From Criticism to Imitation:
Rethinking Tuwei Culture in the Chinese Cultural Order

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Abstract

The cultural order dominated by China's mainstream society has long criticized the popular Tuwei culture on the Internet and its rural background. However, in recent years, mainstream media and official discourse have participated in Tuwei hashtag discussions and even borrowed its cultural form. This paper uses the popular "Cao County" hashtag video produced in May 2021 as a case to evaluate the narrative characteristics of Tuwei culture. Through critical discourse analysis and research on the discussions and comments of netizens and the media on this hashtag, this paper assesses the formation and dissemination of different ideological perspectives on this culture and uncovers the reasons behind Tuwei culture's growing acceptance by mainstream Chinese popular culture.

Keywords: China; Tuwei culture; short videos; cultural order; rural

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Acronyms

CCTV	China Central Television
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CNY	Chinese Yuan
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MC	Microphone Controller
PGC	Professionally Generated Content
UGC	User-generated Content

Chapter 1.

Introduction

In May 2021, Cao County, an ordinary county town in China's Shandong Province, was dubbed the center of the universe, and its social media Douyin discussions reached 1.73 billion times. A quick browse of the "Cao County" hashtag on the Internet reveals that Cao County was popularized by a man shouting in a Shandong dialect on a short video platform. This form, named Microphone Controller in Tuwei culture, is typically defined by mainstream discourse as a "vulgar, crudely made" form (Ma, 2017, Para2). An official website even banned it in 2018 for vulgar reasons. By now, however, netizens' enthusiastic embrace of the Tuwei meme has put Cao County alongside the first-tier cities of "Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou", and even becoming the center of the universe (Weibo, 2021). Most surprisingly, China's official Xinhua News Agency, which once strongly criticized Tuwei culture, published a commentary under the exact title of the meme "Cao County, the Center of the Universe". This commentary drew upon the popularity of the Internet to introduce the basic situation of Cao County and discussed how rural places could develop after they have popular. The very fact that Xinhua News Agency, a top state media organ, pays attention to this cultural phenomenon and reviews this culture, led to further media attention to this development.

As Xinhua News Agency wrote in the article, a small county town was unremarkable and was brought out of the circle by hot memes overnight (Liu, 2021). This research paper studies the characteristics of Tuwei culture, which can attract a large number of netizens to participate in the discussion. As Levine (1988) once said, "media are…constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication" (p. 8). By paying attention to the development of Tuwei culture, it could be seen that the once regarded low-brow Tuwei culture has become a hotspot for mainstream media to borrow ideas. Discussions triggered by this unique cultural phenomenon of Tuwei have led to some critical questions: Why is Tuwei culture regarded as low-brow by the mainstream at the beginning? Why are mainstream media now willing to approach this "low-brow" Tuwei

culture? The year 2018, when Microphone Controller (MC) was banned, is an appropriate window to examine the changes in mainstream discourse towards Tuwei culture: Tuwei culture was criticized for a long time before this period, and MC was strictly banned at that time. After this period of time, more and more mainstream media became willing to borrow the form of Tuwei culture. Therefore, this article focuses on changes in the media's attitude towards Tuwei culture. Furthermore, it explains how the changing status of the countryside in China's development policy has played a role in the changing status of Tuwei culture in media.

This paper uses Michel Foucault's truth system and Stuart Hall's representation system to explain the change in the discursive power of Tuwei culture. Foucault (1977/1995) argues that a regime of truth emerges when "a corpus of knowledge, techniques, 'scientific' discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power" (p. 23). In other words, the truth is defined by the way that some knowledgeable groups use practical power. The mainstream belief in the representativeness of the rural and Tuwei culture allows people to see a special truth of the Chinese cultural hierarchy: a construction that marginalizes the countryside into a low-brow culture and implies the dominance of urban culture. Media discourse constructs specific "statements" that are not "objective, capital-T Truths . . . [but] the process by which small-t truths are produced and circulated socially" (Vavrus, 2019, p. 7), because "truth," as Foucault (1977) put it, is "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements". This system is linked "by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it" (p. 14). Therefore, the identity of Tuwei culture is a specific kind of knowledge, which is produced and spread by accidental truth systems in history and involves specific power institutions. The media performance that carries Tuwei culture constitutes what Stuart Hall calls the "representation system", which uses the "difference" performance between the entire image and visual library to express the effect (Hall, 1997, p. 328). In other words, the operating system of the short video platform contributes to the operation of the truth system and ultimately promotes the presentation of Tuwei culture. There are two levels of operation: the mainstream and influential media discourse such as Xinhua News Agency and the local newspaper, their attitude towards Tuwei culture and the setting of its cultural hierarchy. The other is that on the basis that Tuwei's cultural representation is

different from mainstream narratives, the product involvement and operation methods of the short-video platform promote the consumption and dissemination of culture.

