near each other in the kitchen. )

Shu: (in Cantonese) 喔, 香喷喷! [Wow, smells so good!] What is it?  
Garlic and oil.

Through this expression, Shu unconsciously connected 'home cooking' with 'mum's food' during talking. The feminine are frequently associated with food in the literacy and media representations (Cairns,2015). However, in this context there is no need to put an emphasis on the necessity of a connection between women and food because the word 'mum's food' serves as a symbolic function, representing the kid and their caretaker, the idea of 'home' and a sense of pleasure. Cooking and eating are ways in which enjoyment can manifest. In the other videos, Shu talked about how she used to listen to Chinese music, speak Cantonese and eat Chinese food at home because of the influence of her parents. Clearly, all these habits at home locates Shu's family within a shared narrative of identity as Chinese and this culture was passed down within this space from one generation to another. At the same time, the cultural elements which always appears at home since childhood becomes a significant part for Shu to present a sense of 'home' on the screen.

Even though Shu's mother and sister do not appear in the video but from Shu's description and some of the conversations which happen in the video, the audience knows that she is with her family so it makes it much easier to establish a 'home' environment. Then, if there is no family members around, how do YouTubers create the connection between food, family and Chinese culture? In the video 'What I eat in a day | Grandma's Cantonese Comfort Cantonese food', Weylie uses different elements to create a sense of comfort and present a relaxing home feeling. At the beginning of the video, she says 'I wanted to make recipes that I just personally really miss from home'. Then the video started showing her cooking while she narrates the cooking

steps using her grandmother's method. The first dish is a macaroni soup, a Cantonese breakfast. Weylie decided to make a vegetarian version and she mentions that her grandma 'would make this with Chicken broth' and 'my grandma used to put spam in it'. Similarly, the memory of grandmother also appears in the second dish 'zeng soydan (蒸水蛋)' which consists of dried scallops and steamed eggs. In the video she praised her grandmother's cooking technique 'this is something my grandma used to make all the time... she makes it super super smooth'. After Weylie finished cooking, she put the cooked fish on the table and started a video call with her grandmother. Then the camera was put at Weylie's back and included her grandmother in the scene (See Figure 8). Even though her grandmother is not physically in the space, it still delivered an 'at home' feeling when they are using a very casual tone discussing the food just like everyone else talking with their close family members in daily life. Apart from inviting her grandmother to virtually be with her, sound is also another important way to remind us her Chinese background. Just like Shu playing Chinese song in the back ground, Weylie played the Chinese Drama *Yanxi Palace* 延禧攻略 in the background. The audience can hear the Mandarin conversation while she is cooking, like many Chinese people do at home. Similar to Shu again, Weylie switched her language to Cantonese when talking to her grandmother while using English to talk to the viewers. Apart from this, the slowly cut scenes, the gentle background music, the slightly yellow tone of the video, the casual hairstyle and clothes with the pot and cutlery, a warm, comfortable Cantonese styles home is vividly presented in the video. The sense of 'home' is successfully delivered to the viewers since many of the comments are about home and family. One of the top liked comments from the user *babymel* states:

This video made me feel teary eyed since I can't spend CNY with my family this year and seeing the shows you watch that I did too!! It always feels heart-warming to hear Cantonese spoken.

[Picture removed for copyright reason]

Figure 9. Weylie talking to her grandma in 'What I Eat in a Day | Grandma's Cantonese comfort food'

User *babymel* also mentioned how their dad bragged about making a good steamed eggs with instructions. Viewer 'My Vu' also noticed that the gold pot Weylie used to cook soup is widely

used at Hong Kong's street food markets and described it as 'cute'. The relationship between Wylie and her grandmother also reminded other Cantonese to think about their family members and their childhood family. Although Chinese/Cantonese food plays an important part in their 'home making', it takes many details to recreate a sense of 'Cantonese home' on the screen. Claude Fischler (1988, p.276) argues: 'Food not only nourishes but also signifies'. The food-making process is not only about converting raw material into edible dishes, but it is also something that helps to fulfil people's imagination and emotions (Fischler, 1988, p.284).

#### **4.4 Remembering the historical past and presenting spectacle views**

Not only does Chinese food link the participants to their immediate part, it is also links them to the historical past as a Chinese person. Nicole uploaded a video about visiting Hong Kong to attend a local festival '打醮' (da jiao). This is a long-established religious rite where indigenous Hakka (an ethnic minority in China) family's worship 'Tin Hau', the goddess of fisherman in the hope of good weather and a fruitful harvest. It occurs every 10 years. In 2017, people from 26 villages in Hong Kong, including Nicole's father's, gather for it. Many people return from abroad to attend this festival, including Nicole's family. Holding traditional festivals, according to Crossick and Kaszynska (2016), offer an opportunity for people to cherish the bond between group members, reminding and educating about the history of the region, honouring the power of the community and also passing down the cultural traditions through practice. In Nicole's video, she spends quite a long time to introduce the environment. From the moment they step into the entrance, we can hear Nicole saying 'oh my god, this is some serious business' then she uses a few pan scenes to show the crowd of people and the tall and enormous festival decorations. Nicole talks directly to the camera about the festival and the people who go with her --- her parents, grandmother and one of her friends in Hong Kong. After the introduction, there are another series of pan scenes to show the decorations and sites with Nicole's voice over 'It is so overwhelming!', learning how to burn incense sticks and practicing pray. Nicole is not familiar with the process as when she is trying to pray like her mother the caption in the video states 'I'm totally not making sense'. Then the camera cuts to the middle of the festival ground showing that there are thousands of people gathered together to share a special vegetarian food (see Figure 10).

[Picture removed for copyright reason]

*Figure 10. Crowds in Nicole's video. Visiting Hong Kong for local festival '打醮' (da jiao)*

Before sitting down to have food, the camera pans around the environment to indicate how crowded the area is and how different it looks with the festival decorations at the back. Cheng shows a big information board with the information about all of the villages that are involved in this festival. Her mum pointed to one part of the village information. Interestingly, she points to that part of the information board as well and said in the video 'this is my village', which indicates a strong sense of identity towards her ancestors even though she probably didn't live in that village for a single day. Then, the camera shows several short clips of old school calculators, a 'wishing tree', lion dance, and a traditional ritual. Cheng shows her surprise when filming the old school calculator by saying 'Jesus' to the camera. With the camera showing the ritual, Cheng says 'I have no idea what's going on', and also this part highlights her role as an outsider looking at this cultural event with curiosity and surprise. Afterwards, Cheng did a close up shot to people who are with her: her mother, her grandmother and friend. Then, the camera shows the close up of the vegetarian food (see Figure 11). Even though the camera is focusing on the food, it still shows that Cheng is sitting opposite to other people, also, with thousands of people from other villages that is shown in Figure 10. A feeling of communal experience is also conveyed amongst the people of the same origin via the sharing of food.

There are three elements which repeatedly appeared in Nicola's video to construct a 'imagined' hometown which she feels very close to but still views it as an exotic, unfamiliar place. The first one is the food and crowded people around. Compared with the food which they had in the restaurant at the beginning of the video, the food markets in the festival are very unusual. Cheng demonstrates this unusual environment by mixing the food market with the introduction of the environment by putting a series of camera pans together. However, the way she films was not from the one who lives in this culture even though she says 'this is my village', because the sentences like 'Oh my god', 'This is so overwhelming' were repeated many times during the time. Instead of someone who came from inside of the culture group, Nicola is more like a stranger with curiosity of the spectacular views of the local festival as something 'exotic' and expressing her confusion of the cultural elements that involves.

[Picture removed for copyright reason]

*Figure 11. Food in the video 'Once-a-decade Village Festival (打醮)2017 / Hong Kong*

Demonstrate Chinese food with a historical touch has also appeared in Jasmine Lipska's video 'Exploring Beautiful Chengdu & Travelling Home! China Trip 2018'. As a Chinese- Polish-Australian, Jasmine's mother came from Mian Yang, a small city in Sichuan province. Cheng Du, where this video was filmed, is the capital city of Sichuan. Thus, the video was titled 'travelling home' as Jasmine spent two years in Sichuan when she was little and visited there regularly after all of her family moved to Australia. In the video, Jasmine shows herself and her mother walking around one of Cheng Du's most famous places of interests Narrow and Wide Ally Ways (宽窄巷子). The place is famous for its historical architecture from the Qing dynasty. Jasmine expressed her love for the culture and architecture in the video with facial expressions and hand gestures which emphasises her emotion. The style of the video is very simple, but it contains one similar element which also appeared in Nicola's video. Jasmine edited the street views together with different Chinese street foods to highlight the local culture in a special environment. To further put emphasis on the 'culture' aspects, Chinese-style music is played with traditional instruments and was used as background music. There are two different types of music, one was recorded on site and another one was from an online source, they were also mixed and edited by Jasmine. Another interesting finding is that Jasmine filmed the Chinese opera performers, Chinese instrumental performer and people making Chinese food. Cooking here is not only about food preparation but an art form. Jasmine expresses her love of the Narrow and Wide Ally Ways several times in this video and it is not a surprise that she made another video later that year again in the same place with similar style. It is worth noticing in that video when they are in a food shop, her mother talked about how blueberry tea is good for a person's eyes and general health which caught Jasmine's interest. Associating natural food that have certain benefits to the human body came from the idea of Chinese medicine. Jasmine's mother in the video was acting as an introducer for the local Chinese to present Chinese food from the cultural perspective. Jasmine, like Nicola, often said 'wow' to the camera and tried the tea with curiosity.

#### 4.5 Criticism of eating habits and showing 'unusual' food

Because food habits are embedded in everyday life, the frequency of conducting this cultural practice means it is the matter that could cause frustration between insiders and outsiders. Foodways in each culture have traditionally served as symbols of refinement or civilization in comparison to those involved in 'crude and barbaric' eating habits. Humans, as omnivores, constantly fluctuated between 'the two poles of neophobia (prudence, fear of the unknown, resistance to change) and neophilia (the tendency to explore, the desire for change, novelty, variety)' (Fischler, 1988, p.278); the tension between the familiar and the foreign often make one feel anxious about their food, this causes human to tend to not trust new or unknown foods and also this results in 'the tensions between the two contradictory and equally constraining imperatives of the omnivore's double bind' (Fischler, 1988, p.278).

Weylie mentioned the changes of her attitude towards Chinese food before and after she brought her food to the school. Because she does not like the food in the school she decided to bring her favourite Chinese food 'pork belly with pickled mustard green' in her lunch box to the school and felt excited about it,

'While I was in class, I was like looking forward to lunch. I'm like, I cannot wait to eat this. So by the time I get to lunch, I'm like ready, Right! I like blast out my food. I'm like putting my rice down putting my meat down. I got my chopsticks out, I'm ready to eat.'

However, the reaction from the students surprised her,

'And then all of a sudden, all my classmates look at me and then they're like, What is that smell? And at first, I thought they thought it smelled good. Because to me, this was a shit I grew up with. And these smells fuckin amazing. If you ask me, so I'm all like excited. I'm like, Oh, they want to know what I'm eating. Okay, they all come over and all like hovering over right? They're like, 'what is that? Like What is that smell?' So I was like, Oh, it's a pork belly with like pickled veggies. It's a Chinese dish. And then after I said pork belly I don't know if it's because in America you don't call bacon pork belly. You call it bacon,

but it's really pork belly. I don't know. The second I said pork belly. Everyone freaked out. They're like 'eww, what are you eating? Why are you eating that? That's so disgusting! Oh my god, it smells so bad!' literally everyone just started talking about it. And they made it seem like the most disgusting thing ever. They all walked away. And I remember just like my heart sank. I felt so embarrassed, but I didn't even know what I was embarrassed about.'

Weylie goes through three different stages to understand how Chinese food was perceived from people who are not from her culture group. At first she was excited to bring the food to her school and wanted to share this with others. When the children around her questioned the food, she did not understand the undertone behind it but still introduced the dish with a positive mind. The turning point started from the moment she said 'pork belly', a boneless part cut from the pig's belly, which is a normal word to describe food material in a Chinese dish. Weylie's confusion about the unfriendly comments from the kids is obvious as she started to find reasons from what she said and tried to explain it with 'I don't know if its because in America you don't call bacon pork belly'. The other children's reaction indicated that they were not familiar with the smell of Chinese cooking styles and they referred to it as 'disgusting' and 'bad'. Weylie on the other hand referred to the smell as 'so so good' earlier in the video. The direct comments 'that's so disgusting' on the Chinese food highlighted the differences between Weylie and her school mates. Weylie finally realised her food is not welcomed by the outside. Since then she told he mother not to ask her to bring any Chinese to the school in order to fit in with the others.

The willingness to fit in also appeared in Shu' another video, although she is in the United Kingdom, her experience about her lunch box was quite similar to Weylie's in the United States. She also mentioned that the smell of her food also received unpleasant reaction from the other children at her school.

'When you open up and its like 'wooooo' and everyone in assembly hall just turn around being like 'what is that smell?' 'that smells disgusting'.

....And I remembered running home that day and been like 'Please! Never make it for me again. Everyone was laughing at me!' and then

my mum will be like, ok, fine. And then I go to Co-op buy lunch: ham, butter sandwiches, and wagon wheels. It wasn't tasting that good and I didn't enjoyed it but I just feel like —humm yeah everyone is eating the same thing as now I am eating the ham, cheese and sandwich and I hate ham and cheese.'

Shu sensed that the attitude towards the food was not positive and so she decided to force herself to accept the eating habits from the outside world and hoped it could help her integrate into the mainstream society. Although Shu did not directly described her feeling under this situation, we can still sense the trauma in her talk. As a kid, the shock caused by the reaction from her schoolmates can be more radical because children do not fully understand the social norms so that they cannot disguise themselves in the same way as adults. Many content creators share their similar experience. Firstly, people can easily resonate with the experience happening in school because everyone shares this life stage of being a student. Under that video, user Vgudorf commented 'the casual cruelty of children can be breath taking and I remembered it as well as one who was bullied throughout the middle school'. More importantly, the strong emotion when the children encounter racist comments for the first time can be very powerful because of the drama-like conflicts, undisguised reactions and direct conversations.

There are some food materials in certain society that are considered 'normal' to be eaten and some are not. As Valentine (1999) argues that there are numerous manners and habits involved in the food consuming process, and it normally reflects cultural meaning and indicates the relationship between members within a society. How do you present food which is considered 'delicious' in Chinese culture but not in others? A video created by Chem in shows how she introduces 'chicken feet' on YouTube. Three people appears in this video: Chem, her father and her boyfriend. The video creator's father is from Hong Kong and her boyfriend comes from India. Chem put a box of cooked chicken feet in front of camera and started to talk to the camera, her boyfriend does not appears on the screen but his voice shows up sometimes.

Chem (C):We got chicken feet!

Boyfriend (B): Disgusting!

C : So I know a lot of (Chinese) even locals don't really eat chicken feet but I LOVE them. I eat a lot of things I think even a lot of local Chinese people don't even eat. Ah, I don't eat dogs or cat or stuff like

that, ok? But, chicken feet, things like pig blood that I am fine with. And, other than things like dogs and cats and these types of foods...

B: You don't get that...

C: Yeah you don't get things like that in Hong Kong anyway. And also like, in general, there are lots of dog lovers, cats lovers stuff like that in Hong Kong. They treat their dogs like babies so it's, it's not really a thing in Hong Kong. But Chicken feet I freaking LOVE! I think a lot of people get put off by the fact that it's like...it's their feet, right? And I don't like...

B: Ewww!

C: I don't understand why people have feet fetish...I don't know I just feel feet are so smelly and disgusting but I mean... I hope that they clean them (chicken feet), they don't seem dirty and they don't seem smelly. It is more of texture which is more like a muscly types of texture.

At the beginning the voice of Chem was very excited. Clearly, she was able to understand the general public's discomfort with such food because she shows no surprise when her boyfriend commented that the food was 'disgusting'. After her boyfriend interrupted her, she started to explain why she likes to eat chicken feet. Interestingly, the content turns from 'chicken feet' to 'dogs and cats or stuff like that', which means these are 'unusual' foods tagged by the mainstream society she grew up with. Historically, human consumption of dog meat has been recorded in many regions of the world, including Asia, South East Asia, West Africa, Europe and Oceania (Schwabe,1988). There are still many people from different regions who retain this habit. However, eating dog meat as a cultural practice was linked to unmoral and uncivilised behaviour for a long time. It forms part of the stereotype towards Chinese people which indicates a 'cruel and uneducated' ethnicity. Chem tries in an indirect way to break the stereotype by saying that not every Chinese person likes what she likes but she compromises and did not have the attention to defend this eating habits. She admits that eating dogs and cats is not a cultural practice but an unmoral behaviour as people in Hong Kong 'treat their dogs like babies'. She also admits that in her eyes feet are 'dirty and smell' and 'I hope that they clean them', which indicates that the food material she selected is 'unclean and disgusting' from the views of the mainstream society she lives in. Thus, in the end, she emphasises that the reason she likes the food is just because of its 'texture'.