Drawing upon political economy of communication as a systematic research approach to power relations constitutive of media discourses (Zhao & Xing, 2008), this study sets out to contextualize, map, measure, and understand Tuwei culture as it is related to urban-rural power relations in present day China. To gather the data, I first sorted out the meaning of Tuwei culture in different historical periods in the Chinese cultural context. I also showed the different attitudes of mainstream discourse towards Tuwei culture when the Microphone Controller was banned in 2018 by enumerating representative cases. I then surveyed and mapped the short video platform where Tuwei culture resides today, showing the development of this platform on the Internet in China, the characteristics of users, and the display of Tuwei culture in it. This paper applies text analysis and discourse analysis to conduct specific measuring of the extent to which Tuwei culture is different from mainstream discourse through the Cao County case. Finally, I conclude that the power of Tuwei culture is restrained by different forces. Overall, my purpose is to rethink the position of Tuwei culture in the Chinese cultural order through the Tuwei hashtag of Cao County.

Chapter 2.

Contextualizing Tuwei: Historical Development of Tuwei Culture

2.1.   The Connotation of Tuwei in Chinese

2.1.1. The Connotation of Hometown

The word Tuwei is not a new Chinese vocabulary. It has always existed in the Chinese language. The earliest definition of Tuwei referred to the smell of earthy soil. Tang Dynasty poets used this term in their poems. Fei Xiaotong (1999) believed that Chinese culture grew out of the land and cannot survive without it. Specifically, the smell of soil belongs in China's vast countryside. China's ancient farming civilization has endowed most Chinese people with unique feelings for the countryside and their hometown. In the ancient context, Tuwei represents the smell of the soil, the rural environment, and nostalgia for the hometown.

2.1.2. The Connotation of Vulgar

With the development of the Internet, people have the initiative to create and recreate words and languages. The text form of some Chinese vocabulary has not changed, but the connotations have undergone specific changes. Tuwei is one such term. As an Internet buzzword, Tuwei is usually used to describe some tacky, low-grade cultural phenomena with irregular forms. On the one hand, this culture is regarded as the opposite of "fashion" and "elegant" (Gu 2019; Yang 2010); on the other hand, it is regarded as an absurd low-level network meme in a rural context (China Digital Time, 2016). Compared with the meaning of the hometown, in this context, "Tuwei" has become a derogatory word for low-brow culture. "Countryside" is no longer merely the hometown feeling, but more like the birthplace of low-brow culture.

2.1.3. The Connotation of Integration

The cultural connotation represented by Tuwei in today's society is an integration of multiple meanings. On the one hand, Tuwei represents the local customs and cultural

traditions of the past. For example, the cultural title of Xinhua News Agency, "A bowl of Tuwei flavor family noodles, memories of generations", applied the term to represent the local flavor of noodles (Xinhuanet, 2021). In addition, when Tuwei is used to describe policies and regulations, it represents the positive meaning of being grounded and connecting with reality. It is interesting to note that, on social media platforms, short videos have become a form of Tuwei presentation. The rural and urban-rural fringe areas have become the main creative space and field of Tuwei video (Gu, 2019), and the content covers various aspects such as the collective dance "Social Shake", situation comedies, and Microphone Controller. As a result, Tuwei culture assumes a multifaceted character combining rural culture with Internet culture.

2.2. Mainstream Discourse's Attitude Towards Tuwei's MC

2.2.1. From 2016 to 2018: Criticizing Tuwei Culture's Vulgarity

With the rapid development of short video platforms since 2016, more and more scholars and media began to pay attention to the phenomenon of Tuwei culture. In 2016, Huo published the article, "Cruel Bottom Story: A Video Software in Rural China" on a WeChat public account and attracted widespread attention. The article is full of vulgar and low-brow descriptions of Tuwei culture, and it is assumed that Tuwei is connected to short video platforms and rural areas. It received 2 million views within the first 24 hours (Liu, 2019). Not only that, *People's Daily*, one of China's official media outlets, criticizes it for containing "self-torture, vulgar performance and people with absurd behavior" (Ma, 2017). Professor Kuang from Renmin University of China believed that "the phenomenon of vulgarization of Tuwei culture in short videos is widespread" (Li et al., 2017). From academia to the media, these articles reflect mainstream discourse's critical and negative attitude towards this cultural phenomenon.

Among the many forms of Tuwei culture, those on the short video platform have gradually differentiated into more stable forms such as social shake, Tuwei skits, and MC. Among these forms, MC is a representative of Tuwei culture that has been severely criticized and prohibited by specific regulations. MC is a piece of rap music from the late 1970s. It got localized after being introduced into China. The title of Emcees /MC /M.C. gradually became synonymous with rappers during this period. Compared with hip-hop, MC often appears on live streaming channels of short video platforms. Its music melody

is simple and it often borrows the melody of other music works to fill in the lyrics. The lyrics pursue rhyming and catchy feelings. Since most of its audiences and producers are not well-educated (Chen, 2018), the content of the lyrics usually has a shallow base. In many audiences' perceptions, MC is "the shout of the bottom people" (Chen, 2018, p.178). In February 2018, China Central Television named and criticized a MC video that involved praises for drugs. After that, the Internet live broadcast platform issued the "Announcement on Adjusting MC Content" and banned 77 MC songs (Duyu, 2018). Furthermore, the State Administration of Radio and Television required that hip-hop culture and Sang culture not be used in TV programs. In such an environment, many social platforms in China showed a condescending attitude towards MC culture, while mainstream public opinion tended to regard Tuwei culture as "backward" and "low-brow".