In the interview, Chem talked about why she decided to put this online,

Because I got laughed all the time, you know, when I was a child people would say, ‘Oh! You eat dogs!’ ‘this is so dirty and disgusting’ blah blah... I got really offended, I felt sad and angry, I didn’t understand why, I mean, I did understand why, but when I gets old, I just think it’s a culture thing. No matter what people eat, sometimes I don’t accept it, I respect it. And for me, eating chicken feet is just a fun thing to do now

Chem mentioned the eating habit of Chinese people again in this interview and connected it with the unpleased memory and emotion. She also recalled people use ‘dirty and disgusting’ to describe her Chinese food, which is the similar experiences Weylie and Shu experienced. Dirt, according to Mary Douglas (2003, p.35), does not hold an essential meaning and it is nothing but disorder. ‘Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.’ Because food habits is more of a series of social activities, by creating a sense of difference through our taste buds and metabolism, food habits draws a clear line between us and them, self and others. However, this subjective attribute of this line means there is no such food which can be tagged as good or bad, or even as clean or filthy. The construction of food habits between cultural groups always involves moral judgement. People who eat filthy food are also considered to be filthy. Julia Kristeva (1982) argues that ‘food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection’. Even though Julia’s initial work is to discuss how the child establishes a sense of self from separating with his or her mother, her theory was deeply influential and can be used to explain many social phenomena. Because humans have this primal impulse to distinguish us from other, we tends to assess foodways by simply ascribing to system of purity and pollution. We tend to believe our food is better than others’ because it is cleaner, fresher and healthier. When we encounter the foodways we are not familiar with we tend to consider them as filthy. We purify ourselves by vomiting or by objecting ourselves.

Interestingly, different from the narrative style in her video, Chem demonstrated the understanding of this ‘dog’ eating habits and described it as a ‘cultural thing’. Clearly Chem knows the boundaries how Western people draw the line between ‘our food’ and ‘others’ food’. Thus, although she holds a different opinion behind the camera, she still adopted a careful strategy when talking to the imagined audiences.

Chicken feet also appears in the video '16 Must Try Classic Dim Sum Dishes'. There are also three people in the video, including the two founders and presenters of the channel Mike and Dan, and their common friends Cheryl. The conversation focus on chicken claws right from the beginning of the video:

Mike (M): Something you need to know about Cheryl, she doesn't eat a lot of stuff

Cheryl (C): Yeah, I don't eat a lot of stuff (laugh)

M: So why are you here?

C: Because you were like 'right, we come to have dim sum' so I was like 'ok, I will get some dim sum'

Dan (D): We dragged her here dude

C: (laugh)

D: So you're gonna eat that chicken claw right?

C: Umm, I mean I've liked chicken feet, it's like it is still in my Chinese blood so It's like a delegation. And it's good for your skin!

M: Okay okay

Mike introduced Cheryl to the camera and pointed out 'she does not eat a lot of stuff' so we know that they familiar with each other's eating habits. However, Dan still asks Cheryl if she eats chicken feet indicating that this question was asked for the audience's benefit, which pointed out the unusual part of this habit. Cheryl's answer linked Chicken's feet with 'Chinese blood' and admitted the cultural differences between them and the possible audiences of this video. In the main body of this video, they started to introduce the chicken feet with a very close shot of the dish:

D: mmm I think this is the number one most controversial Dim Sum for the Westerners

M: It's not bad. Yeah, you know. (eat the chicken feet) I just don't sit around thinking about this all day

Dan pointed out that the dish is not widely accepted in the Western society and Mike's answer implies that they understand the cultural idea behind this and he tried to affirm this eating habit

but with an indirect expression, saying it is ‘not too bad’ instead of saying ‘it is good’. Then, he tried to negotiate an appropriate way to solve the cultural gap by telling audiences his way of treating this eating habit, which is not to think too deep culturally.

This way of negotiating between two different cultures also appeared in Mike’s other video ‘16 item Dim Sum Breakfast’ (2017) when he is trying the pickled chicken feet ‘I feel this might be scary to some of you, because it's really pale. I promise you not as bad as you think. Really good actually’. In contrast to his previous video, only Mike appeared ~~in the video~~ so the style also slightly changed. Instead of talking to his friends, Mike directly talks to the camera and he uses ‘you’ to refer to the potential audiences who might watch this video. Mike demonstrates his awareness of the unacceptable reality of this food and then tried to convince the audience that the taste is pretty good ‘if you acquired it’ with demonstrating his joy when trying the dish in front of the camera.

Dan and Mike also did many videos about eating habits, many in a comedic style. They made a series of videos showing the differences between Western and Chinese food culture and eating habit, including washing dishes before eating, ordering ‘strange’ food, picking food for others, etc. Dan acted as a Western person and Mike played the Chinese part, they are having dinner together in a Chinese restaurant. The acting and content are slightly exaggerated with amusing imitations especially the ‘Western’ person’s reaction to the Chinese people’s behaviour. However, in the end Dan discussed his intention of making the video:

Dan: Every time I go out with my Western friends, sure enough there is something we do or I do or you do, that, they’re like...oh.. yeah that’s kinda awkward..like spitting the fish bones out... what about you Sunny? Have you had that experience before?

Sunny: Ah yeah, I’ve seen tons of things like that

Mike: Yeah, so he gets it. Hopefully anyway, just done for fun, but we feel like these pretty much represent crazy eating habits we have

Dan showed his intention to challenge the manner which has been established by the Western society. From his description, ‘spiting the fish bone out’ is treated as an unpolite or ‘awkward’ behaviour by his Western friends. However, in Chinese food preparation it is the common method of cooking whereby normally the chef will keep the fish as a whole leading to people

tending to pick the bones out while eating. Thus, he started to question the way Western people perceive Chinese eating behaviour. Dan did not further discuss this topic but turned to ask for Sunny's affirmation. Mike also showed his agreement with Dan but then put emphasis on the content being 'just for fun' to keep the conversation in a relaxed and funny style.

#### **4.6 Negotiating Authenticity: 'This is Real Chinese food'**

In today's society, ethnicity is often represented as using cultural symbols through public displays. As Shun Lu and Gary Alan Fine Said in 1995, 'While the display of ethnicity does not eliminate its psychological power to affect self-image, much ethnicity is made real through cultural transactions'. a feasible ethnic identity relies on interaction with other groups through a series of symbols and signs. Through this interaction, an individual will be placed into certain categories by the public. Even though identity is continually shaped through complex lived experienced and social changes, cultural expectations from the outside world will influence the individual's identity construction and also how he/she understand themselves. (Chow 1993,p.6; Weiming, 2005,p.145-167). The presentation of ethnic identity is often related to economic activities: festivals, restaurants, clothing and so on. It has a close relationship with marketing and has become a promotion tool.

As discussed in Chapter 2, YouTube built up a commercial system which encourage creators to be the entrepreneurs of themselves. getting more attention by increasing the click rate will lead to a better advertising share. In order to achieve this goal, marketing strategies will be conducted into the process during video production. One of the most important marketing strategies for YouTube content creators is to be 'authentic'--- for many consumers, a socially desirable image in a competitive and differentiated market (Lu, Fine, 1995).

Authenticity has received increased criticism from cultural analysts (e.g. Intason, Coetzee & Lee, 2019) because they think that authenticity is just a discursive tactic that individuals or organisations use to achieve their socio-political goals (Berman 1972; Bendix, 1998; Charles, Larmore & Bowman, 2010). Authenticity is a folk concept that is created locally, and those things which claimed to represent authentic experiences may turn into a source of disputes. Authenticity, like tradition, has undergone constant change throughout time (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012; Hueber, 2016). Ethnic food is usually associated with families and ethnic groups

in the literature. However, According to Lu and Fine (1995), when Chinese food becomes a performance and is presented in front of the outsiders in American Chinatown, certain identities will remain recognizable, even though the cuisines themselves have experienced constant innovation and reinvigorating due to the local influence.

When it comes to presenting Chinese food on YouTube, showing ‘real’ Chinese cuisine is still an important sales point. Videos produced by the channel ‘Ziangs Oriental Food Workshop’, many of them were named ‘REAL Chinese Takeaway Curry Sauce and Chips’, ‘How to cook REAL Chinese Roast Pork and Chinese Takeaway BBQ Sauce’, ‘REAL Chinese Takeaway Curry Sauce and Chips’ and so on. The similarities of those titles all include ‘real’ written with capital letter to add emphasis. Also, sometimes this channel produces videos to compare the same dish in a so called ‘overseas style’ and ‘original style’. In the video ‘Ziangs: Traditional Hakka Chinese Foo Young’, video creator Chin explained in the beginning of their video

‘OK, today’s video is basically a traditional egg foo young *should* be. Even though egg foo young was invented by Americans, granted you get in Chinese takeaways or Chinese places anywhere in the world: Hong Kong, China itself, Singapore... You gonna find egg foo young. But, it was invented by Americans as a result of people wanting a Chinese style omelet in... I think it was in the late 60s early 70s (subtitle on the screen: ‘FAIL: MEANT MID 1800’s!’) So today, we gonna do the closets variations of that... just to show you what **the traditional Chinese food is** compared to American style food.’

In ‘Staged Authenticity’ MacCannell (1976) contends that many visitors are driven by a desire to observe indigenous’ live as they really are, a yearning for truth, closeness, and the opportunity to share the genuine experiences behind the staged settings. Highlighting what is ‘real’ and what is ‘fake’ is a way for video creators to demonstrate their authority on ethnic culture and satisfy the touristic gaze for most of the viewers. However, unlike serving food in a Chinese restaurants outside China where providing identifiable dishes and environments is essential (Snow and Anderson,1987), presenting ethnic food on YouTube requires that not only the food itself has ‘authentic’ traits but also about the person who creates the videos. In ‘Ziang’s Oriental Workshop’, there are a few words which are always repeated in the description part under each video.

‘We have 3 generations of Chinese/Malaysian chefs in our family and all love cooking, as a family have owned takeaways and restaurants in the UK, Brunei, Malaysia and Hong Kong. We are not just 2 people who think we know how takeaways do things because we are Chinese, we know how they do things because we'd done it for generations, we're here to teach you the secrets that they don't want you to know, we love cooking and can't wait to share what we know with all of you :)’

Even though the video creator Chin was born in United Kingdom and his mother was born in Brunei, he still emphasises in every video about why they are professional and knows how to cook ‘real’ and ‘traditional’ Chinese food. According to Riefler (2020), consumers are more willing to pay for the local and global food brands which claim themselves ‘authentic’ because it allows them to experience and perhaps identify with the ‘true foreignness’ of the ethnic group. In Ziangs’ videos, establishing a proper image of being an ‘authentic Chinese’ could help viewers, mostly non-Chinese, producing the feeling of ‘true foreignness’.

Malaysian Chinese content creator mnrnigelng (Nigel Ng, also known as Uncle Roger) made a series of videos reviewing famous Western Chefs’ methods of cooking Chinese food. His experience as a stand-up comedian helps Ng maintain a funny style consistently in all of his videos and he has established an Asian funny man Uncle Roger who has a strong accent and defends the traditional Asian way of cooking. In one of the videos Uncle Roger criticised the way Chef Patel cooked rice, commenting:

‘...you are killing me! How can you drain rice with colander, this is not pasta! I never seen any one drain rice like this, if your rice is wet, you fucked up, don’t bring colander into your rice cooking’

Even though Uncle Roger is trying to criticise Chef Patel’s cooking technique but there are still various ways to cook rice and the food cooking methods in China are also experiencing changes over time (2006, Wang). In comparison with the attitude towards Chef Patel, Uncle Roger made another video praising Chinese Chef Wang Gang’s cooking, not only because of his cooking technique but also the cooking environment. ‘In Asia, we have two kitchen, indoor kitchen and outdoor kitchen’. Even though Wang Gang is cooking the egg fried rice outside,

this is still a staged video to show the ‘authentic Chinese villagers’ life’ and not a golden rule in every part of Asia. Also, Uncle Roger compared the elder man appearing in Chef Wang Gang’s video to a kung fu player which caters for the stereotyped image of Chinese people but again, makes the video more ‘authentic’. Last but not least, as user Quill pointed out in the comments, Uncle Roger ‘said at 12:03 ‘Just kidding. Don't demonetize me’ in absolutely perfect accent-free English’, in most of the videos he uses a very strong Asian accent to build a funny and ‘real’ Chinese man. Even though Uncle Roger criticised the cultural appropriation behaviours from some Western chefs in reality, his video still inevitably falls into the Western stereotype during the practice.

Performing authenticity also appears in Shu’s videos. In her video ‘Chinese Girl Shows how to Correctly Eat Soup Dumplings’ Shu shows the technique of eating soup dumplings (also called Xiao Long Bao 小笼包 in Mandarin) in a restaurant located in London’s Chinatown. However, Shu is British Chinese and the way she demonstrates in the video of how to eat soup dumplings is something she researched online. She also shows how she normally eats those soup dumplings and called it the ‘incorrect way’. Culinary activities are socially constructed. Many viewers desire the ‘illusion of authenticity’, which motivates British Chinese video creators to perform exotic and bows to the viewers preference.

However, this kind of performance also received criticisms from some viewers, one of the comments from Jesper says

‘Firstly, xiao long bao isn't a dim sum dish, so doesn't matter if you're a dim sum queen. Besides the fact that it's obviously the wrong type of vinegar for xiao long bao, this is the incorrect way to eat them. Ask people from Wuxi how to properly eat it, since that is where they invented it. ‘

Clearly this is a challenge to Shu’s authenticity. However, food as a way to deliver culture is in continual flux. Although soup dumplings weren’t first introduced as dim sum, it evolved across cultures and has become an important element to dim sum today. Cultures are never completely closed systems: external influences have an impact on cultural logics. And this can be directly reflected in cooking styles and eating habits. The implication of this argument about

cultural knowledge results in a denial of alternative definitions of being Chinese by essentialising a ‘true’ way of eating. Thus, we can see that on one side, performing authenticity becomes a strategy for Western Chinese video creators to satisfy the viewers tourist gaze; on the other side, this kind of performance also receives essentialised criticism from viewers about what it means to be a ‘real’ Chinese.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the ways in which Western Chinese portray ethnic food on YouTube, in order to learn about how it contributes to their identity work. It started from the discussion of how cooking and eating the food could help Chinese immigrants form collective identity and how Western Chinese present these cultural elements which always appear at home and within their cultural group on YouTube to wider audiences.

Chinese food appears in the videos and is often associated with a sense of ‘home’. In their videos, ethnic food serves as a metaphor for the idea of ‘togetherness’. Leisured eating, relaxed environments and tight families are valued in their videos. Memories around Chinese food are naturally narrated during cooking by creators. Also, in order to emphasise the ‘home’ feeling, many details including language use, background noises, the style of the settings and interaction with families even from a distance are all carefully arranged to build up the ‘home’.

Not only does ethnic food connect people to their immediate part, it is also connects them to the historical past. A feeling of communal experience is also conveyed amongst people from the same ethnic background via the sharing of food. The life experiences indicates these Youtubers cannot position themselves totally within Chinese culture. Thus, their way of presenting the historical past and food culture from their origin often switches between views from the inside and outside of the cultural group. Just like Jasmine saying ‘wow’ when hearing that blueberry tea is good for a person’s eyes, Nicola told the camera ‘this is my village’ but still constantly expressed confusion and surprise to the cultural elements and food habits which she observed at the festival. The hometown of their parents, together with local food was presented with a spectacular view and sometimes exotic which keep them in distance with.

Because the habits of consumption vary between cultures, when food is brought from the domestic space to the public area, people's attitude toward the food changes dramatically. According to the videos created by Chinese diasporas, part of their memory was about how they encountered racism from outside world because of their different eating habits. These differences serve as a force to help them identify 'them' and 'us', 'usual' and 'unusual'. When presenting the 'unusual' food online, Western Chinese often indirectly defend the stereotype of Chinese culture but they show no intention of robustly challenging the system of purity and pollution in evaluating foodways which have been formulated in the domestic society.

Apart from making compromises with the visceral and moral sense of difference via food practices, creating a sense of 'real' and 'authentic' feelings is another feature when presenting ethnic food on social media. Because of YouTube's commercial nature, many viewers believe that the culinary authenticity of ethnic cuisine enables them to experience and perhaps connect with the ethnic group as a 'real foreignness' (Lu, Fine, 1995). Some content creators successfully attract the attention from viewers through highlighting differences and performing 'exotic' cultural activities.

## **Chapter 5 Chinese Parents**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter investigates how user-generated content on YouTube negotiates the diasporic cultural identity through the presentation of Chinese parents online. According to Silverstone

(1999), family is the initial group that shapes the cultural identity of individuals. Based on the core research questions, this chapter sets out to answer the following questions specifically:

1. How do Chinese diaspora present their parents through their content creation?
2. What roles do Chinese Parents play in Chinese diaspora's video when they negotiate their position within the Chinese family culture and in Western social culture?
3. What kind of strategies do these creators adapt to improve their visibility and seek attention from the dominant society

To answer these questions, this chapter identifies the process of Western Chinese content creators marking the differences between themselves and their parents through various video formats. No matter if it is just setting up a chat with peers or creating a short play to generalise the features of their elder generation, the creators showed their desire to portray Chinese parents as a cultural 'other'. Although during the vernacular practice, those creators may unconsciously reinforce the stereotype which the dominant society may place on their parents, they still actively reject the social discrimination by contributing to challenge the current existing prejudices and actively take control of the diaspora cultural discourse. To the end, the author also discussed how YouTube empowered but also shaped the Western Chinese content creator's identity construction practices. By generalising their personal experiences with different groups, creators build connections with potential audiences; and at the same, this action also subscribes to the logic of YouTube's attention economy because the wider audiences to which they connect, the more visible they will be.

## **5.2 Family, parents and identity construction**

The primary space where children start to develop their identity is with their family (Phinney, 1996). Parents, as the core family members, can be viewed as the significant cultural agents that can influence the formation of their children's cultural identity. Previous studies have shown that parent's values could strongly influence their children's cultural values (Rohan & Zanna, 1996). However, this situation can change in the globalized era. Parents and families

have to face various challenges from local and global sources, which results in the constant negotiation between the cultural from their home countries with their receiving countries (Robertson, 1995). For those parents who are from non-Western origins who later moved to a Western nation, it is a necessary for them to negotiate their cultural practices in order to fit into the dominant society. Additionally, they must also deal with a variety of possible stressful situations, such as racial prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping (Li, 2001). Their children, although having to face similar challenges to them, have generally proved to be better integrated into the host countries (Lieber, Nihita & Mink, 2001). Apart from that, the transnational background and the asynchronous cultural assimilation may result in family communication conflicts between the children and their immigration family (Costigan, 2006).

According to Baca and Eitzen (2005), families of colour were viewed as homogenous when they appeared in literature. Their complex and diverse history behind those families were largely ignored with a series stereotypes. For example, Chinese parents, together with other Asian parents are tagged as ‘tiger parents’ stressing high levels of educational attainment and strict management to ensure their children’s success (Zhang,2015). The emergence of digital media has given children from ethnic minorities an opportunity to build their own discourse, however, there have been few studies focusing on how ethnic minority/second generation immigrants portray their parents from the cultural perspective, especially about Chinese in Western countries.

The existing studies have mostly focused solely on the Asian community in the United States. For example, Guo and Lee (2013) emphasised the significant influence of Asian American YouTubers Kevin Wu and Ryan Higa. Their videos brought them a large scale following thus making them online celebrities, which built an online forum for the Asian community through their own ‘vernacular discourse’ and, at the same time questioned the dominant perception of Asian Americans. Kevin Wu made a video ‘My dad is Asian’ with his father which achieved five million views on YouTube. This practice, argued by Lee, deconstructed the essential differences between Asian immigrants with American-born Asians to extend the definition of ‘Asianness’ while still reinforcing the racist stereotypes to seek attention. When assessing the comments posted under the video ‘Shit Asian Dad says’, Ho (2016) pointed out the users identify with the video through setting various boundaries. This chapter is developed from these articles to explore the diaspora Chinese video creators and their practices in portraying their parents from the cultural perspectives.

### 5.3 Marking the boundaries through differences

#### 5.3.1 Different lifestyle: from financial distress to ‘awkward’ social manners

In the video ‘Most embarrassing things about being raised by immigrant parents’, Chinese-Americans David and Andrew shared their stories with Vietnamese-American Richie Le and Vietnamese-Canadian Leenda Dong who also were raised by immigrant parents. At the beginning of the video, Andrew Fung opens the conversation and introduces the topic and the style of the video, which is ‘the most embarrassing but funny stories we have been raised by immigrant parents.’ From what they discuss, the ‘embarrassing stories’ mostly focus on the financial hardships their family endured when they were young. Richie Le recalled how his mother usually did not order meals which included toys in the fastfood shop, instead, she ordered the ‘one dollar meal’ and asked for the toy from the staff. This story was responded to by Chinese American Andrew Fung,

Andrew: to be honest I didn't even know there was any other items on the menu other than the dollar menu.

Richie: Ahh, no!

Andrew: Until I got my own money, I couldn't order ... It still carries with me until today, because even today I'm still ordering from the dollar menu a lot.

Andrew's description indicated that his parents probably did not order anything more than one dollar when he was young. Richie's reaction indicates the unusual condition of Andrew's story. Andrew then explained how these experiences influenced him in the long term. He used ‘until I got my own money, I couldn't order’ to express that his will were suppressed by his financial condition and unconsciously marked the difference between his parents' consumer behaviour and his behaviour. Also, he mentioned his mother constantly returning things ‘even grapes’ to the shop because ‘it saved us a lot of money’. Apart from saving money on food, they also recalled a memory about ‘eggplant cars’,

David: So a lot of people always be like, ‘Yo, David I noticed your family's always buying cars in like, weird colours.’ No, that's just cuz that's just the cheapest one available is the purple or the..

Andrew: (laugh)No, no, no, it wasn’t purple, it was eggplant

Leenda : Oh my goodness (hands cover face) (laugh)

Andrew: (stand up and talk to the camera) Eggplant!

(Text on screen: EGGPLANT!)

David laid stress on the word ‘cheapest’ to emphase the reason for buying the purple car. When David mentioned the colour, Andrew interrupted and used ‘eggplant’ to describe the car which made the ‘weird colour’ more specific. Then Andrew exaggerated his body language and spoke to the camera while in a bold font text ‘EGGPLANT!’ appeared. All of these editing techniques serves two functions, one is to emphasise the unusual experience that they went through because of the poor financial condition of their immigrant family. The other one is to highlight the Chinese parents as hilarious characters.

Apart from building up the character by talking, performing is one of the most popular ways to represent their parents. Andrew and David made a series of videos titled ‘Things Asian Parents Do’. This series contained 13 episodes and each episode include eight to ten features about their parents followed with a short performance. Andrew and David acted as sons and their friend CiCi Lau act as their mother. In the first episode, the first story is about ‘stocking the shampoo from hotel’

David: Here are the (finger quotes) weird things our parents did

Andrew: Every time they go on the vacation, they will always come back with a full bag of shampoo bottle

(cut to the performing scene)

Son David :(stand in the bathroom and closing the door)Taking the shower!

Mother Cici :(push the the door, carry many small shampoo bottle)

Wait! I have new shapoo! (pick a few bottles by hand and show them to the camera) Caesar palace! Take one!

Similar to this one, many of the short performance in this series are about CiCi Lau acting as the mother collecting tomato sauce from fast-food shops, taking free bags and eating free food in the supermarket, putting water in the soap and not using kitchen papers. All of these life habits focus on saving moneys. David described these habits as ‘weird’ and again, drew a line between them and their parents.

As discussed in Chapter 2, identity is constructed through differences. In many videos this line does not only draw on the financial conditions but also the social class differences between the two groups. As Bourdieu (1987) argued, cultural capital and social capital played significant part to determine ones’ social class. Compared with their immigrant parents, Chinese who grow up in Western countries are generally more educated and well adapted to the dominant society (Portes & Macleod, 1999; Picot, 2011). Thus, they can better understand the social manners and practice them as a local person. Yi played a Chinese American who felt constantly embarrassed by her parents because of their social behaviour. When her parents told her not to find a boyfriend loudly in the restaurant, she bowed her head and glanced the waitress who passed from her. There is no direct expression in words but through her physical performance, audiences are able to understand that she was not comfortable when her parents discussed her private issues loudly in the public area.

Acting the part of parents also involved the comparison of cultural differences between the Chinese parents and Western parents. Normally Western parents appeared with kind and supportive personalities while Chinese parents are portrayed as strict and constantly worrying about money. In the end of the video ‘Off the Great Wall’ (2014), the creators addressed their intention, ‘we are not trying to say Asian parents are not as good, they are just a lot more strict! And they have their reasons to be a lot more strict’. They expressed their understanding of their parents behaviour and referenced the reason of their cultural and economic background ‘we all know how hard our parents work to provide anything we wanted and really take care of us’. No matter whether they admit it or not, Chinese creators are unintentionally standing on the opposite side of their parents. Using words like ‘weird’ or ‘embarrass’ to emphasise the ‘foreignness’ of their parents allow Chinese who growing up in the west create a sense of shared experiences and serves to maintain existing hierarchies of assimilated minorities. The success about topics related to Chinese parents created a valuable space for the self-representation and rearticulation of the Chinese identity online. Performing ‘Chineseness’ and generalising the concept to ‘Asianness’ through the characters of their parents allow a younger generation to

articulate racial, ethnic, generational and cultural assimilative anxieties, especially the unfair feeling of been treated as culturally ‘foreign’ in the dominant society. (Tuan, 1998).

However, sometimes the performances are much more than a demonstration of the differences. When rejecting the identity of first-generation immigration, Western Chinese content creators are unconsciously reinforcing the stereotype that the dominant society has of Chinese people. Bart Kwan played the role of an elderly Chinese man by himself in ‘Shit Asian Dads Say’ with a wig full of messy hair and a red jacket, Bart Kwan as ‘Asian dad’ appeared in a different setting with very quick cuts, including picking up different vegetables and shouting ‘so cheap’ or ‘so expensive’, having difficulty parking the car, shouting at his children, blowing his nose in public, coughing over food and snoring heavily on the couch. All these ‘rude’ or ‘uneducated’ characters are reflecting the stereotypical impressions of Chinese immigrants which widely appeared in Western literature and media from the early 19 century. Chinese, together with other immigrants are portrayed as poor, dirty and cannot act with an appropriate manner to fit into the host countries. Thus, they were considered as ‘uncivilised’ for quite a long time. Since the video achieved a huge success on YouTube, with 9.3 million views as of September 2021 when this work was written, similar videos such as ‘Shit Asian Mom Say’ or ‘Shit Asian Girl Say’ were also created. Just as Jonathan’s response in the reaction video, ‘My mum says a lot of these things, but she doesn’t say in, such like, over-the-top manner, you know what I am saying’. Obviously, the Chinese creators who grow up in the West draw a line between being ‘native’ and being an ‘immigrant’ by mocking their parent’s limited understanding of Western culture and their decent Western lifestyle. Their exaggerated performance of Chinese parents reinforces the pre-existing stereotypes of mainstream discourse.

Apart from showing the uncivilised social behaviours, the ways that content creators adopted to reinforce the stereotype of their elder generation also including create a masked character who have certain types of appearance which fit into the mainstream society’s imagination. In the video ‘Things Asian Parents Do At The Supermarket’, Andrew went to the Asian supermarket with his mother. However, after turning around he could not find his mother because every elderly Asian women in the supermarket looked exactly the same – short hair and small in height. From the interview with another video creator Song, he mentioned that this clip is responding to a joke which was very widespread in the Western social media, which is the comic stated that all Asian women’s hair style will change to the same short hair style after they turned to 50 years old.

Use of language plays another big part when it comes to playing the role of Chinese parents. YouTubers tends to switch their accent and change to a typical Chinese or East-Asian accent. Chinese-Irish creator Steven Wu played both the father and son in his videos. While he can fluently speak English with an American accent, every time he switched to portray his parents, he will change to a strong Chinese accent. He explained that ‘the accent that I do is my first accent. I learned to speak English in China cuz I was born and raised in China’ He then practiced changing his accent after he moved to America and became a comedian. It is interesting to note that even though Steven He originally spoke with a Chinese accent but in the video he intentionally uses a Chinese accent to represent his dad while using a fluent American accent to represent himself. Apart from this, language is also associated with cultural understandings, Andrew and David mentioned that their parents have issues recognising slang terms because they still remain distant from the mainstream society even though they moved to the host countries decades ago. In these performances, the video creators emphasised the reality of the acculturation difficulties for their parents, the first-generation Chinese immigrants. The difficulties reflect not only on the appearance differences but also the strong accent and their limited vocabulary, which indicates the limited understanding of Western culture and a lack of control when speaking English. As Lam explained this phenomenon in his interview,

I would say as creators we like to exaggerate things sometimes, but I don’t think it is something inappropriate, you know, we are all Chinese and we are their children, so we understand the pain. Putting these on the screen is to tell people that ( growing up in immigrant family ) we also have to overcome a lot of things. And it is another way to connect to people who have similar backgrounds, they will resonate with us, just like I feel resonate with them (other creators)

Creator Song also expressed similar idea

I think they (Andrew and David) have a good intention; they don’t mean to say something bad about their parents. It’s just, it’s just to show how different we are. I personally don’t feel offended at all and I think my parents won’t as well, we do so because we know them so well. If other people act like that, I will feel uncomfortable, but when they

(Andrew and David) did it, it feels like they are telling my story, just in a funning way.

The ‘embarrassing’ performance of Chinese parents is to put emphasis on the uncomfortable feelings of a foreigner stepping into the new world. The comedy and humour was created through the contrast between the behaviour of Chinese parents and Western social norms. The video creators share the same cultural and ethnic background with their parents also make their acting more acceptable: firstly they stand on the same ‘ethnic minority’ ground instead of someone who comes from the privileged background; secondly, as someone who still is different to their elder generation, these creators have the advantage of ‘being on the outside looking in’.

Despite the above stated issues, there is another point that is worth noting, which is the role of minorities in the ethnic/racial related comedy. According to Juni and Katz(2001), for the minority performers, it is a strategy of defence when putting ethnic/racial related jokes into their comedy because for them, it is a time to reexperience the sense of victimisation and pain but at the same time also an opportunity to conquer failure and erase previous negative effects. Some comedians treat performing stereotypes in the play as a way to help them enjoy the activity which appears to be painful and tedious and also a therapeutic performance to cure self-hate (Juni &Kartz, 2001)

Although YouTube was treated as a space for fun and playful videos, this amateur practice and participation could enrich the online discourse and create a space for identity negotiation and representation. Western Chinese are taking control of expressing their cultural identity or representing the Chinese community based on their understanding within the dominant social hierarchy. After the initial success of some videos, creators are encouraged to present ethnic and racial related content through their performances.

#### **5.4 Different family styles: emotional suppression, rejection and resistance to stereotypes**

Chinese Parents are portrayed as the ‘other’, and the image of ‘otherness’ also reflects on the relationship between parents and children in a Chinese family. It normally related to the ways

of communication between generation. The differences between Chinese culture and Western culture are also reflected on the emotional expression between two generation. Dan Chen and his friends acted as their parents and they also acted as Western parents in comparison to illustrate the differences. In the video, Western parents are portrayed to be more straight forward and to express their care and love to their children but Chinese parents are more reserved in many situations. One of scenes is when the child returns from college,

#### Western version

Daughter (D): (push the door) Hey mum! I'm Home!

Mother (M): (open arms) Oh my god sweetie! (hug daughter) Oh my gosh! I missed you so much! How many days has it been?

D: (hold mother's hand) Three days !

M: Oh my gosh! Don't go away for that long ever! I love you!

#### Chinese/Asian Version

Son : (open the door quietly) Hi, dad, umm, I'm home from collage

Father : (sigh) (move glasses) Ahh, it's been many years son (tap son's shoulder) many years. Your mother missis you a lot. You should go say hi to her (tap son's shoulder)

(son walk away)

(father take off glasses and snob quietly)

In this short performance, creators processed the emotion in two opposite ways. The volume of actor's speech was much louder in the Western version while in the second version actors tended to speak more quietly and in a softer tone. The body language was also more exaggerated in the first version compared with the second one, the only body language on display when he saw his son was a tap the shoulder. Differences also reflected in the dialogue. In the first version, the western mother told the daughter 'I love you' and used interjections such as 'oh my gosh' to put emphasis on the emotion even though they were only separated from each other for three days. However, in the second version, the Chinese father did not say anything to express his love for his son when they first met after several years of separation but instead asked his son to see the mother instead. After his son walked away, the father expressed his emotion finally, but still with control. At the end of the video, the creators addressed that their video content was based on their personal experience and the experiences of their friends.

‘It is a little bit quiet’ Yi Yang stated, but through their performance, a forbearance, reserved and quiet image of Chinese parents was established from the perspective of the Chinese who grow up in the western countries.

It is often claimed that Chinese parents are more reserved to communication, and they appeared in YouTubers’ story as an obstacle for their children’s cultural integration. In Weylie’s video, she talked about she did not have any idea about the race and ethnicity differences before went to school. She thought everyone was the same because her parents never introduced her to this concept which resulted in the culture shock in the school. When she encountered difficulties when learning language, they offered little help in Weylie’s memory.

‘After my parents knowing that I was testing so low in my reading or my English tests and stuff trying to understand why I was testing that way. My mom immediately just got mad at me and was like, You watch too much TV. Why don't you study more? You're born and raised in America. How do you not know English?’

The pressure that Weylie received from her parents does not only indicate a gap between the two generations but also shows the differences between individualist culture and Confucianist culture. According to Sung (2011), respect for one’s elders is an important part of Confucianism, which directs offsprings to recognise the care and aid received from their parents and, in return, to pay respect to their parents (Kong,1995; Lew, 1995; Takahashi, 1995). The Confucius tradition gives parents absolute authority to criticise the younger generation. However, research shows that the first generation of immigrants cannot adopt the receiving countries’ culture as quickly as the second generation (Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Bai, 2015; Algan et al, 2010). As the authority of the family, when they are not able to recognise the environment changes happening out of their home, the ruthless criticism will make the younger generation receive additional cultural pressure.

Weylie is not the only one that has received pressure from family members. Shu described the difficulties that her appearance brought her, which was partly caused by her parents. As a Chinese girl growing up in a small village in Britain, Shu could not find any other people which looked like her. And as she does not have a ‘typical Chinese look’ like her sisters, she felt depressed.

‘..my parents and their friends constantly being like ‘you're too dark, you're too fat, your lips are too big your eyes are so small ,why can't you be more like your sister ’ So I grow up just constantly thinking ‘ woo, what am I?’

From Shu’s expression, it is difficult to identify herself as a member of her family because of constantly denying her appearance based on the cultural aesthetic. Shu described her trauma feeling that she used to wash herself in the bath and wanted to make herself pale to integrate into the culture group. The negative self-consciousness which is shaped by family members will lead to a sense of alienation from their parental culture especially when young immigrants could not find any people with similar experiences in their local area.