2.2.2. Change Attitudes Towards Tuwei Culture: from 2018 to Present

Tuwei culture quickly came to the spotlight in this "criticized" form and in the subsequent development process. On the one hand, mainstream discourse still focused on the vulgar part of Tuwei culture; on the other hand, it also tried to appropriate it and incorporate it. In 2019, for example, a CCTV News anchor borrowed the popular phrase "Oli Ge (奥里给)" from Tuwei culture in a program. This word is commonly used by an amateur internet celebrity to express "come on" in short videos. Not only in Chinese media, but the international fashion brand Balenciaga in China also launched a series of fashion items that are characterized as "Tuwei backpack" by many netizens on the Chinese Valentine's Day in 2020. The posters used exaggerated color schemes and ancient "butterfly" and "flowers" stickers. Looking at the poster would present the visual shock brought by the retro-style posters in the 1980s photo studio (The Surging, 2020). In 2021, with COVID-19 sweeping the world, many official slogans in China use Tuwei sentences, such as "Let's get vaccines together, and Miao Miao Miao together (我们一起打疫苗，一起苗苗苗)", "Masks or ventilators, please choose one of the two (口罩还是呼吸机，您老看着二选一)." For the writing of slogans, it seems that incorporating Tuwei established a closer tie to the people. In academia, scholars have turned to the field of cultural studies more from the perspective of criticism and compilation. For instance, Gu (2019) discusses the relationship between "vulgar video" and the transformation of audiovisual media, as well as the class expression and consumer psychology behind

"Tuwei". Liu (2020) applies the special discourse symbols in the short video and uses Hall's theory to introduce the perspective of the social and cultural environment of the urban-rural relationship in Chinese society to study the history of the rural-urban dichotomy.

To be sure, Tuwei culture in the form of MC has not disappeared after various short video platforms have strictly regulated the content of MC. Instead, Tuwei culture changed the content field and still appeared on short video platforms in the form of a "scream". From a certain type of situation, the label of MC has been replaced with a "Battle Hymn". As a result, MC with titles of various provinces in China was transmitted on the short-video platform for a while. For example, they are "Jilin Battle Hymn" and "Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and Chongqing Battle Hymn". The content becomes a passionate tribute to the hometown, coordinating with the dynamic rhythm, roaring the love in the heart with a deep voice.

Chapter 3.

Mapping Tuwei: Tuwei Culture on the Short Video Platform

3.1. The Development of Short Video Platforms

When studying Tuwei culture, it is inevitable to mention short video platforms. According to iiMedia Research (Luolu, 2021), 70.9% and 52.3% of interviewed Chinese short video users said they had used Douyin and Kuaishou respectively. Douyin and Kuaishou have apparent advantages in the short video field. Between 2016-2017, Tuwei culture took a strong position in Kuaishou (Kevin, 2020). Also know as Kwai, Kuaishou is a tool platform founded in 2011 to make GIFs and was named "GIF Kuai Shou". After subsequent development, by 2014, it had become a short video-sharing platform focusing on social networking. As described in Chapter 2, the first time Kwai's popularity increased was during the period of intense criticism of Tuwei culture in 2016. Today, the Kwai platform uses Internet technology to distribute short videos to users in a decentralized manner so that every creator can get the same attention, and users can establish close relationships through this way (Zhou, 2020). "Inclusive values" is the characteristic of the Kwai platform (Zhou, 2020). People's attention is no longer limited to the elite culture of a specific class, but barriers are broken down to allow ordinary classes to show their lives and share stories. Therefore, Kwai targets users not only in third- and fourth-tier cities, but also users of all regions and age groups.

When Kwai became the focus of the short video arena in 2016, Tiktok (also known as Douyin), another leading platform today, was also developing and rising rapidly. From the beginning as a short video platform for music creativity to later focusing on young people in first- and second-tier cities, it has become a popular short video platform with selected content as a breakthrough. For users, the videos recommended by Douyin are algorithm-based; that is, if users like to watch a certain type of content, it would be frequently recommended by the platform (Zhou, 2020). From the beginning of inviting Internet celebrities to selecting content to attract users, the platform has gradually grown and does not need this strategy to attract urban users. Tiktok's user

base has already expanded from first- and second-tier cities to third- and forth-tier cities. In addition to young people, there are also some middle-aged and elderly users.