Generational differences related to family education can be more interesting. CantoMando, a YouTube channel founded by three Canadian Chinese, made a reaction video watching Asian parents answer questions. The original video was done by an American YouTube channel ‘Jubilee’ where they invited a group of parents who all share an Asian background to stand in an empty ground marked with seven lines from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. After hearing statements spoken by the host, parents were asked to choose an attitude by standing on one of the lines. One of the questions is ‘I am happy with whatever career my child choses’. One parent chose ‘strongly agree’, one choses ‘agree’, one chose ‘somewhat disagree’ and the rest of the parents chose ‘somewhat agree’. The creators Sheldon Ho, Mike Wu and Edward Leung reacted to their choices,

(Edward pause the original video)

Mike (M): Wait wait wait wait wait!

Sheldon (S): Are you serious.

Edward (E) (point to the original video): That’s a fucking lie!

M: No no no no no, what they, what they mean is this: I am happy with whatever my child choice is, as long as they’re within the realm of doctor, engineer and scientist! Especially the person that went off the screen (point to the women who walk to stand on the ‘strongly agree’ line in the original video)!

S: This is for the camera

(Text: this is for the camera!)

M: Jubilee puts out and ad to cast people right?

(Text: Jubilee puts out and ad to cat people right?)

M: You think the real tiger moms' are reading the ad?

(Text: You think the real tiger mom's are reading the ad?!)

M: Off course they can't bro!

(Sheldon and Edward laugh loudly. Sheldon fall back to the sofa)

From the beginning of the video, the three boys showed a strong opinion about this statement/question. When they saw all of the parents choose 'somewhat agree' and one choose 'strongly agree', they use the word 'lie' to describe the situation. Mike's interpretation reflected his impression of Asian parents. Sheldon expressed the distrustful attitude of these boys towards the people in the original video by saying these are just the performances 'for the camera', by which he meant this is not the true thoughts of these parents. Mike then used two rhetorical questions to further confirm the suspicion. By saying 'real tiger mums' will not have the time to go on the camera, Mike indirectly indicated that the Asian parents in the original video were not 'real' and could not represent the Asian parents opinion towards their children. The body language of Mike, the big text on the screen and the dramatic reaction from Sheldon and Edward all amplifications of their emotion, which is strongly rejecting the choices made by people in the original video. Then the video cut back to the parents:

The women who choose 'strongly agree' speaks: And obviously Asian parents they don't think 'oh my kids will be a bar tender one day' That's why I will be happy with whatever she chooses

The man who choose 'somewhat disagree': Even if he is happy. I believe he has to pursue something that's right

(Cut to face Edward, Sheldon and Mike)

M: which means doctor, lawyer, engineers bro. It's the holy trinity!

(Edward and Sheldon laugh)

E: So far it seems like American parents are more like, lenient?

(Text: So far it seems like American parents are more like, lenient?)

M: No.... (Camera close up to Mike's face)

American parents know how to lie in front of the camera

(Text: American parents know how to lie in front of the camera)

(Edward Laugh )

In CantoMando's video, they cut the full speech from the women who selected 'strongly agree' and only left the later part. This woman worked as bartender herself and that is why she can accept her children to do the same job as her. The statement of this woman showed not every Asian parents fits into the mould of a 'tiger mum'. However, Mike, Sheldon and Edward did not respond to what this woman had to say. Instead, after the man in the original video spoke, Mike continues to express his opinion about Asian parents. Then Edward tried to make sense of the results by finding the differences between two of the countries. However, this intention was denied by Mike. Mike's response emphasised the 'tiger parent' character of Asian parents across Western countries. Even though the parents' attitudes towards their children's career choice may reflect Mike or other the two boys' living experiences to some extent. However, categorising this experience to the border Asian community is still problematic, especially when Asian parents are widely represented by the mainstream society as inhumane and strict. Interestingly, the next statement/question to the Asian parents is 'I consider myself as a tiger parent'. Mike pointed one of the women in the video said, 'she looks like a tiger mom' but when Edward asked them if they (Sheldon and Mike) consider their parents as tiger parents, Mike immediately disagreed and said 'I don't think my mom is a tiger mom'. Sheldon then continued the conversation, 'honestly, I met a lot of Asian parents, to be honest, you're (Edward) the only guy who has tiger mom'. This conversation proves that Mike and Sheldon have not meet many strict parents in the real life, they still portrayed Asian parents as 'tiger parents', though unintentionally.

However, when the stereotypes across the generation and pointed to the whole ethnic group, the three boys showed the clear awareness to defend their racial/ethnic group. After watching the statement question 'I believe Asian American are ethnic minority', most of Asian parents in the original video chose 'somewhat agree', two of them choose 'agree'.

E: Honestly, there is a lot of dislike for that term, but what it is, is that there shouldn't be the comparison factor (between minority groups). I think like, taking the culture and their values of education and family and stability and then shaming that itself is not the right thing to do.

M: It's not, it's not. I also don't think that it is something that has to be exclusively Asian. You could be a model minority as well, why it has to limit to like Asian people. The problem I have is model minority be tied to a race. Like been generalised to a race, that's the problem.

Edward made it clear that their awareness of the racial politics of this term. Also, Edward and Mike pointed out racialise the “model minority” is the part that make this term problematic. Based on this understanding, Mike highlighted the word ‘race’ twice in the last two sentences to show their resistance about the stereotype.

Similar conversations also appeared on another channel ‘The Chen Dynasty’. Dan Chen and Mike Xing Cheng hosted a quiz about ‘How Asian are you’, it is a list of assumption about Asians. One of the statements is ‘academic study and grades’

Dan (D): (Roll eye ball)... No.(laugh) Yes for you (pointed to Mike) yes for you, yes for you.

Mike (M): Alright (read the quiz) ‘Stuff that Asian people like’ I don't LIKE it, so I'm gonna say no

D: Woo..no. no. Let's rephrase this, how important is.. yes, it was important for you. I would say (wave hand) important for you. (face the camera) Cause NO Asians love study. But for me it wasn't

M: Okay so it's for me not for you. Okay next one, ‘bowl haircuts’

D: (hand tap the table) yes. I, I, did you ever get a bowl hair cuts?

M: (Smile) Yeah. That's all Asian parents know how to do just to give you a bowl hair cut

From the beginning, even though Dan confirmed that Mike is good at academic study, but Mike was reluctant to admit this. Instead, he reread the whole question and emphasised he is just good at it but does not ‘likes’ studying. Dan understood the undertone of this question and attempted to reconstruct the expression by ‘rephrasing’ the sentence using many body languages to stress that it is an individual thing (‘for you’), not a group feature. Then he turned to the camera, with the intention to clarify to the virtual audiences. He emphasised ‘No Asian’ to clearly deny the relationship between the impression of ‘good at studying’ to the Asian group.

From these steps, we know that Mike and Chen are not willing to be tied with the existing model minority stereotype. When the topic of the questions changed to be about the atmosphere suddenly became much more relaxed and Mike easily generalised ‘bowl haircuts’ to something that ‘all Asian parents’ will do. Maybe the ‘bowl haircut’ is just a kind joke but it still shows how reluctant they were towards the model minority stereotype in comparison.

It is clear that the boys on the CantoMando channel and The Chen Dynasty all showed they are reluctant to accept these stereotypes, but the humorous and relaxing style undermined the seriousness. According to Guo & Lee, as an entertainment platform, funny and relaxed videos are more encouraged than professional and obscure content because the previous one can attract more attention from the general audiences. However, is it also worth noting that one video may achieve high views and comments because of its interesting style, but also, and more importantly, because the lack of representation practice of Chinese community on mainstream media and the amateur content brings new change to the current environment (Rhagavan, 2009).

## **5.5 Deconstructing the cultural differences**

Many positive stereotypes relating to Chinese people in Western countries are deeply rooted with discrimination. David Livingstone Smith (2020) mentioned the process of dehumanization of minorities in his work. First, the dominant community treated ethnic minorities as a threat and ‘label them murders, rapists, or freeloading parasites sucking the life out of the body ‘of their country.’ Then, they humiliate them through discrimination. Because of the previous two steps, victims are no longer treated as human beings but creatures and ‘something that needs killing’. Model minorities, together with ‘tiger parents’ are the productions of dehumanization. Once the tag was given to certain groups, the humanity of this group was automatically removed. Personal effort can also be diminished because of the alienated personhood. Nina mentioned both in her video and her interview that her classmates tend to attribute her excellent performance on academic to her ethnic nature noting ‘I think that puts a lot of pressure on me’. Sometimes the pressure can also result in the rejection from making positive change. Le in her interview spoke about how she refused to fit into the dominant Chinese stereotype by deliberately underachieving on school work and in other art classes and this could explain why the previous mentioned YouTubers such as boys from CantoMando, Dan and Mike were rejecting this tag.

Sometimes this prejudice could also influence how people from the dominant society perceive the success of people from the ethnic minority backgrounds. In the video 'why Asian Parents Don't Tell You Sad News' Andrew Fung and David Fung used an example to demonstrate the cultural differences between Chinese families and Western families. The Chinese Olympian Sun Ying Sha's parents hid the truth that her grandmother passed away during the Olympic competition and only told her the truth after she won the gold medal. The reason behind this was that her parents were worried the sad news will influence Sun's performance in this important competition. David pointed the news might cause a misunderstanding from the Western perspective:

David: Yeah. And I think obviously, if you look at the result of Sun Ying Sha, you would say that, obviously, they made the right choice if you're being very results based. But some people were like 'four months! I can't believe that'. And some other Western people were like, 'Dude, they should have told her and she could use that as fuel to get to goals instead of a golden silver'.

By imitating the tone of the American people, David explained the viewpoint as a person influenced by American culture, that is treating the sad news as motivation instead of disturbance. Then, they tried to expand the story to all immigrants and the entire Asian community which will be discussed later in this chapter. After that, Andrew connected the story with their growing-up experience:

I mean, I'm not gonna lie that our dad loves ping pong. We played it growing up. And obviously, even though they weren't the strictest Tiger parents, they had tinges of that, and there's certain things they didn't tell us. So I understand how Sunying Sha was raised and coming from where she's coming from, you know, probably middle class, Hu Bei province, you know, just trying to make her family proud and also make (pause) her, their country proud. Perhaps, it's like, I can understand how serious it is. It's that serious, and she achieved the results

Andrew referenced to the 'tiger parents' again, although he claimed that his father is not the 'strictest' one but subtly admitted the personality of his father and the way he acted is in Andrew's eye's, fitting into the strict parents scheme. After that, Andrew also spoke from Sun's perspective by connecting his childhood experiences to hers. He then put her situation under a broader Chinese culture to show his understanding towards Sun and his parent's action. The pause he took before talking about how Sun could make the country proud also demonstrated his knowledge of how collectivism work in Chinese culture. However, the conversation did not stop after demonstrating their understanding of Chinese culture. David pointed out how this culture may undervalue the achievement by Chinese sports players because they are not 'seen as a well-rounded people'. David compared Sun with other famous American sports celebrities to argue the point that Sun does not have a charismatic personality traits publicly:

David: A lot of the Chinese female athletes I guess in particular, they don't wear makeup, they have short hair, it seems just something like that, you know, it doesn't fit the image of a Wheaties box superstar that in America. We demand our gold medalist to have you know

Andrew: it almost feels like that nobody from the Western world is jealous of their gold medal if they have to live life like that,

David: Right? Because that's where all these things whether they're true or not are exaggerated, where they're like, well, they were just drained in a Cold War facility in the gray concrete. So sure, of course, they'd win it. That's all they did their whole life

By using the terms 'we' and 'our' to refer to United States, and 'they' for China, David and Andrew switched their position to the American perspective. Starting from the united hairstyle and appearance, David and Andrew discussed the reasons for the cultural misunderstanding is rooted in the fear of dehumanised beings. They also touched the social political reasons behind this. During the Cold War, the Western media started the 'Red Scare' campaign towards socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union (Jenkins, 1999). By portraying the socialist country as dehumanized and an extremely disciplined system which suppressed the individual's will and required absolute obedience from people in their country in order to achieve the success in the war, the campaign had escalated the fear of imminent destruction

within Western countries (Fătu-Tutoveanu, 2015). This campaign caused fundamental influence for a long time after the end of the Cold War. Because of China's political system and the long existing stereotypes of the Chinese community, Sun could easily be read as being indifferent being under this context. Andrew developed the thoughts to the border discrimination reality towards Chinese people in the United States by, again, recounting an example from his personal experience. One of the Chinese classmates who was good at math were discounted the achievement compared with others who were good at sports. David then started to challenge the idea, however, through affirming the social system of American society:

David: Because are we living in a capitalistic society? Are we going a meritocracy? Are we going off people who are the best at what they did then really what whatever they sacrifice or they do or do not have or whatever shelter or cloistering they have perceived sheltering in their life, it shouldn't matter.

The presumed positive effect of a capitalistic society and the connection with meritocracy indicated David adopted the Westernised assimilative idea framework even though he was attempting was to criticise the unjust social values. However, they also showed their critical views towards the culture in the capitalist society. Andrew pointed out money worship is not discounted by American society while intellectual achievement was not equally emphasised. Also, they did contribute into normalising the cultural differences from different perspectives and showing great effort to change the current discourse against Chinese culture. As Andrew stated in the last of the video, 'there is multiple different culture out there and they work in different situations.'

As mentioned before, from the perspective of Chinese growing up in Western countries, their relationship with their parents is different from their Western friends. The emotions between Chinese family members is more reserved. According to Silverstone (1999), the cultural identity is shaped through initial family relationships and also help keeps the social behavior consistent between family members. What if these unwritten norms are disturbed from the outside? As the one who experienced two different cultures, Chinese diaspora creators show their experimentation by changing the way they interact with their parents. The three boys in CantoMando (Sheldon Ho, Mike Wu and Edward Leung) decided to call their parents and tell them 'I love you', which as Mike Xin Chen once mentioned 'Chinese people are notorious for

not liking to use the phrase 'I love you'. Before the phone call, Mike said to the other boys he felt very nervous and awkward because this is his first time telling his parents 'I love you'. Then the below conversation took place in Mandarin:

Mike (M): Hello? Where are you?

Mike's father (F): We are walking back home right now

M: Oh walking back home .... How far?

F: We are at the Da Tong Hua (大统华) to buy some noodles, want to cook Shaozi Mian (哨子面) for lunch.

M: Want to have Shaozi Mian for lunch right?

F: Yeah

M: May I tell you something (laugh)

F: Then speak !

M: Oh, ummm, I..I love you

Mother (talking in distance): I love you, what does this mean? What does this mean?

M: Ah, yeah..yeah it's.... ah, ummm, you are very good parents (Sheldon covers his face and laugh quietly)

Mother: What are you talking? What do you want?

M: I don't want any thing. I just want to say I love you

F: What is the meaning of this 'I love you' stuff?

This dialogue is very much presents Mike's way of interacting with his parents do not follow the norm. From the beginning, Mike opened the talk with casual questions and his father answered without skepticism. However, after he told his father 'I love you' his parents started to question him. Mike's reaction is also not natural, as he paused many times and tried to give the 'I love you' a context (you are very good parents). His mother still refused to accept the way he is talking and continued to question his intention. It was the same for the Mike, Sheldon and Edward's parents who also could not treat this as a normal conversation and tried to ask for an explanation. Sheldon's parents thought he was doing this because 'he has to make a video' whereas Edward's mother asked him did he get any trouble and did he need help. The conflict and drama are also emphasised through the use of the music and the video editing. When Mike told his father 'I love you' the music changed to the tune that is normally used to

create suspense in film. Many close-up shots are used to capture to the facial expressions of Sheldon and Edward when Mike was calling his parents. There are many videos on YouTube made by Chinese diaspora content creators where they express their 'love' to their parents. The motivation behind this does not come purely out of nowhere but their desire to fulfil the expectation of emotional expression between them and the elder generation, although the action is through introducing Westernised cultural logic into the family which is already constructed with Chinese social norm.