When facing similar audiences, cultivating content and subdividing products is the development strategy of Bytedance, the company that operates Douyin. After Bytedance developed Douyin, they listed Watermelon Videos and Volcano Videos to provide different types of video content. When discussing the user composition of Tiktok, it is not uncommon to notice a high degree of overlap with the users of Kwai. Moreover, it is no longer possible to distinguish users by the phrase "there is Douyin in the south and Kuaishou in the north", which was used at the time of their respective creation.

In addition, today's short video platforms have the function of live-streaming. The year 2016 is known as the first year of Internet live-streaming. Users could set up a live streaming space on a platform, and then multiple users can join to watch and conduct text interaction and donation. Although live streaming has been an independent platform since the beginning of its development, the boundaries between live streaming and short videos are becoming increasingly blurred. The live-streaming platform and the short video platform have been integrated into multiple dimensions: content, functions, and users. The short video platform has opened up content such as games and personal live streaming. The live streaming platform also has access to the short video stream portal (Gamewower, 2020). Not only that, in terms of business model, short video and live streaming form a complementary relationship: attract users through short videos, and then set up live streaming to promote products, publish advertisements, and invite users to give virtual gifts or donations.

3.2. User Portraits of Short Video Platform

In order to have a deeper understanding of the user groups of Tiktok and Kwai, this study first analyzes the audience of the short videos from these platforms. In 2021, China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 47th "Statistical Report on China's Internet Development Status" in Beijing. As of December 2020, the number of Chinese Internet users reached 989 million, an increase of 85.4 million from March 2020 (CNNIC, 2021). The penetration rate reached 70.4%. Among them, the number of short video users is 873 million, an increase of 100 million compared to March 2020, accounting for 88.3% of the total Internet users (CNNIC, 2021). Tiktok's goal of daily

active users in 2021 will reach 680 million. In May 2021, Kwai's first-quarter financial report showed that Kwai's daily active number was 295 million, and the average monthly active users was 520 million. According to Tiktok's data report released in 2020, its users' age ranges from millennials to those born in the 1960s (TikTok, 2020). It can be seen that these common and ordinary user groups constitute the audience and users of the short video platform.

In this type of short video platform, creation and viewing are equally important, and content is classified into various aspects of ordinary life. For example, Kwai's content involves 24 categories such as sports, entertainment, food, pets, mothers and babies, and a slogan such as "The so-called unique, but a daily carol" (Kwai Research Institute, 2021). It means highlighting every detail of daily life and being close to every ordinary person. The huge number of users of the short-time frequency platform has constructed the characteristics of users generated content of the short video platform. A large number of ordinary people have become key opinion leaders in their own areas of life, encouraged by the operation of the platform, and realized through live streaming and e-commerce. In this "decentralized" background, the real-life of ordinary people can be shared, and the platform's encouragement mechanism has also promoted the desire of video creators to make money. According to data from Kwai Research Institute, more than 25% of monthly active users earned an income on Kwai in 2020. This encouragement mechanism makes ordinary people more willing to share their lives and improve the quality of videos.

3.3. MC on the Short Video Platform

MC exists on the short video platform in two forms, live streaming and short video. Generally speaking, MC singers will sing or improvise in the live streaming room of the short video platform, and the users in the live streaming room will make gifts and donations on the parts they are satisfied with. Virtual gifts and donations need to be purchased by users through digital currency on the platform. After the live streaming ends, the MC singer can exchange the received gifts and withdraw cash. A successful MC live streaming can simultaneously accumulate popularity and capital. As mentioned in the previous section, the platform not only has the characteristics of user-generated content, but also has the form of professional-generated content. The platform consciously attracts people who are good at producing short videos with the feature of

10

streaming profit. In addition, MC singers also make some short videos and post them on their accounts to increase and build higher popularity for the live stream by gaining likes and comments. Not only that, because MC is close to the performance of the general population and consists of straightforward expression, the audience is more sticky. Many fans of MC singers also record and edit the highlights of the singers in the live streaming room and publish them on the short video platform. This type of video is called "teaching material", and it provides materials for many fans to learn and imitate.

Chapter 4.

Measuring Tuwei: The Analysis of the "Cao County" Hashtag

4.1. Research Design and Demonstration

4.1.1. Case Selection and Demonstration

Based on a browsing of the most highly discussed Tuwei culture element, this section foreground #曹县 (Cao County) as a case study. The argument for this choice is as follows: Firstly, this hashtag originated from a form of Tuwei culture. There are many popular forms of Tuwei culture on short video platforms. As discussed in Chapter 2, the State Cyberspace Administration of China and State Administration of Radio, Film and Television jointly banned MC in 2018 for its vulgar content. However, the hashtag of #Cao County is still in the form of MC, and the label of MC is hidden. Secondly, this hashtag is also very popular in the field of Tuwei culture. It appears on two leading short video platforms in China: Tiktok has 1.65 billion views, and Kwai has 200 million views and 11,000 related short videos. Furthermore, the hashtag in Weibo has 510 million readings and 24,000 discussions.