## **5.6 Generalising personal experiences to broader social groups**

In many different videos, creators showed their intention to generalise their personal experiences into a border sense. The initial attempt was to summarise their individual experiences to find a common point for people to relate to. This is why many videos use the terms 'we' or 'our parents' to form the connection with the potential audience. Also, one of the most common intentions is to extend the Chinese parents to Asian parents. Mike Xin Chen and Dan Chen are both Chinese American, but the videos they produce are mostly titled 'Asian'. Mike Xin Chen mentioned one time 'one reason that our Asians are able to relate to each other a lot of is because our parents. In more cases than not, Asian parents are very much alike'. In this point, the creators were attempting to break the ethnic boundaries and build shared experiences across the whole Asian community. Similarly, Leenda, an Vietnamese American made a video with British Chinese Uncle Roger named '15 things growing up with Asian Parents Ft. Uncle Roger, J Lou', in the beginning of the video Leenda pointed out several things that 'every Asian parents do, and you might feel related to'. She and other content creators identified in-group boundaries on a generational level, moving beyond ethnic-specific identification toward generational experiences. Under this view, it is obvious that the video derives its power from the fact that it depicts first-generation immigrants as an out-group, while the creators share in-group points of view as second generation youth. Because of the gap, it blurs the boundaries between other identities such as race and ethnicity, which challenge and break the essentialism of the 'Asianness'. Sometimes, they also extend the sense of commonality to a general immigrant, such as Andrew Fung said 'I think any kid grow up with immigrant parents can relate to the fact that ...it gives you a different perspective for American culture'. Now the boundaries were set between 'native' and 'immigrant' and also created a sense of belonging across second generation immigrants. Furthermore, the boundary can be

pushed even further and become the line between children and parents. In the video-mentioned above, 'Why Asian Parents Don't Tell You Sad News', Andrew said 'I think this goes for any culture in any type of person that anytime you have some bad news to tell someone, you still got to figure out the timing.' Even though lately Andrew and David specifically talked about the cultural logic behind the Chinese ways of thinking, they still intended to find a common space even at the surface. By constantly switching the boundaries, Chinese creators can negotiate their identity through deciding who can be included as 'we' and who stayed as 'others'. YouTube allows people to build their social capital through video creation, which empowers the creators to negotiate their identity through constantly switching the boundaries and deciding who can be included as 'we' or 'others'. However, many interviewees mentioned about how generalize the concept could bring them more traffic. When Nina answered in the interview why she put the title as 'British Asian' and 'British Chinese', she said 'Asian is more searched, and a border term than country specific'. Jane also puts,

People like to see somethings they can relate to, comparing with 'Chinese', definitely there are more Asian out there. If I talk to the larger group, I will get more traffic. I tried to put words like 'Asian' or 'immigrants' in my title and those videos were doing quite well.

because this is still an algorithm-based platform, there is a need to fight for visibility in order to fit into the attention economy and that is also the reason which drives creators to find the commonality between themselves and the users. Due to this reason, interviewees all admits that they would prefer to establish one or a few typical figures relating to the traditions of the family's country of origin (the natal culture) rather than describing the specific individual. The image of Chinese parents is portrayed as a group of people who are old fashioned, strict, with high expectations and sometimes uncivilized. When Western Chinese amplify the embarrassment or uncomfortable memories that they have encountered before and simplified these experiences to a general negative frame. This leads them to have a sense of alienation from their natal culture. This emotion becomes fragmented, deterritorialized and crosses over thousands of 'homes' in every corner of the world, connecting young Western Chinese people who are sitting in front of their computers.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed how diaspora cultural identity of Chinese in Western countries are constructed and represented on YouTube. Firstly, there are multiple styles and formats to present Chinese parents. The most popular and widely adopted one is narrating a story in a funny and hilarious way. One reason is because the entertainment feature of YouTube preference the positive reaction of the traumatic experiences instead of developing the topic into a serious and obscure statement. Apart from setting up discussion between peers, content creators also like to summarise the features of their parents and produce short plays to represent their parents. Although serious talk is not a popular format, some creators are still doing this as an experiment to discuss the racial, ethnic and cultural related issue in order to challenge the existing discourse in dominant society and inspire conversation around the topic to take control of over the discourse that shapes them.

The content these videos present can be categorised into the following topics. The first one is about the consumer behavior of the Chinese parents as a consequence of the financial conditions when they entered into Western society. Chinese parents are portrayed as a group of people who are extremely stingy and dedicated to save money in various ways. Additionally, their immigrant background sets up an obstacle for them to integrate fully into Western society as well as for their children to do also. Thus, their limited understanding of the Western cultural and manners were represented as inappropriate, sometime uncivilised behaviour by their children who owned the cultural and social capital in the dominant society. The strong accents are always involved when creators perform or mention their parents which not only reinforces the differences between native and non-native speakers, but also serves as an ethnic joke to please the existing stereotypes of the mainstream society. No matter whether it is setting up a discussion with peers, making a short play to perform the elder generation or compare their Chinese parents with Western parents, content creators were consciously and unconsciously emphasising the differences between themselves and their immigrant parents. The similar living experiences also enable them to generalise their individual experiences to a broader cultural scale. Western Chinese highlight the difference between themselves and their Chinese parents with the desire to express of racial and cultural anxiety.

Apart from establishing a ‘foreigner’ image of the Chinese parents from social economic perspective, the relationship between parents and children is also a popular topic online. This is usually about the communication between generations. Chinese parents are portrayed as

being more emotionally reserved based on the content creators' experiences. Also, by emotionally going through the identity struggles that the young Chinese people encountered within the family, those creators started questioning the authoritative role of their parents and the cultural traditions that kept within the family. When discussing the Chinese family style online, they unconsciously reinforce the stereotypes of their parents by constantly denying the variety of personalities and beliefs that the elder generation hold while at the same time, rejecting the positive stereotypes crowned by the mainstream society.

As a group who constantly negotiating between two cultures, these content creators are facing challenges from both sides and they are taking action online to tackle the challenges. Apart from simply rejecting the stereotypes, some Chinese diaspora have tried to continue the conversation on the platform by deconstructing the discrimination with social political contexts and personal experiences to strive for the understanding from larger audiences. Although it is obvious that they showed a preference for their Western side, they still contributed to change the current discourse which is against Chinese and Chinese culture. Also, to fulfil the expectations of emotional expression with their elder generation, creators showed their intention to change their way to interact with their family members.

The emergence of YouTube provides the Chinese diasporic youth the opportunity to form their identity with people who share a similar background through shared experiences. The boundaries between 'us' and 'them' are constantly switching between ethnic, racial and generational groups showing their sense making process and also the desire to seek a larger scale of attention on this commercialised platform. just as Andrew stated 'sometimes when you come from the outside looking in you have a different perspective than people who are raised inside of it their whole lives'

## Chapter 6 Heritage Language

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter has investigated the relationship between heritage language and identity representation of Chinese diaspora. As mentioned in more detail subsequently, heritage languages serve as a significant tool for Chinese diaspora to connect with their culture of origin and also as an important symbol to construct their identity. Developed from the main research questions, this chapter will set to answer the following four questions:

1. What are the roles which heritage languages plays in Western Chinese diaspora identity construction?
2. How do they narrate their heritage language relating to the personal experiences on YouTube?
3. How do they practice their language to construct an online community and encourage the diasporic identity circulation?
4. How does the commercial platform influence their language practice?

This chapter answers the questions with following perspective. This chapter has identified the close relationship between heritage languages, migration history and experiences growing up. Many creators tend to treat their language learning and speaking as an identity practice. The narrative structure of their stories were discussed in this chapter together with their changing opinions towards their heritage language. In addition, this study also looks at how Western Chinese have established a diasporic community online through creative use of their heritage language. Lastly, this chapter has identified the ways in which Chinese diaspora have adopted the business model in their heritage language speaking practices.

## 6.2 Heritage language, cultural identity and Chinese

The relationship between language and culture is very tight and they cannot exist without each other. Language both reflects and is affected and formed by culture. Broadly speaking, human beings can also be represented by language as it functions as a symbol of his/her historical cultural origins, lifestyles and ways by which things can all be included in it. As Bonvillian (2019) pointed out ‘Language is an integral part of human behaviour...cultural meanings are expressed both in the symbolic sense of words and by the ways that interlocutors evaluate communicative behaviour’.

A heritage language is the language which is spoken by an immigrant family and their children. According to Montrul (2012) ‘the languages spoken by the wider speech community in the host country are majority languages with official status while the heritage language is a minority language’. Because it is normally used between family members and people who share similar ethnic backgrounds, the language is closely connected with an individual’s identity (Kondo-Brown, 2003). No matter if a child was born in the host country or not, as long as they grow up in an English-dominant environment they often become English-dominant, particularly after they start school (Lee & Shin, 2008). As a result, many children find it hard to learn and maintain their heritage language. Unable to keep their heritage language may make it difficult for them to retain their cultural identity as they lose an important ability to access to the cultural resources.

Chinese, as the world’s most used language, is also widely spoken by Chinese diaspora worldwide (Statista, 2020). There are ten dialects in Chinese, the most common dialect is Mandarin used by 53.6% percent of the Chinese population (Steering Group Office for Survey of Language Situation in China, 2004). However, Cantonese, a dialect which originated in southern China, used to be the dominant language of many Western Chinese, but its influence within the Chinese diaspora is gradually declining. Many Chinese immigrant parents tend to send their children to Chinese language school and studies have shown individual’s identity formation can largely influence one’s heritage language learning. When the heritage language was spoken by a Chinese diapora on YouTube, the language itself does not only serve as a communication tool but also a cultural symbol which represent their cultural identity.

### 6.3 Language use, immigrant history and traumatic experience

On YouTube, there are many videos made by Western Chinese sharing their experiences growing up and one of the most important topics are about their stories with Chinese language. The main focus of this section is to look at the narrative identity of Western Chinese content creators in the lens of their migration history and life journey. As creators discussed them and their family's migration between different countries and finally settling down in their host countries, the complex linguistic and cultural identities are always involved in their story telling.

The background of Canadian Chinese content creator Vicky is complicated, she was born in Canada and moved back to Taiwan and stayed there for between six and seven years, after which she then officially immigrated to Canada together with her whole family. When her friend Kristy asked what was her first language, she struggled:

My first language is English, because I'm better at it, obviously. But then I usually say that my first language is Chinese like Mandarin. But, um, because like, you live there, right? Yeah. So it's very confusing.

...

Yeah. Like, every time I go back, I speak English to my sisters. Right? And then the workers there. They're always just like 'American?' Yeah, I'm like, but it's like, like, I don't know. Cuz they're just they always say like, oh, like, 'I can hear the difference between foreigners and locals.'

Vicky expressed her confusion as she associated language with her complicated experiences. Chinese is not only her heritage language but also the native language of the motherland of her parents, the place she lived in part of her childhood and the language they speak at home. At the same time, she attended a school which did not have any people of colour, so apart from speaking with her parents, she did not have many opportunities to speak Chinese. Also because her father spoke Cantonese and her mother spoke Mandarin, it led her to struggle when learning Chinese because she had to switch between the two different dialogues at home and sometimes 'mix them together'. Although she used the expression 'go back' to describe their trip to Taiwan, she used English instead of Chinese to talk to her sister. The video also showed that the local people thought she was a foreigner based on her accent when speaking Chinese.

Vicky's situation suggests that the individual's migration history provides a different view for his/her identity and also complicates the language profile. The migration history and the language profile are directly influenced by and will continue influence how individuals identify themselves, where they reside, and how long they may remain in a given area (Morris, 2009).

The language related memory also demonstrates their position of being an immigrant child whose parents came from different Asian countries and settled down in a third country. Meili on her channel shared her story as an American Japanese Chinese. She only speaks English and that established a barrier for her when trying to connect with her extended family. Every time she returned to China with her parents, she needed her mother to translate her speech when she spoke to grandmother. Not been able to culturally connect to her family made her feel guilty and stressed. On the opposite hand, she also had to overcome the language challenge by herself when she was at school and helped her parents to write English emails. The use of language in Meili's life forced her to consider herself as the 'minority of minority', because in from her perspective, she was constantly comparing herself to her other Asian friends whose parents spoke the same language, and also her native friend who had learnt English from their parents. 'I was frustrated, I guess, because I wish my parents knew the language well, and we could just be any other normal American family, and they could speak the language fluently'. The different background and language use by the elder generations have made the life experiences and cultural identity of the child in this migrant family much more complex. Because the child's movement was forced, sudden and unexpected, some of the stories she told were filled with resignation, resistance and insecurity.

Cece's relationship with language shared some similarities and differences with Meili. As a mix-raced child, Cece used to associate learning language with identity practice. Because she did not want to be recognised as Asian, the self-denying of her race made her resistant to learning Chinese.

(1)I really hate my younger self for rejecting learning Mandarin.(2)  
ⒶAnd it's not just because it was difficult, Ⓑit's because I had this like,  
ⒸI hate saying this, Ⓓbecause I literally hate my younger self for this,  
Ⓔ but I had this like, internal hatred for being half Asian. ⒻIt was like  
the stupidest thing ever. (3)But basically, I was just so insecure when I

was younger. (4)This is this is gonna sound bad, but I'm just gonna say basically, (5)like in kindergarten and stuff, like when my mom would come to pick me up from school, I was like, I just like always feel so awkward because I did like, I'd like get in the car really quickly, because I didn't want anyone to like hear her accent cuz she has like an accent when she speaks, which is like, cool. (6) But when I was younger, I was just like, like, ashamed of it almost...(7) But like the specific like school district I went to growing up was like, mostly white, I was always trying to like, kind of like lean more towards my Caucasian half. (8)That's also another part where being half white is like a privilege because like, yeah, like, I'm half Asian, but I'm also half white.

\*This transcript was divided into eight sentences, marked from (1), (2)...to (8); In the sentence (2), there were six turning points and was marked from (a),(b),...to (f)

Cece revealed that the reason she did not learn Mandarin was the shame of being different from her other Caucasian friends at her school and this led her to refuse accepting her racial background. Cece also mentioned that her mother had an 'accent'. As Mugglestone (2003) argued that a person's accent works as a social symbol which can divide people from different social or cultural backgrounds. Even though she used the expression 'cool' to describe her mother's accent, she did not treat that accent as a positive sign when she was young. Interestingly, the process of revealing her thoughts has been through different stages, in sentence (1) Cece showed her current opinion regarding the attitude she holds towards Mandarin in her childhood. There are four turning point in sentence (2) before she explains the reason why she rejected to learn the language. In turning point (a) she indicated that a part of the reason was because the language was difficult; then, she showed her attempt to reveal the reason but failed; In turning points (c) and (d), she returned to reemphasise twice of her negative views about her past attitude towards Mandarin. In turning point (e),she finally revealed the reason but then denied again her past attitude in turning point (f).Cece explained her motivation behind the attitude towards learning Mandarin in sentence (3). Before she told the story in sentence (5), she showed her awareness in sentence (4) of speaking on the platform and what she said can be heard by the unknown audiences. After telling the story, she revealed her sense of feeling behind the story and further discussed why she felt ashamed in sentence (7). In

sentence (8), Cece pointed out another unspoken reason behind her identity preference, which is racial hierarchy. From the way Cece narrated her experience, we could sense her struggling to open up herself up. She understands that as a half Caucasian speaking about these racial and ethnic topics she may need to be more sensitive when talking on a public platform considering her past attitude. However at the same time, she did experience the sense of shame by living as a visible minority. Also, after many years she built up the connection with her Chinese side and now understood the issues relating to race and ethics at a much more advanced level than before. As a consequence, there are so many back-and-forth expressions and complicated emotion involved in the story telling.

Apart from narrating the story of growing up through directly talking to camera, American Chinese creator Steven Lim used the short film 'A cat that barks' to express his struggle of being a visible minority but also one who had lost their heritage language. His parents used to exclusively speak Chinese to him and his older brother. However, after his brother was enrolled at pre-school, the English teacher became frustrated because they were unable to communicate and asked Steven's parents to only speak English to them at home. After that point Steven never learned how to speak Chinese. However, he had to face being misunderstood by both Chinese-speaking people as well as the dominant society. In the film he film shows how Chinese people tried to approach him and start a conversation in Chinese. He claimed that because he did not speak Chinese, he was too 'American' in Chinese people's eyes, but in the dominant society he is more 'Asian' than 'American'. In one scene his Caucasian colleagues were at work and asked him 'Oh, so, Steven Lim. So you must be Chinese? So how would you say John in Chinese?'. Steven narrated his feeling with the following voice over:

'Growing up, I used to get the questions all the time. It droves me nuts. It wasn't that people for some reason always wanted to talk about where I was from, as if I didn't really belong in this country. But what cut deeper was that I knew that part of my cultural identity was lost. And that despite being ethnically Chinese, I can't speak the language'

Steven touched on two layers of his anxiety in this talk. The first one is the feeling of being rejected as a member of the host country when people similar to him were asked ~~the~~ questions such as 'where are you really from'. If this question denied his identity as 'American', the questions about his Chinese ability forced him to also question his identity as being culturally

'Chinese'. The rejection from both sides placed him at the weaker side which make Steven lost the power to take control of his own identity. The seemingly harmless question was initially triggered by his physical appearance, but then 'devalued' him by separating him from the dominant group and cultural roots. Furthermore, even though he wanted to take actions to encourage positive changes, he received further criticism such as 'your American accent is so bad. Oh my gosh, just stop trying' from Chinese people. As one of the identities, cultural identity shares the common attributes with other identities and they co-exist and co-dependence, none of them can be examined singularly without considering the influence of others (Chambers 1994; Hall,1987; Husbands,1994). For the visible minority, their cultural identity has always been expected to be associated with their race, which set an obstacle for ethnic minorities to establish a sense of belonging and acceptance. Clearly Steven Lim was aware the power inequality hides behind the conversation. This led him to ask in the film 'is it even my fault that I don't know Chinese? Isn't it my brother's preschool who made me this way?'. These rhetorical questions highlighted the hopeless feeling of a child who came from an immigrant family when facing the immutable social and political forces that stopped him from learning his parents' language (Cambell & Christian, 2003). However, when the questions were asked by a creator, who has 224,000 online followers, there is also the intention to defend the disadvantaged status of those Chinese diaspora who cannot speak the heritage language and those who are constantly being misunderstood, and being blamed or self-blaming from outside. At the end of the film, Steven turned his narration of language dilemma from shame to pride. He stated 'Thankfully, my identity comes from my creator, who love me with no contingencies & fine print. And so that the end of the day I have no reason to be ashamed for how I was created or the way that I was brought up.'

In another video, Steven Lim also shared the story of his ethnic name. Many researchers have mentioned the importance of one's name to his/her identity (Nicolaisen,1974, 1980; Emmelhainz, 2012). Name, represented by certain language identifies the features of an entity (Nicolaisen,1974). As a symbol that is represented by the heritage language, a person's name is one of the core cultural signs which Chinese diaspora carry with them all of the time. In the video description section Steven introduced the meaning behind his name, Steven is Lim's first name and his middle name is Kwo Wei (国伟). Every Chinese name has its own meaning. In the description section, Steven explained that Kwo (国) represents God's kingdom, 'Wei' refers to his mother's favorite hymn, 'How Great Thou Art', or '你真伟大'in Chinese. His

parents chose this Chinese name because they wanted him to revere gods greatness. However, the reason they did not give him a Chinese name as his first name was because as an Asian immigrant, they experienced the hardship of using a Chinese name, ‘people never remember them’, so they decided to give him a English name which was easy to remember. According to Gerhards and Hans (2009), if immigrant parents who have a higher desire to acculturate into the host country, they tend to select names which are common in the host country. Apart from assimilating into the dominant society, studies have shown that some ethnic minorities voluntarily chose to use ethnic name to seek ethnic maintenance and express their ethnic and cultural identity (Fryer and Levitt 2004). However, in the video, some of the other ethnic minorities recounted the unpleasant memory of being mocked by their classmates. One girl named Ying recalled:

one time there is this girl said ‘Hey, are you going skiYING’ and she say that to her friend, and they were like start laughing. I remember is happened in the bathroom. I literally couldn’t allow myself use bathroom during lunch time. I get scared from that experience

The pronunciation of the ethnic name could result in the segregation and cause self-denial for the individual who experiences the dilemma. However, it also served as a strong connection between ethnic minorities with their cultural identity. The other girl said ‘I think another reason I didn’t wanna change my name is because it made me feel so connected to my culture’. In the end, Steven put a series of screenshots from people who commented under his video about their ethnic names and the meanings behind their names.

From reviewing the content creators’ past experiences, language, especially ethnic language, played an important role in the experience Chinese diaspora had growing up. Their opinions towards Chinese in their childhood are always related to an unpleasant feeling or memory. In Tsagarousianou (2016)’s work, she discussed how European Muslims adopted an injustice frame when they engaged in online discussion about their experiences. For Western Chinese, even their online activities are diverse and multi-layered. The narrative of their language relates to past experiences falling into the ‘injustice frame’ or ‘cultural trauma’, this sense of traumatic largely came from their experiences of growing up in an immigrant family, the pressure as a visible minority and the racial discrimination from dominant society.

## 6.4 Changing attitude on language practice

Studies have shown that language identity, as part of the cultural identity, is embedded in the context and formed during the conversation. According to Kanno (2003), the attitude of diaspora towards their heritage language and cultural identity varies, mostly relying on the place an individual live, the people they interact with, and also their stage of life. The stories created by Western Chinese content creators also displayed the changing language identity during the time. Even though many creators went through an identity crisis and rejected learning the language at an early age, they normally showed their desire to start learning Chinese later in life. This motivation mainly arose from their desire to connect to their extended family and the culture. Meili said she felt regret not taking the language class seriously and decided to take more Chinese classes at her university. Creator Meili also expressed her willingness to learn Chinese in the video because ‘I think that I'm still in that like exploratory stage of knowing my heritage, I really want to strengthen my capabilities in knowing the language and culture’. Through looking at the growing up experiences and life stories of the content creators, it is clear that the diaspora identity formation, just as their language adoption and learning, is not straight forward and does not follow some fixed path with a single direction. Just as Hall (1990) argued, differences exist and continue along with time, the line that creates the differences are also shifting based on various factors. Machado (2011), Schwartz (2007) and Stephen Barbour (2000) believe that the concept of ethnic identity usually comes from the genetic connection and emotional bonding between the members of the group. They also use ‘ethnicity’ in ‘kinship’ to describe that bonding. According to Stephen Barbour (2000: 7), the members of a certain ethnic group normally share a consistent cultural norm, and a common language. To those Chinese diasporas, re-learning the language offer them a chance to explore the connection between themselves and their ethnic culture, which could possibly provide a cultural space for them to rely on and help negotiate their position in this world.

This is echoed by David Fung’s story. He went to Shanghai and studied Chinese in his junior year at university because of the ‘major identity crisis’. In the talk set up by Andrew Fung, David Fung and Nelson Chen, the three boys discussed why there were not so many Chinese living in Western countries who are good at Chinese, one reason they pointed out is the lack of connection to the Chinese culture.

Andrew: ...growing up especially growing up in the past, like you know, ten, fifteen, twenty years, there was not a lot of cool ways to keep in touch with Chinese culture now unless you were in to see pop see dramas, see movies at the time, you weren't going you were taking yourself out of a huge market of people who also speak Chinese and a bunch of ways that you can learn.

David: The Japanese kids can watch all this anime in language and be like, Oh my gosh, that's like how my mom talks or that's all my grandma talks. Or the Korean kids can turn to, like so much media that they legitimately think is cool and modern. That's in language and be like, Oh, yeah, like I want to learn from everything from H.O.T. to 2PM to now, BLACKPINK.

David pointed out there is a lack of popular culture products which are created by the Chinese speaking community which can be widely accepted by the Western society. Mok (1998) pointed out that the image portrayed in the media plays a crucial role in the process of identity construction because it serves as a socialising agent and provides a space to influence people's opinion of one another and themselves. Cooley (1902) also suggested a name for this process, called social mirroring. He suggested that the individual understands him/herself based on other people's view and often this 'self' is constructed within the society. The media image of a cultural group can strongly influence the individual's identity (Suárez- Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). If the image is authentic, it can have a positive influence on the individual while if the representation is negative the influence also tends to be more negative. The worldwide popularity of Korean TV dramas has caused the demand for Korean classes increase dramatically globally and it also has become one of the motivations for Korean diaspora to learn their heritage language (Chik, 2017; Choi, 2012). Similarly, the popularity of Japanese anime also led to the same phenomenon (Chan & Wong, 2017). Although Nelson Chen mentioned that he watched Hong Kong media at home when he was a child, the influence of those media were still limited.

Andrew: I think South Korea seen so much westernization in the past 50 years that they don't even really look at it. Like East versus West as much it's more like all blended into one fusion, like being Chinese is

like very much like black and white. Like, we're the East they're the West. And to mix the two is like won't either won't work or is not right or just nobody doesn't.

David: Whether it really is whether it's right or wrong. A lot of ABCs feel like even though they respected Chinese culture is just super outdated and uncool. And I do not think that Korean Americans or Vietnamese Americans feel that way about their culture. Speaking I will say Yeah, my Korean friends. They think being Korean is cooler than being American. But definitely you will not meet any Chinese or Taiwanese Americans that would say that Chinese culture is cooler than America.

The influence of the Korean wave challenged the cultural power of Americanisation (Appadurai, 1996). Through importing Western culture and reinterpreting them into a new 'in-between' cultural form, this practice has been successfully embraced by Asian audiences (Ryoo, 2009). On the contrary, the Chinese popular cultural industry started much later than Korean entertainment industry and did not adopt or negotiate the culture from the West, at least during Andrew Fung and David Fung's teenage years. Thus, it is difficult for the Western Chinese of their generation to accept or resonate with the media representation because of the non-negotiable cultural heterogeneity. David and Andrew's conversation pointed out the positive influences of the media representation to the individual's cultural confidence as one will put themselves equal with their Western counterparts within the cultural hierarchy.

Interestingly, Nelson Chen also pointed out the preference of the Chinese dialogue has changed from Cantonese to Mandarin:

Andrew: There's a debate especially 15 years ago, you're like, Yo, I gotta learn Cantonese, because that's my language I'm with. However, of course nowadays in 2019, and I feel this way. And I feel for a lot of ABC Cantonese people, because now they're kind of sitting there being like, dang, man, I kind of wish I was studying Mandarin, and would probably maybe affect my career If I had known it. But I spent most of my life learning my mother tongue, which is Cantonese.

Nelson: like David said, you know, the predominant Chinese language right now, 2019 you will have to say Mandarin. If you're making that decision today, yes, today, even now, even I would say I'm pretty fluent in Cantonese, I do want to learn Mandarin. I feel like Mandarin is the language that you need to know. Right now whether you know you're doing business or media in terms of being in Asia or America or even around the world. I think Mandarin is such a powerful and strong language, that it's very beneficial for you to have

Andrew and Nelson pointed out the changing patterns of the dominant dialects in Chinese over the last few decades. Also, from their conversation there is a clear sign that Nelson, together with other Chinese born into Cantonese speaking families, prefer to learn Mandarin. And the motivation behind the thought is based on the rational and practical consideration about which dialect could lead to greater recognition in the Chinese language circle. Because of the growing social and economic impact from the People's Republic of China, understanding Mandarin (the official language of PRC) could improve the possibility of access to different opportunities. However, this consideration does not reflect the theory raised by Smith (1993), who insisted that the primary dialect choice of an individual is based on its ethnic identity and their sense of an 'ethnie'. Although both of this dialect belongs to the Chinese language, and they share many common pieces of vocabulary, the phonological and grammatical differences make the two dialects very distinct from each other. Most importantly, the two dialects have come from different cultural origins which also indicates that the people who use them developed different cultural identities.

However, Nelson and Andrew's narration revealed their intention to challenge the traditional view between the language choice and the desire to maintain the kinship relationship from the common ancestors (Smith, 1993). The previous beliefs about the connection between language and ethnic connection ignored the reality of diaspora's everyday life, their communication and network would be largely restricted because of the differences in their dialect. As a result, the changing and fluid environment that diaspora live in has created urgent and powerful needs to embrace the newly constructed identity and replace the previous thoughts on linguistic and ethnic identity. Previous views on ethnicity and identities are being proved to be outdated

because it cannot satisfy the necessary requirements from immigrant people and their decedents, such as access to social recourse, interaction with outgroups and being recognised by the wider society. All the newly emerging requirements have helped form new ethnic identity and changing cultural belongings. This opinion questioned the previous opinions about that the motivation behind ‘heritage’ language learning is to maintain the ‘kinship’ and keeping the ethnic cultural ‘authentic’. It is obvious that the strategy on linguistic strategy those Chinese diaspora people adopted is based on their everyday life, from survival to connect to outside world and to achieve higher levels of success. Thus, instead of sticking to certain perspectives on the relationship between language and diaspora, it is better to investigate and understand the realistic needs of those people and developing the conceptual frames about ethnicity and cultural identity from there.

### **6.5 Constructing online communities through speaking Chinese on YouTube**

Western Chinese content creators have also contributed to the practice of displaying their heritage language to their audiences. In this section, two videos have been selected and the relevant comments, each represent a popular style on YouTube. An analysis of how speaking their heritage language can help creators construct an online community and support the circulation of diasporic cultural identity. One of the video creators is directly talking to the camera and narrating their past story. This is also the style which most of the creators have adopted when retelling their experiences growing up. A key difference is that they are using their heritage language. Letita Kiu talked about her experience growing up in Cantonese while all of her other videos were in filmed in English. She posted a video around the Chinese New Year in 2019 and the background was decorated with Chinese calligraphy specifically used to celebrate Chinese New Year. Letita Kiu also wore a red dress, which represents ‘luck’ in Chinese culture. In this properly set up environment, Letita used Cantonese to narrate her story as a Chinese Canadian. She mentioned at the beginning of the video that her Cantonese is not very good and she will get help from her parents. Under this video, many viewers left comments about their immigrant history and marking how language influenced their relationship with ethnic cultural. Some of these comments are detailed below:

*Sarah Wong:* This got me so emotional... I'm a second generation Chinese Canadian who grew up having almost no connection to my

culture. I don't know the language and I've never visited Asia... It wasn't until I was a teenager that I understood that my life experience as an Asian was different than my white friends. Now I live in Italy and I feel like an outsider all the time. It's funny how I can be so disconnected from being Asian yet at the same time so completely defined by it. Anyways, this video was so so beautiful and heartwarming. Thank you for sharing your story! Happy new year!

*Nikki Dang:* Wow your chinese is so good! My first language is also Cantonese, I struggled a lot in school making friends and comprehending things, as I kept going to esl and special ed (they didn't know what to do with me lmao) my English got better but my Chinese is really non-existent now. I could only answer the most basic questions my grandma asks me and can't hold up a conversation.

There is always a strong emotion associated with the story written by the viewers and this is an example of how bilingual or multilingual creators systematically adopt different language sources to emotionally connect with viewers through detailing a specific part of their life story and migration history. Language here not only serve as a communication tool but also a piece of memory, a cultural symbol that reminds them of their past experiences.

Apart from properly setting up an environment and talking to the camera with a planned structure, the ethnic language also appeared in some casual, everyday life vlogs (video logs). Vlogs are a popular video style whereby a creator records their life in a natural and informal style. The topics of vlogs range from what they look like, what they eat, things that they do and many more. There is a popular challenge called 'speaking Chinese for 24 hours' on YouTube. The video is about talking exclusively in Chinese for 24 hours. Creators can choose to speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Fujianese or any Chinese dialects for 24 hours. Following this there are some of comments from the video 'I tried to speak Chinese for the day (aka Chinglish lol) ', produced by Chinese American Ivy Li. She recorded her routine in a normal day but spoke to the camera in Mandarin. In the opening sequence, she introduced her reasons for making this video and she started a vote on Instagram and her followers required her to make this video. Then, she introduced her background. She grew up speaking Fujianese (a Chinese dialect) in New York City and attended a Chinese school to learn Mandarin. With the influence of Chinese

drama, she can understand most of the words in Mandarin but cannot speak fluently. Echoing with her introduction, the video used special effects to highlight her confusion with Mandarin pronunciation.

Under this video, the most liked comments tried to identify with the funning details featured in the video. User *Hyungwon's unused microphone* quoted Ivy 'It's not that I'm dumb, my teacher doesn't know how to teach me' and commented 'literally me'. This ranked the most liked comment with more than 3700 likes at the time this study was written. The second most liked comment came from user *Imannasan*, he/she also left a similar comment 'Literally me every time I speak Chinese: 'wo bu zhi dao''. At a simple level, viewers shared the sense of common community with Ivy.

User's sense of community also came from their geographical location and cultural background. The background used in the video's introduction prompted the viewers to develop a specific linguistic connection with Ivy Li. There were many comments like the one below:

*Angela Wang*: makes me so happy when other people speak chinese and english because i'm fluent in mandarin and english and my family is also from fuzhou! ❤️

*Irene Rose*: omg im a canadian asian (i speak fluent chinese, fujianese and english) PLEASE do a speaking fujianese for a day and I know Zoe from tiktok is also a American fujianese so maybe incorporate her into ur vid?

*I'm ok*: Gurl I feel you. I moved to Sweden when I was 5 and I only speak Swedish English and Cantonese so thanks for the Chinese dramas that helped me to 😂😂

Through serving to reveal identity, the experiences of being Chinese and living in the West transcends geographical boundaries. Their similar experiences of living in a multilingual environment serves to create a collective identity based on their cultural experiences. The imagined community of one's cultural belonging created a sense of transborder citizenry and

was formed through social engagement and shared experiences. The enthusiasm of language identification also encouraged more users to connect with each other on other social media platforms and they celebrate the visibility of their ethnic identity. Under the user *Irene rose*'s comment, user *Evalives* replied, 'Omg, what's Zoe's TikTok? I'm an Fujian American as well!'. User Shuxian Qiu also replied, 'so delighted to see so many Fujianese on Youtube. Welcome to Fujian !!' The social interaction empowered the minorities to build up cultural pride through their virtual connection. These shared experiences do not only arise from being bilingual or a multilingual speaker, but also the memories of watching Chinese popular culture:

*Serena*: OMG 爱情睡醒 <sup>9</sup> I REMEMBER BEING OBSESSED W  
THAT WHEN I WAS 10 AND I WATCHED 夏家三千金 <sup>10</sup> AND A  
BUNCH OF OTHER SHOWS THE MAIN LEADS WERE IN TOO  
ITS HOW I LEARNED CHINESE AHAHHA

*C*: AHAHHAHA my american born chinese brain is enjoying this so  
much LOL and as an army too when you mixed bangtan sonyeondan  
with 防弹少年团 <sup>11</sup> i was CUH-RYINGGGG LMAOO

*Nctzencafe*: oml someone who watches 奔跑吧 <sup>12</sup>, listens to wayv and  
stans bts<sup>13</sup>? the taste is overwhelming

According to Spitulnik (1996), forming a collective cultural identity can be realised through shared linguistic, semiotic practices in discourse. The Chinese characters, initial letters, the name of different television programmes and music bands form several boundaries which only the Chinese internet user who understand initialism and love Chinese Korean popular culture are able understand. In contrast to the talk that Fung Bros mentioned above, Ivy Li is 16 years old younger than them and a member of the new generation of Western Chinese who already have started to embrace the popular cultural products from China. Only recently, the Chinese drama, TV programmes and music bands joined the Korean Wave and adopted the

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<sup>9</sup> 爱情睡醒了 (*Waking Love Up*) . A Chinese drama broadcasted in 2011

<sup>10</sup> 夏家三千金 (*My Daughter*) A Chinese drama broadcasted in 2011

<sup>11</sup> 防弹少年团 BTS (Bangtan Boys) is a Korean boyband contains seven members

<sup>12</sup> 奔跑吧 Running Man. A Chinese entertainment television programm which imported from the Korea.