The method of combining the video and text database is used to select specific material. On the one hand, because the hashtag "Cao County" comes from the video format of the short video platform, studying the video itself helps to more intuitively understand the content of the Tuwei culture of MC and its cultural representation. Therefore, from the two leading short video platforms Tiktok and Kwai, two videos with a high number of likes and fully conforming to the hashtag content were selected for analysis. On the other hand, this hashtag was discussed separately by three types of media, and the attitude of its written response can be revealing of a given cultural order. First of all, in terms of social media, the hashtag #曹县是什么意思 (#what is the meaning of Cao County) was selected on Weibo. Among them, one collection of eight Cao County memes was selected with the highest number of reposts, comments, and likes. In the Internet field, "meme" generally refers to related concepts that are conventionally used to represent a special meaning and can resonate with informed netizens, as well

as a sense of humour in a specific context (People's Daily Online, 2020). This form is a re-creation of the Internet culture of this Tuwei hashtag by netizens, which has aroused strong discussion and citations. I intend to use these eight short sentences for text analysis. Thirdly, I chose an interview report from local media to conduct discourse analysis. In this media report, the county mayor responded directly to the popularity of online memes. This local media outlet, Qilu Evening News, made an exclusive report on this event, "Dialogue with the mayor of Cao County: We are thinking about how to keep Cao County popular". Finally, in selecting mainstream media articles, Wiseresearch retrieved 28 review articles about Cao County from 9 mainstream media platforms and selected an article with a maximum of 13 reposts. Coincidentally, this article comes from Xinhuanet and the title is "Understanding the Expectations Behind the Hot Meme of Cao County, the Center of the Universe". Discourse analysis is carried out in conjunction with the Qilu Evening News interview and the Xinhuanet commentary.

4.1.2. Research Method Selection and Justification

This article chooses the text analysis method and the discourse analysis method for the video data and text data, respectively. For the research of video data, the goal is to go from the surface layer expressed by Tuwei MC video to the deep layer of the content to discover the characteristics of Tuwei that cannot be grasped by ordinary browsing. I choose semiotic analysis among many research methods. The use of symbols enables human beings to divide the world into subject and object in consciousness so that human beings can break away from the body of the subject and stand in the position of the object to examine the existence of self. Saussure (1996, p.102) analyzes linguistic signs as a pair of concepts with two sides: the signifier and the signified. Social semiotics believes that social reality (or culture) itself is a building of meaning—a symbolic structure. Many discourses follow specific procedures and are restricted by social norms. The study of Tuwei MC video interprets the two videos of the "Cao County" series from the perspective of three symbols: sound, body and language. For the analysis and research of text material, this article uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze the discursive and social power of the case qualitatively.

Discourse is the use of spoken and written language and a strategic element in the field of power relations (Foucault, 1978). As a practical method, discourse not only constructs the social world, but is also influenced by it (Wang, 2012). Because of the

dialectical relationship between the discourse world and the real world, discourse analysis has gradually developed into an important research method in the field of social sciences after being proposed by the American scholar Harris (Hei, 2013). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory considers discourse as a form of social action; discourse constitutes society and culture; social problems lie in the public or private discourse; discourse is ideological and historical; the connection between text and society is intermediary; discourse analysis is explanatory. As a critical social analysis procedure and a way of discussing social change issues, CDA seeks to understand the power and ideology embedded in social and cultural practices by identifying the relationship between the unique communication practice and the larger social background on which it depends production, dissemination, and consumption.

In the specific analysis method, the influence of Fairclough's social culture analysis method is more prominent. This method constructs a three-dimensional framework composed of text, discourse practice, and social practice. The three dimensions are successively expanded from the micro to the macro and are interconnected (Fairclough, 1993, p. 225). The analysis process uses Fairclough's suggestions for reference and is divided into two stages: the analysis of text and discourse practice and the analysis of social and cultural practice. In the first stage, the text is studied critically, with a general reading of the text in terms of related words, sentences and texts, followed by an analysis of discourse practices in the context in which the discourse was produced and transmitted. The second stage is to put the discourse into a larger social-cultural context, paying attention to the in-depth integration of text analysis with relevant social theories, and digging out the essential connotation of the social facts expressed by the discourse and the underlying ideological issues. Moreover, this stage tries to answer the following questions: 1. Behind the discussion and creation of the hashtag "Cao County" by netizens, what made this Tuwei video quickly popular, and what kind of social power issues are involved? 2. Has the mainstream media's attitude towards Tuwei culture changed?