<sup>13</sup> A Chinese boy band contains four members, it is also a sub-unit of the Korean boyband NCT.

hybridisation strategy to boost their influence within Asian groups (Jiewei, 2012). User *M.X.S* wrote ‘First time ever someone on youtube watching Chinese shows and drama. It's my hobby to watch them.’ which means that the group which watch Chinese drama is still quite small. However, because Ivy Li’s micro-celebrity status had a positive impact on viewers attitude towards Chinese drama, it also served to encourage more viewers to reveal their preferences and set up linguistic boundaries. The distinction between in-groups and out-groups created a sense of privilege to the person within this group. Using the Chinese language is a way to disclose their identity as an in-group person and enjoy the cultural capital behind the label. Under user *Nctzencafe*’s comment, Western Chinese used Chinese to communicate with each other, talking about their favourite television programmes and how they managed to keep the heritage language. Another interesting part is, in the same way as Ivy Li’s expressed they mixed English and Chinese, there is a name to call this specific language style, ‘Chinglish’. According to Korovina, Pushkina and Krivoslykova (2020) ‘Chinglish’ has been treated as an ethno-linguistic assimilation. Ethno-linguistic assimilation is the process of losing the native tongue by a certain ethnic group during the interaction between different groups (Tavadov 2011, p. 43). This phenomenon occurs most frequently in the large cities of highly globalised countries and the young generation tends to adopt this trend faster than others. Linguistic assimilation normally take place together with other forms of assimilation, both ethnically or culturally. Also, Tavadov (2011) believes it marks the loss of the ethnic and cultural identity from the members of the group. However, Fung Bros challenged this view. In the video ‘10 reasons why Asian American don’t speak English’, Andrew Fung talked about their experiment to include Chinese words in English rap or mix Chinese words into English speech. This active exploration should not be treated as an unconscious loss of ethnic identity, but a creation to new localised variety of English. This experiment has already been seen in Singapore English and Indian English, with the negotiation to ‘preserve the phonological, lexical, grammatical and rhetorical traits of their native language and find an expression of their national and cultural identity in the course of speaking the global language’ (Fang, 2011). Because of the changing identity for Chinese diaspora, this creation can also be treated as part of the process of their diasporic cultural identity formation.

Another type of comments came from native Chinese speakers, different from other diaspora Chinese viewers whose intention is to build connections, they tend to highlight the differences. For example, user *Jiang Yuxi* commented ‘ohhhhh~your pronunciation sounds great. There are many kinds of accents in China, you've done a good job!’. A person’s accent and pronunciation

are always highlighted. Unlike the Chinese accent in English, which is associated with various stereotypes, Ivy's accent received significant praise. Although the user *Isabelle Fang* used the term 'weird' to describe her pronunciation, this tone quickly changed into a friendly compliment 'so cute lol!'. Compared with native speakers, non-Chinese speakers tend to describe the sound of this language, which positions them as an complete outsider looking in.

*Juli B.:* I loved how your mandarin sounds. Everyone say that mandarin it's hard and weird but I really do love the sound of the language idk why, it's just satisfying, relaxing, elegant idk jajsaj and different  
*Seak:* I don't speak mandarin but listening to people speaking it is so satisfying for some reason Now that I think about it I did take mandarin classes in first grade and for the life of me I can't remember

Compared to other creators which shared their experiences by talking directly at the camera, vlogs do not tend to contain many strong opinions but instead aim to establish a closer and more intimate relationship between creators and viewers. The backstage performance, as Goffman suggested, can make language and cultural practices more authentic to the audience because the creator themselves are immersed in the everyday environment just like me and you. Additionally, audiences, especially the people who lived in bilingual or multilingual environments may find themselves easily able to resonate with the creator's imperfect language skill, which, in turn, encourages people to reveal their own experiences and this leads to the establishment of a community based on diasporic cultural identity.

## **6.6 Language practices under YouTube Economy**

No matter whether it is the telling of the heritage language related stories or embodying language usage within common life settings, the mediated linguistic practices all fit into the YouTube economy. When telling a story, the narrative of the relationship between an individual and heritage language constantly follows a solid structure: beginning with the childhood trauma due to the 'sense of differences'. The objective or subjective factors acted as an obstacle in their heritage language learning journey. With the passing of time, they started the process of accepting their culture as well as embracing their heritage language and also expressed regret that they had resisted learning this language in their past. This narration

follows the process from shame and resistance to embracing and taking pride are almost identical. When asking interviewees why they decided to format the script with its structure, many of them mentioned they were inspired by some other YouTubers and because their video became successful, they decided to follow the similar structure, such as Mia says,

‘If you are on this platform for a while, you will understand the power of making people feel angry, sad, joy, or relax. Showing these feelings will make you more personal to them. Also, if you follow the topic and structure of the trending videos, your video will be pushed to the ones who already watched similar content, they tend to be more interested in these topics so it is very possible that they will watch till the end.’

According to Balance (2012), the familiar structure served as ‘emotional hook’ to build a close connection with audiences. From an unhappy and anxious past which is filled with the self-hatred towards their own identity, to a confident and bright future. This process successfully embodies the emotional labour of their experience growing up as children. According to Marshall (1997) and Redmond (2016), the ‘affective economy’ was constructed through the public consumption of emotional discourses and images. In many creators’ stories, the heritage language functions as a breakthrough point for their emotional expression. Additionally, the close and intimate feeling is also the reason why Chinese speaking vlogs are well received by the audiences. According to Emma Maguire (2015), this is because of the feature of production and the distribution process.

According to the interview with Mia and other creators, they often have a good understanding regarding to the algorithm of YouTube and planning their content to fit into the distribution system on YouTube. Because the distribution strategy on YouTube aims to cater audiences’ preferences and attempts to ‘keep users in a cycle of video watching’, videos contain similar content are highly possible to be watched and favored by similar audiences (Bryant, 2020). If one video went successful, similar content potentially has a large number of audiences. Thus, this answers why many videos talking about growing up experiences were mainly using similar titles and posting within similar time period. Also, as discussed in the chapter 2 and 4, the Creators on YouTube are more likely to present an authentic picture of themselves. However, this seemingly unscripted content are well embedded in the business intentions from the creators. Shu’s video ‘My Morning Routine Speaking Only in Madarin Chinese’ is sponsored

by a language learning app and Leitita Kiu's Cantonese speaking video talking about her growing up experiences which mentioned before in this chapter were also sponsored by a clothing brand. They all managed to combine their language practice with the business beneficial under the identity pursuing framework. According to Morris and Anderson (2015), presenting authenticity could help when developing the close and intimate relations, which can highly influence the trust from the audience. The audiences are more likely to turn their emotional attachment of certain creators to the purchase decision based on the connection established during this time (Riadh et al., 2020).

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has carefully analysed the close relationship between the concept of heritage languages and Chinese diaspora's cultural identity is constructed. In the first section an investigation into how content focuses on the role of language played in the Western Chinese content creators' identity through narrating their migration history and life journey was presented. The most common way to discuss their past experiences is through directly talking to camera. Some of the short films produced by Steven Lim also received significant attention online, even though the narrative structure of directly talking to the camera and short films are almost identical. Recording vlogs in Chinese has become popular recently and many creators who are not fluent in Chinese have started to speak this language in more casual style in daily life settings.

The complex linguistic and cultural identities have always been involved in story telling. Because of the various migration history of the creators' families, it provides a different view for creators to look at their identity and also complicates their language profile. Also, for some creators, the different background and language use of the elder generations have made learning the heritage language much more difficult because of multiple dialect or a multilingual home environment. Additionally, many creators have grown up in a white-dominated community without any support from their local ethnic community, received pressure from a racial hierarchy and inequality forcing them to deny their own ethnic and cultural identity. Thus, refusing to personally learn to speak Chinese is their way to reject being recognised as 'Chinese' and this complicated emotion is hidden within their story telling. There are many immutable social and political obstacles which make children's heritage language learning very difficult.

However, as a visible minority, do not know how to speak Chinese which makes their identity construction much harder because he/she might face the rejection from within their host countries and also from the Chinese community. Thus, Steven Lim produced a short film talking about the confusion and anxiety he experienced in the hope of empowering the Chinese diaspora using his influence on YouTube.

Steven Lim also produced another short film with a similar narrative structure to demonstrate how a person's ethnic name, a symbol represented by their heritage language, influences the identity construction of diaspora. Similar to how other content creators' language relates to life stories, Steven and other diasporas' experience with their ethnic name also falls into an 'injustice frame' with the shared traumatic emotion in their story telling (Tsagarousianou, 2016).

However, the opinions on heritage language changed during the narrative. Even though many creators went through an identity crisis and rejected learning their families' language at an early age, they normally showed their willingness to start to learn more about Chinese. This motivation mainly arises from a desire to connect with their extended family and their culture. Additionally, Mandarin lessons appears to be more popular among young diaspora Chinese than other dialects due to the rising social economic impact of China. This phenomenon challenged the previous understanding of the ethnic language learning, which states the motivation purely came from the ethnic maintenance.

Because of the changing attitude towards Chinese and the desire to establish a more positive representation on their heritage language, Western Chinese content creators also engage in speaking Chinese online. Creators have successfully established a close relationship with audiences through the use of their heritage language, shared migration history and Chinese popular culture. 'Chinglish', a diasporic cultural production was widely used in videos and the audiences' comments. Partly because of the limited language ability, but more importantly, it serves as a boundary for young Chinese diaspora to celebrate their common experiences and for them to take pride in their identity. No matter whether they are speaking directly to the camera using a professional setup or recording a casual vlog revealing details about their daily life, Chinese diaspora have created a space to allows the circulation of diasporic culture and has turned their heritage language experiences of the past from unpleasant or traumatic feelings into a positive, attractive and fun practice.

It is worth noticing that the YouTube economy has had a fundamental impact on the content editing and distribution strategy. The consistent narrative structure serves as a ‘emotional hook’ (Balance, 2012), to attract the attention of the audiences. The self-revealing personal stories and daily life also builds up a close and intimate relationship with viewers. All of these are well embedded into the seemingly unscripted videos with the goal of turning the emotional attachment.

## **Conclusion**

This study looked at the cultural identity construction and representation of Chinese diaspora content creators in Western countries through the reconstruction of cultural symbols on YouTube. This study's findings are consistent with a broad variety of extensively debated literature on identity and representation in the field of media and cultural studies. Specifically speaking, it contains the theories including diaspora and transnationalism; cultural identity and representation; hybridity and intercultural identity; semiotics and power relations; participatory cultural and self-expression; self-branding and authenticity on digital commercial platforms.

### **The changing meaning of cultural symbols**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Barthes (1977) noted that objects and people do not hold solid meanings and it is often generated from social interactions. Because of the complex backgrounds of Chinese diaspora, the meanings of cultural symbols (Chinese food, parents and heritage language) were constantly negotiated between past and present, being private or public, within the ethnic community and the broader society. Also, according to Orgad (2014), 'representation draw on certain cultural repertoire of symbols, narratives, codes and conventions, which, in turn, they produce and transform'. This also indicates that there is an invisible line between different cultural representations, one cultural meaning which is understandable to certain groups may not be accepted by others. The cultural identity of Chinese diaspora has been passively influenced by the unstable meanings between home and school (domestic society) in the past and they are taking active actions to represent their identity by introduce new meanings into the symbolic interaction based on their diasporic cultural experiences.

### **Constructing diasporic cultural identity through differences and connections**

Hall (1996) has emphasised that 'difference' is the most significant notion in identity. The existence of self-consciousness comes from interacting with others' and recognising the uniqueness between 'Us' and 'Others'. As identity is reflected from the discourse, it is very

difficult to capture the whole picture of the ‘real’ identity. Thus, Hall suggested that identity studies should focus on the moment of identification. ‘Identification’ is seen as a meeting point that ‘multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses practices and positions’ (Hall, 1996a, p. 4). This study took Hall’s theory as a start point when analysing the ‘moment’ captured by Western Chinese content creators on YouTube. Through looking at the content, this study found Western Chinese have constantly switched their position to identify differences and connections between themselves and other social groups.

Their relationship with China was demonstrated through visiting China and talking about China. Through demonstrating spectacular views about the grand feasts of the local festival and historical locations, they positioned themselves as ‘explorers’ who investigate new things. However, the repeated sentences such as ‘this is my village’ also shows their intention to build up the connection with this land. On the contrary, when they mention China, the pronoun used is often changed to ‘them’ instead of ‘us’ during their speech, which also sets up a boundary between the Western Chinese and the native population.

Chinese parents on YouTube serve as a symbol which refer to ‘the first-generation immigration’. In their videos and comments, Chinese parents still carry most of the existing stereotypes that Western society has of Chinese immigrant. Through reinforcing the stereotypes applied to their parents while challenging the positive stereotypes on their own Chinese content creators shows their strong desire to remove the ‘immigrant tag’ and identify themselves as a member of Western culture.

However, their emotion towards Western culture is also complicated. The most significant differences which they identified were from the time when they first introduced the well-recognized objects within the ethnic community to public spaces such as their school. The immediate negative reactions from the outside have been internalized as part of their identity and became an obstacle for them to completely integrate into the Western society. These childhood experiences still influence them, and it has been used as major piece of content when narrating their identity construction.

These ‘third place’ experiences also resulted in the cultural invention. ‘Chinglish’ is one of the best examples of this. Content creators use their credibility as a micro-celebrity to embed positive connotations into these cultural inventions through online representation. These

practices have welcomed from people who share similar background. Through shared cultural inventions such as language use and foodways, they have created a space to stand 'in between' the two sides and celebrating their identity not only as 'Chinese' or 'Western' but the combined, yet different 'Western Chinese'.

### **Representing 'hybrid identity' through negotiating power relations**

Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994) treated the word 'hybrid' as an unbalanced power relations between the colonizer and the colonized. This theory has also reflected in the Western Chinese representation strategy. As someone whose culture of origin was on the lower level of the existing hierarchy, many of the content creators have forced themselves to embrace Western culture. The mainstream discourse portrays people from their ethnic community with strong stereotypes at the time when they were growing up. As mentioned in the Chapter 2, establishing a stereotypical representation towards those marginalized or minorities is a part of the social order control and symbolises the order from those in power. The traditional media did not afford them a space for self-expression, this power relation facing significant change after the emergence of digital social media platforms. The so called 'participatory culture' has exemplified the democratic features of these platforms and create a sense of control for those marginalised groups. The character of the Internet, which works to 'link the liked mind together' has also played a role in their online connection. The initial connection online has encouraged Chinese people to share their identity and challenge the existing discriminatory discourse which is circulated within the mainstream society. However, instead of robustly standing against the misunderstandings presented towards their lifestyle and their cultural traditions, Western Chinese people have strategically adopted the gentle expression with the awareness of the still unbalanced power behind themselves and the mainstream society. This compromise has partly been due to their 'hybrid identity' which already caused them to embrace the Western ideology, but also because of the economic pressure from YouTube.

As a commercial social media company, YouTube internalized the libertarianism politics from Silicon Valley while also inheriting the entrepreneurial capitalism characteristic from the day it entered the market. It promoted the 'doing it yourself' culture by challenging the hegemonic controls from the traditional media conglomerates. However, this seemingly self-achieving, meritocratic, liberal way of thinking is encouraged by another hegemonic power, the internet corporations. Thus, the motivation of self-expression has quickly turned into an attention

seeking competition. The identity representation also fits into this strategic self-revealing market plan. From revealing the home enjoyment, or performing the ‘real’ Chineseness, the performed authenticity has satisfied the tourist gaze from audiences and resulted in an increased visibility. The reason why YouTube creators put significant emphasis on the visibility is that it could turn result in financial benefits. This motivation encourages content creators to strategically plan their video content in order to fit into the attention economy. Many videos share similar narrative styles as the pre-existing ones have proven to be successful. As Balance (2012) suggests, the familiar structure served as an ‘emotional hook’ to build up a close connection with their audiences. From an unhappy and anxious past which was typically filled with a sense of self-hatred towards their own identity, to a confident and bright future. This is one of the ways in which they have been able to build public awareness of the personal dilemma but with little intention paid to systematically question the institutionalized problems which exist. Additionally, advertisements and sponsorship has become embedded in the identity representation, making the process of self-revealing closely tied with the market profit.

The growing power of China has also influenced the identity construction of Chinese diaspora. The most direct influence is the transformed consumer behavior of cultural products. For a long time, the influential cultural products were created in Hong Kong or Taiwan, but the situation has changed significantly in recent years. The Chinese popular culture products from mainland China have joined the contra flow of Korean Wave, which has served as a source for Chinese young people to build their imagined community with other diasporic Chinese people all around the world. The economic growth has also resulted in an increased motivation of language learning with the intention to seek improved career development prospects and build up cultural bonds with people in China. The connotation of Chinese cultural symbols has changed from something to be ashamed of in the past to something which is now worth celebrating in the present.

Thus, the identity construction and representation activities of Western Chinese have been influenced by the multi-layered power relations from individual to institutional, from economic to cultural, and historical and political factors. All of those intervolved powers continuously compete with each other which has resulted in the ‘identification at the moment’ which we see in the YouTube ‘field’.

## **Research limitation and future possibilities**

Qualitative research methods have been adopted in this study because of the complex and varied backgrounds of the content creators and also the changing nature of identity construction. Compared with quantitative research methods, qualitative methods have proved to be advantageous in in-depth analysis of the human's sense-making process. As a work that has specifically focused on how people negotiate their position in the human society, this study is one of the areas which qualitative research is most suitable for. Thus, a range of approaches were adopted to understand the Western Chinese's online identity construction and representation activities in a comprehensive and in-depth way. Because my purpose when selecting the material was to find those which were distinct from others, the current strategy was the most suitable one for this work.