4.2. Text Analysis of Tuwei Video "Cao County"

4.2.1. Video Language Analysis

The topic of "Cao County" originated from the song of an MC singer during live streaming, its transient feature makes lyrics challenging to save. The short video selected from Tiktok was intercepted by netizens during live streaming and posted in short video. The content is to teach netizens how to shout "Cao County" in the form of MC. This type of video inspired many young people to imitate, so it is also known as the teaching version of the video. There is only one sentence in the video: "Cao County, Heze, Shandong, Niupi 666, my baby". The first half of this sentence is the place name: Cao County is located in Heze City, Shandong Province. The word "niupi" means "fucking awesome", and it is mostly slang that refers to an attitude of appreciation. These kinds of words are more casual on Chinese occasions and rarely appear in proper sentences. "666" is a Chinese Internet term, and it describes a very powerful and admirable state. This singer pointed out that he should say it in a "mellow" voice in the teaching video. Then, his explanation of "mellow" was "the feeling of constipation." With regard to the text content in this video, it can be seen that the language of the text is straightforward and incorporates the discourse characteristics of Internet culture. The single narrative composition is the straightforward "shouting" in MC culture. The content of "niupi 666" is expressed enthusiastically in repeated repetitions, and the last sentence, "my baby," reflects belonging and pride. This singer repeated and superimposed emotions, loaded with the Tuwei feelings of every listener.

In another "Hometown Introduction" video, the text content is as follows:

On the topic of Cao County, the Internet has been particularly popular in the past two days. Big beauty Cao County, the ancient capital of a thousand years, welcomes friends from all over the country to come to visit, taste our Cao County food, and see the local customs of Cao County. Heze, Shandong, "wercome" to Cao County (Kuaishou, 2021).

From the perspective of the text, it is difficult to find the characteristics of "screaming" or shouting from the video. In order to expand the user base for such a promotional video, this singer chose more formal words and narratives. "Thousand-year ancient capital", "Great Beauty" and "Taste Food" are more literary and standardized expressions, which are more like a manifestation of his approach to mainstream

15

aesthetics. It is worth noting that the "welcome" in the last sentence is expressed in English. On the one hand, it seems to be combined with the background of Cao County's proximity to the global economic system. On the other hand, it is more likely that the singer deliberately used English in order to enter the mainstream cultural order. However, the misspelling of the letters "wercome" and the slightly biased word sequence "Shandong Heze welcome to Cao County" show the unrefined roughness and realism.

4.2.2. Sound Analysis

When the sound symbol transcends the traditional "recording" and "reproduction" functions, it rises to a narrative element that carries the function of a specific symbol. Furthermore, when a specific cognitive space and imagination system is created or reconstructed, the "soundscape" enters the knowledge horizon of narratology. These two videos, "Cao County's MC Teaching Video" and "Hometown Introduction," share the unique symbolic features of MC from the sound of music and human voice, bringing the audience of the video into the narrative world of MC.

Raymond Murray Schafer proposed the soundscape in the 1970s and then entered the field of narratology, mainly emphasizing a sound environment or auditory image constructed through the rhetorical expression of sound symbols (Liu & Zhu, 2020). In "MC Teaching Video", the sound symbol is mainly presented as a single human voice. In a relatively indoor environment, the singer's voice is fully presented. In terms of volume, the sound is loud and the cracking of the microphone can be heard; in terms of timbre, according to his own description, it is a "mellow voice", but the overall sound is rough and thick. The overall voice image is consistent with the voice characteristics of MC culture. On the one hand, it is a simple and authentic presentation at the sensory level, and on the other hand, it presents the typical rhetorical expression characteristics of Tuwei culture.

In another "Introduction to Hometown" video, the singer's voice has not changed in particular. Unlike the Teaching video, music is added to the video after this man said, "music go". It selects a piece of network music as the background music. In this whole song, only two melodies and one lyric are repeated. The style of the song presents a strong dynamic feature, which is different from classical music and popular music. Such a direct and single expression feature has become a common musical element of Tuwei

videos. In line with the overall landscape of Cao County in the picture, the direct and rough narrative characteristics of the sound symbols are inevitably strengthened.

4.2.3. Analysis of Body Symbols

Because social and cultural content is made visible through bodily symbols, the symbolized body also reflects culture and constructs it. The roughness and shouting in MC culture are reflected in the symbols of the body. In the "MC teaching video", the singer's clothes are randomly covered over the body, the earphone cords are entangled, with a scar on the face, and the camera randomly intercepted half of his forehead. All the randomness and roughness carry MC's cultural information and construct such a Tuwei cultural narrative. Different from the mainstream aesthetics of "appropriate clothes" and "complete lens picture", through this unconventional and differentiated transformation, the body image recognition of MC culture has been improved.

In the "Hometown Introduction" video, the body symbol is more inclined to a mainstream "formal" expression. Foucault (1977) believes that power relations and political models continue to punish the body to consolidate and continue the existing social system. The singer put on a plaid shirt, combed his hair neatly, and used close-up scenes. However, the unfolded shirt and the pouted belly, with the yellow and black hair color, still show the Tuwei temperament and uninhibited MC culture. At the end of the video, a fly landed on the singer's stomach, and there was no editing or shielding in the later period. This also enhanced the authenticity and roughness of the body symbols in this Tuwei culture.

On the whole, the language, sound, and body symbols of these two videos are rough and casual, but their content and emotions are enthusiastic and true, and they all express a deep love for their hometown. Such a strong contrast is a form often used by Tuwei culture. Although the representation is different from mainstream culture, the effect is relatively good from the perspective of user viewing and consumption.

4.3. Netizens and Media Discourse Analysis of the "Cao County" Hashtag

4.3.1. Analysis of Weibo Discourse

Weibo hashtag #曹县是什么意思 (#what is the meaning of Cao County), the topic with the highest amount of reposts, comments, and likes, is based on 8 Cao County memes derived from Cao County.

Type 1. Comparison of the context of Cao County in Chinese cities

"Bei Shang Guang Cao"

"I would rather have a bed in Cao County than a room in Shanghai." (Weibo, 2021)

In type one, netizens' premise is that a keenness to create Internet memes lies in the humour brought about by its strong contrast. Touted the achievements of Cao County is often achieved by comparing Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and other domestic first-tier cities. Not all memes can easily become popular. For example, although the term "Wuhu" often used by gamers has the same sound as a place in Anhui Province, this place is not as popular as Cao County. A closer look at Cao County will reveal that this city has many areas worthy of research and excavation. In recent years, economic development has placed more emphasis on the Internet and young people. In fact, Cao County is one of the largest Internet e-commerce counties with 151 Taobao villages and 17 Taobao towns, most of which are known to sell Han costumes.

Type 2. Comparison of Cao County and the city in the global context

"I am a Cao drifter who has been in Cao County for five years under too much pressure, and I am going back to the countryside in New York."

"Vaguely remember the Cold War between Cao County and the United States in those days."

"Jokes should also be moderate. The real gap between cities must be seen clearly and objectively evaluated. New York has not been able to catch up with Cao County in recent years" (Weibo, 2021).

Similar to Type 1, the humour in Type 2 also comes from strong contrast. The difference is that this time the object of comparison has gone to the world. Since Cao County has joined the global economy, it has a well-known coffin industry exported to Japan. This business is related to the woodcarving tradition of Cao County, coupled with the local richness of paulownia, which fits well with the industry. Today, the output value of coffins exported by Cao County has reached hundreds of millions a year. Locals said that Japan has high requirements for coffins, and all products are made as handicrafts. It can be seen that as more and more netizens have understood the background and industry of Cao County, there has also been more and more creative space. This extended Cao County from the domestic to the global context, creating more and more funny memes on the Internet.

Type 3 Comparison of Cao County in the historical and cultural context

Ancient Rome, Babylon, Ancient India, Ancient China, Ancient Cao County (Weibo, 2021).

In type 3, Cao County is placed in an ancient civilizational context, forming a humorous contrast. It is because Cao County is a historic city. From the order of these ancient civilizations, we can see that netizens are well versed in the laws of exaggeration and humour. By putting "Ancient Cao County" at the end of that meme, following the four well-known ancient civilizations, a strong sense of gap has formed, and this makes people laugh.

Although it is undeniable that the small county seat of Cao County has made efforts to develop, the power gap between the city and the county in the Chinese context, and the ideological difference between the West and the East in the global context, is still huge. Within this context, a lot of ridicule about Cao County carries people's complex emotions towards developed cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. Behind this is the reality of uneven development between cities and villages. For example: "I often feel inferior because I am not a native of Cao county", which expresses people's yearning for developed cities and admiration of local

19

people in the current resource allocation pattern; "Cao County is under too much pressure, and I want to return to my hometown in Shenzhen", it is a reverse expression of the general sentiments of the migrant population, such as the hard work and helplessness of the migrant population in the first-tier cities; "I would rather have a bed in Cao County than a room in Shanghai" is a complaint against the high housing prices in first-tier cities. If the "Cao County" in these memes exchanges the subject status with the developed city and becomes object status, then the funny and interesting meme will instantly become a cruel and ruthless fact. In the ridicule of Cao County, the focus is not this county itself, but the first-tier cities that seem to be trampled on but have never lost their central status. The flattery of small county towns, on the surface, is a more or less entertaining way of seeing the place and affirming the value of the place, but it still reflects the obvious gap between the "center and the periphery" of the city. And these memes reveal people's perpetual longing for developed areas.

In addition, combined with the global environment and the historical background of Cao County, these memes also reflect that the Chinese state is deeply involved in complex global power relations. "I vaguely remember the Cold War between Cao County and the United States in those days." "I am a Cao drifter who has been in Cao County for five years under too much pressure and I am ready to return to the countryside in New York." On the one hand, the United States, as a major global economy, and New York, as the financial capital, are far more developed than Cao County. On the other hand, the recent complicated and tense international relations between China and the United States have also become a topic of constant discussion and ridicule among netizens. In an environment where Chinese media continue to report on China-US relations, New York has become an iconic place imbued with multiple meanings and the subject of irony and ridicule.