However, scholars may argue that this sample selection process may result in choosing the non-representative data. Staller (2010) disagreed with this idea, 'qualitative researchers are more apt to use some form of purposive sampling. They might seek out people, cases, events, or communities because they are extreme, critical, typical, or atypical'. Based on this argument, rather than collecting mundane text, items which highlighted certain topics were searched for. Also, after long term observations, it was noticed that the most frequently raised issues within Western Chinese online community. From this perspective, the chosen material can still be considered as representative. Additionally, a variety of different materials have been included especially different types of videos (video blogs, short plays, online conversations, talking to camera and response videos) and other information to make sure that this study takes into account the values shared within this group.

Another limitation is the observation from an offline perspective. This study adopted semi-structured interviews but most of them were conducted online without observing their daily activities in person. This research method was planned from the beginning of the project. It was initially intended to observe a British Chinese politic group organised their election and their methods to boost their visibility through YouTube. However, the idea was finally removed from the research plan as the political group stopped creating content on their YouTube channel. Also, considering this research focused on Chinese diaspora across Western countries, the financial restrictions made conducting an offline study impractical. Therefore, future studies may wish to build upon this work and extend the research scale to investigate how the offline

experiences potentially can influence Chinese diaspora's content creating activities. Although this study has highlighted the cultural differences between China and other Asian cultures, which meant it avoided falling into the homogeneous trap, this study did not consider the current political, economic and social contexts of each Western country. Although mentioned in Chapter 1, these four countries all share similar historical attitudes towards China and the Chinese people, the lack of focus on distinguishing the different social contexts between each country limited the contribution of the study to the current scholarship.

Also, the definition of Chinese diaspora in this study is rather limited because of the migration backgrounds of these Chinese people. This choice also resulted in some limitations to this study. One thing is that some of these people who identify themselves as British Chinese or American Chinese, but their family has a long history of migration between different countries. Also, some of them came from mixed culture family, such as Vietnamese Chinese or Korean Chinese. This pose a question to the validation of the study, as how much of their cultural identity came from their connection to Chineseness or just being 'Asian' in general? This could explored further in a future study as well.

Although this study has identified the activities across YouTube, considering that social media has not existed for a long time and that they also provide a 'share' function to encourage users to promote their content to border society, the limited understanding of the cross-platform information exchange could be another limitation in this research. Even though other platforms are not the 'field' of this research, this study has still highlighted the close connections between these platforms through following them during the research. Studies should also focus on their cross-platform activities to give a more complete understanding of their online behaviors.

Lastly, given the influence of the global pandemic, Chinese diaspora have been the target of significant new discriminatory or racist behaviour from their host countries and this issue has become one of the major concerns within the online community. Many videos were produced to fight against the anti-Asian racism and to also support the Black Lives Matter movement. This cross-ethnic group connection was not explored in the current study due to the time limitation and also the current study is more culturally focused. However, as one of the identities, cultural identity shares the common attributes with other identities and while they co-exist and are co-dependent none of them can be examined singularly without considering the influence of the others (Chambers 1994; Hall,1987; Husbands,1994). Thus, more lights need to be place on the relationships between Chinese diaspora and other ethnic groups.

## **Research Contribution**

As mentioned before, the purpose of the study was not to identify the essential meanings behind the cultural identity but rather to attempt to understand the process of their identity construction and to investigate how people position themselves and others through negotiating the meaning behind the symbols. This work demonstrates the complexity and fragments of identity construction and the representation process through looking at the Chinese diasporas' activities on YouTube. Identity assertions always appeared with the sense of 'difference' from others, such as foodways, lifestyles and communication norms within the ethnic communities. As Ang (2003, p.141) suggested, 'claiming one's difference and turning it into symbolic capital has become a powerful and attractive strategy among those who have been marginalized or excluded from the structures of white or Western hegemony'. The finding reinforces the previous studies that the identity of diasporic Chinese content creators is marked through differences.

The methodology of this study offers a possible way to look at the online platforms as an entity rather than isolated information sections. By comparing and connecting different types of source material together, the close connection within this group on YouTube was identified and how diasporic identity was created and is circulated on this platform. Additionally, this study has also analysed the formation of the 'hybrid identity' through carefully reconstructing and deconstructing the research materials and combining them within the social and historical context. The complex social, cultural and historical and economic power relations were identified during the research process, which contributes to the existing studies relating to hybridity theories.

Also, many recent studies focusing on Chinese diaspora and their social media usage have mainly focused on their connection with China and the various Chinese social media applications, but they rarely focus on the social media which are popular in Western countries. Also, they rarely focus on text or image-based platforms, but with the fast development of new technologies, videos have become a significant type of content which people consume in their daily lives. Additionally, the main focus of the existing studies on Chinese diaspora are people who have moved to the host countries as young adults, who have already established a relatively solid identity before they move. Thus, compared with the diaspora investigated in this study, their experiences are significantly different. Although there are some studies which have focused on the second-generation Chinese, very few of them have looked at their online

representation on YouTube across geographical boundaries. Most of them are restricted within one location or country. Thus, this study provides a unique view of looking at the experiences of Chinese diaspora and fulfilled the gap identified in Chapter 1.

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## Appendix A: YouTube Videos of Western Chinese Content Creators

As mentioned in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), the video creators' real channel name will be hidden and the link of the video will also not given if the follower numbers on that channel are below fifty thousand.

<b>Identity of the creators</b>	<b>Channel Names</b>	<b>Videos</b>	<b>Links</b>
American Chinese	Chen Dynasty	16 Must Try Classic Dim Sum Dishes	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59S3rvwdnCk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59S3rvwdnCk</a>
		How Asian are you	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NVwT4HGAS0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NVwT4HGAS0</a>
		9 Asian Eating Habits Westerners May Never Understand	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s62mzPflkfl">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s62mzPflkfl</a>
	Off The Great Wall	ASIAN PARENTS VS WESTERN PARENTS	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaxYQ70fPcA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaxYQ70fPcA</a>
		9 Types of Asian Parents	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6F_DHhmne-0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6F_DHhmne-0</a>
		10 Signs You're An ABC (American or Australian Born Chinese)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9xC_IMmV2w&amp;t=141s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9xC_IMmV2w&amp;t=141s</a>
		Awkward Asian Parents Moments	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?">https://www.youtube.com/watch?</a>

			v=8oxtXsZT69g
		Awkward Moments with Asian Parents - Bonus Video of the Week	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgftJERus94">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgftJERus94</a>
		Growing up Chinese American MY STRUGGLES	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbhsXa7FzUM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbhsXa7FzUM</a>
	Wylie Hoang	What I eat in a day   Grandma's Cantonese Comfort Cantonese food	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=559NFBc8cvU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=559NFBc8cvU</a>
	Steven Lim	Day In The Life Of An Asian/Ethnic Name	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGjgZY4Q5sU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGjgZY4Q5sU</a>
		A Cat That Barks (Not Speaking Parents' Language)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ivke9uWwNfs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ivke9uWwNfs</a>
	Ivy li	i tried to speak mandarin for the day (aka chinglish lol)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPNtbFLLxkQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPNtbFLLxkQ</a>
	Fung bro	why Asian Parents Don't Tell You Sad News	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhICs9gEW7s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhICs9gEW7s</a>
		Most embarrassing things about being raised by immigrant parents	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3iKE34R-IU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3iKE34R-IU</a>
		THINGS ASIAN PARENTS DO AT THE SUPERMARKET   Fung Bros	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwBHTX8O9tk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwBHTX8O9tk</a>

		THINGS ASIAN PARENTS DO   Fung Bros	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqeiHI13XY8&amp;t=18s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqeiHI13XY8&amp;t=18s</a>
		10 REASONS WHY CHINESE AMERICANS CAN'T SPEAK CHINESE!   Fung Bros	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuqcVxRqQHI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuqcVxRqQHI</a>
	Bart kwan	Shit Asian Dads Say	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5MJbZ414J8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5MJbZ414J8</a>
		Shit Asian Moms Say	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HP2escR3qQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HP2escR3qQ</a>
	Cece	growing up ½ asian    identity crisis, chinese vs american school, & more	_____
	Meili	Growing up Asian American    My struggles	_____
British Chinese	Shu	London Cheap Eats & Traditional Cantonese Home Cooking	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfZUgxUz-HI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfZUgxUz-HI</a>
		My Morning Routine Speaking Only in Madarin Chinese	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fS2IBA0Z0cc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fS2IBA0Z0cc</a>
		Chinese Girl Shows how to Correctly Eat Soup Dumplings	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cL0of09Nu4c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cL0of09Nu4c</a>

		MY Struggles Growing up British-Born Chinese	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZwivMQ-uDc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZwivMQ-uDc</a>
	Mrnigelng	Uncle Roger DISGUSTED by this Egg Fried Rice Video (BBC Food)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53me-ICi_f8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53me-ICi_f8</a>
		Uncle Roger AMAZED by PERFECT EGG FRIED RICE (Chef Wang Gang)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5M_Z0ARqol8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5M_Z0ARqol8</a>
		15 things growing up with Asian Parents Ft. Uncle Roger, J Lou	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvxwgpNSEuI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvxwgpNSEuI</a>
	Ziangs Oriental Food Workshop	REAL Chinese Takeaway Curry Sauce and Chips	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40iNf54m_0U">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40iNf54m_0U</a>
		How to cook REAL Chinese Roast Pork and Chinese Takeaway BBQ Sauce	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb61bf4NQZ4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb61bf4NQZ4</a>
		Ziangs: Traditional Hakka Chinese Foo Young	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aMv5rzQVCI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aMv5rzQVCI</a>
	Nina	Growing up British Chinese   British Asian   British Born Asian   香蕉人	_____
	Nicole	Once a decade Village Festival (打醮)	_____

		My Experience Growing Up as a British Born Chinese	_____
	Chem	EATING CHIKEN FEET?!	_____
Canadian Chinese	Cantomando	Asian Americans Say 'I Love You' To Moms for the First Time	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0kZRHc1nj8&amp;t=92s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0kZRHc1nj8&amp;t=92s</a>
		Is it Okay to Beat Your Kids?   Asian Parents Answer	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30M1c2WtNDE&amp;t=127s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30M1c2WtNDE&amp;t=127s</a>
		Making Egg Tarts ONLY Speaking Cantonese	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fI5fFGCu57M">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fI5fFGCu57M</a>
	Letita Kiu	Growing up Chinese-Speaking Chinese Cantonese	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOsdxF5wbc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOsdxF5wbc</a>
		12 Essential Things You'll Find in an Asian Kitchen	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8b63rjrMjY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8b63rjrMjY</a>
	JeffreyFever	Draw My Life - Jeffrey Chang	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1P9KbJlGuLE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1P9KbJlGuLE</a>
		How My Dad Raised Me	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBwvfUYHhXs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBwvfUYHhXs</a>
	Vickey	Growing Up Chinese Canadian // Asian American Tag	_____

			_____
Australian Chinese	Jasmine Lipska	Exploring Beautiful Chengdu & Travelling Home! China Trip 2018	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSyZAM5q7EI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSyZAM5q7EI</a>
		Going Back To China & Our Hometown Again!   China Trip 2018	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAtzW2D7f3I">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAtzW2D7f3I</a>
		Celebrating the Lunar New Year with My Eurasian Family!	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajtbruty9cc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajtbruty9cc</a>
		Speaking My Chinese Dialect in Mianyang!   China Trip 2018	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Z64rcY1k84">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Z64rcY1k84</a>
	Steven He	Asian Parents going through your room	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db9_xsDr5PM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db9_xsDr5PM</a>
		My real accent - Reddit Review #001	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4H8Z1cOYwYk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4H8Z1cOYwYk</a>
		Asian Parent Punishments	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsSP-nHjZ0Q">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsSP-nHjZ0Q</a>
	Jenny	Being Asian Australian   ABC   Jenny	_____
		Bilingual July Favourites   Chinese & English 中英双语   Jenny	_____

## Appendix B: Information of Interview participants

Name	Age	Identity	Methods to conduct interview	Profile
Lam	23	British Chinese	In person	Born in Swansea, a small town in Britain. His family run a Chinese restaurant. Had to help his parents running family business when he was young. Started YouTube channel because he watched many videos at home and think become a YouTube content creator is an interesting thing to try. Never visited China but started to pay attention to news related to China. Can speak Cantonese as this is his family language.
Nina	22	British Chinese	E-mail	Settled down in Britain when she was 3 with her mother. Grow up in Tauton, Somerset. Know how to speak Suzhou dialect and Mandarin. Visited China every year and love Chinese food. Started YouTube channel because wanted to be a presenter in the future
Meili	25	American Japanese Chinese	Video meeting	Born in Seattle, United States. Mother is Chinese and Father is Japanese . Don't know how to speak Chinese but willing to learn in the near future. Started YouTube Channel because one of her friends started and got successful so she wanted to try. Spend many

				hours a week on YouTube and also watching people teach how to make successful YouTube videos.
Song	27	American Chinese	Video meeting	Move to San Francisco when he was five. Mother and father both work in the supermarket in Chinatown. He is a freelancer filmmaker and editor so had experiences work for other YouTube Channels. Learning YouTube video making strategy and want to start his own video channels soon. Think it is easy to become successful if acting as a 'stereotyped Chinese person' with strong accent and funny behaviour.
Vicky	20	Canadian Chinese	Social media text message	Born in Vancouver but move back to Taiwan before she was one year old. Then officially immigrant to Canada together with her family when she was about eight years old. Grow up in a town which does not have any other ethnic minority so felt struggle when growing up. Decided to start YouTube channel because watched many videos online. Want to be successful so spend some time learning how other people make successful videos.
Le	23	Canadian Chinese	Social media Text message	Born in Vancouver and family is running a Chinese restaurant. Does not have much time managing YouTube channel but is considering spending more time on creating videos. Speak Cantonese at home and learned Mandarin in the Chinese school in her childhood. Watch many YouTube videos

				at home and think it is a way to ‘connect’ to other Chinese friends.
Mia	25	Australian Chinese	Video meeting	Moved to Newcastle in Australia with her family when she was five. Experienced difficulties at the first few years in Australia and wanted to move back to HongKong. Her parents was very busy so she started to watch YouTube videos since very young. Stated YouTube channel because she think it is a good opportunity to move her career to media industry. Spending times learning other people’s video style.
Chem	30	British Chinese	Video Meeting	Move to Britain when she was 10. Started YouTube channel because was inspired by another British content creator Bubz. Family is from Hong Kong and love Chinese food especially dim sum.

## **Appendix C Semi-structured interview questions**

### **Grown-up place**

How do you identify yourself?

Where did you live when you first come to the country you spent most of the time grow up in? How long you stay for?

Are there many Chinese people in the place you've grown up? Do you and your family close to them?

Do you have very close Chinese friend when you grow up? Are most of your friends Chinese?

Have you paid attention to the trending videos 'growing up experiences as ethnic Chinese'? How do you feel when you watching it? If you are going to do it, how will you plan the content? From a creators' perspective, do you know why this becomes popular and why people like to make content related to this videos?

### **China**

How often you visit China? When is the last time you visit China?

What does China mean to you? Is it like another home or somewhere you are not so familiar with

Do you have Chinese social media accounts like Weibo or WeChat? Do you watch Chinese TV programmes or TV series?

### **With other communities**

Are there any Western Chinese/ Asian YouTubers you like to watch? And also, do you also follow any Western YouTubers who are ethnic Chinese or Asian (eg, Canadian Chinese, Korean American, etc) ?

Do you feel resonate to the things they talk? Why? Are there any similarities or differences comparing with your experiences?

Do you think the racial issues and the identity struggle that young ethnic minorities experience in western societies are very similar to what you heard or you think there are some differences between countries? What is the similarities and/or differences?

Do you watch TV dramas or listen to music from Asian countries (like K-pop, Japanese animation, etc)? Is it possible to name them? Do you think you are a big fan of it?

### **Chinese Parents**

Is it possible to briefly introduce your parents background? Do you think there are any differences between your parents and your local friend' parents?

(Showed the video made by Fungbro, 'Things Asian Parents do')

Do you think your parents are like this? Have you ever watched videos like this? From a content creators perspective, why you think they are going to make videos like this?

In your memory, do you feel any cultural gap or something you disagree with your mum in terms of values and behaviors? How you solve these problems?

### **Chinese language**

Do you know how to speak Chinese? Have you every speak Chinese with your parents/ families or any other friends at home or other places?

Have you ever watched other western Chinese try to talk Chinese in their videos? How do you feel this kind of content? Will you make similar things like that as well? Why

Is there any specific memory related to your language learning or speaking in your childhood?

### **Chinese food**

You mentioned you quite like Chinese food, is it possible to name your favorite dishes? Are there any specific memories related to Chinese food?

Have you ever made any food which is related to Chinese food?

Can you recall anytime you make videos about Chinese food, how will you normally plan the content?

Have you ever watched any videos about ‘weird Chinese food’? From a content creators’ perspective, why do you think they will make these videos? Will you make any videos like this as well? Why?

### **YouTube Channel**

What is the purpose of setting up a YouTube Channel? Do you have any developing plan for your channel?

Do you think you have a certain personal image, a certain personality or a character you want to build and deliver to your audience on YouTube? If yes, what will it be like and the reason why? If not, why?

Do you have any strategies for your YouTube videos to be successful? How?