On the whole, netizens' creation and admiration of Cao County's meme has won more enthusiasm for Tuwei's call for "Cao County 666" and increased this small Chinese town's Internet exposure. Cao County's own history and development have added rich material to this "memetic creation". The gap between the urban and the rural has also become the usual material for netizens to create contrasts, and to a certain extent, they express their inner thoughts and emotions through the act of creating memes.

4.3.2. Discourse Analysis of Reviews in Mainstream and Local Media

A commentary published by Xinhua News Agency entitled "Reading the Expectation Behind the Cao County, the Center of the Universe" received 13 reposts and multiple views from other media and platforms. Xinhua News Agency, a state-level news media in China, is a "top-stream" platform among mainstream media. The local newspaper Qilu Evening News also promptly followed up on the Internet, and exclusively interviewed the county mayor of Cao County. This article was published in the form of an interview, "Dialogue with the County Mayor of Cao County: We are Thinking about How to Make Cao County Continue to be Popular". These two pieces are illustrative of the attitudes and views of national and local media respectively towards the "Tuwei Cao county meme". At the same time, we can also see how the local government has tried to take advantage of this meme.

Xinhua News Agency's commentary article started with a direct reference to the meme on the Internet. Among them, the two words "cause" and "trigger" indicate that the writing background of this review was triggered by the excessive popularity of the "Tuwei Cao county meme". According to the word frequency statistics of relevant texts, "Cao County", "Internet", "Netizen", "E-commerce" and "Trending" appeared 7 times, 3 times, 3 times, 1 time, and 2 times respectively. Since "Internet", "Netizens", "E-commerce" and "Trending" all belong to the Internet context, it can be seen that this comment mainly revolves around the relationship between Cao County and the Internet. The names of Tiktok and Kwai did not appear in the article. Instead, "short video platform" was used, and the form of "Tuwei MC" was replaced by "Shandong dialect accent". Similarly, the platform used by netizens to spread and consume this culture, such as Weibo, Tiktok, and Kwai, are all replaced by the "Internet". It can be seen that by studying the words related to the "Internet", this research will see media discourse strategies and attitudes towards Tuwei culture.

Table 1   Choice of word collocations related to the subject of "Internet"

	Subject	Collation words
1	Netizen	ridicule
2	The Internet	carnival
3	Netizen	ridicule
4	The Internet	carnival
5	Netizen	ridicule
6	E-commerce	spring up
7	The Internet	carnival
8	Trending	get popular
9	Trending	one-night pop

The subject "The Internet" is mentioned the most in the article. Although media reports deliberately conceal the names of Tuwei culture and Internet-related platforms in strategy, the mainstream media's attitude towards it can still be seen from the choice of words connected to it.

According to the above table, the commentary chose the words "ridicule" and "carnival" to match "netizens" and "Internet" in a neater way. First of all, the "ridicule" follows "netizens". The meaning of it in the Chinese context refers to "verbal teasing", which is mostly a mocking attitude. Secondly, after "carnival" is once matched with "Internet", the phrase "online carnival" is borrowed from Bakhtin's "carnival theory", which refers to the phenomenon of "the clamour of sentient beings" in the virtual world of the network. The discourse strategy of this review is for netizens to create a "Tuwei popular meme". It is natural and reasonable to think that the attitude of all netizens towards the "Cao County meme" is a teasing and mocking attitude. The behaviors that have become popular on the Internet are "carnival " behaviors. Therefore, this discourse can be seen that although the mainstream media no longer criticizes and scrutinizes "Cao County in Tuwei Culture", they still use discourse strategies to associate it with negative words. In other words, this kind of popularity on the Internet is not a good thing in the absolute sense, so everyone needs to understand the "expectations behind it" to make up for the shortcomings.

However, not all word statistics related to the Internet are negative. Most of the narratives about the use of the Internet in county towns are encouraging and positive. The vocabulary that accompanies "E-commerce" and "Trending" is "spring up", "get popular", and "one-night pop", respectively. Among them, "spring up" means relatively rising or protruding, and it means "later-comer wins". Here is a more positive expression.

The article talks about the use of the "spring up" when Cao County uses the Internet to develop business, which implies an attitude of encouragement and appreciation for the county's good use of the Internet for its own development. In addition, with regard to the verb collocation of "Trending" on the Internet, commentary discourse tends to choose neutral words such as "get popular" and "one-night pop". Whether it is on the Weibo platform or Tiktok and Kwai, trending on the Internet will be related to the re-creation of the Tuwei culture of netizens. When talking about the outlook for the development of Cao County, the article did not choose words with negative emotions as before, but used the result of "trending" to encourage the development of the county.

The exclusive report of the Qilu Evening News has three main parts: response to "Tuwei Trending", "Cao County's Background and Foundation", and "Cao County's Future Development". Unlike Xinhua News Agency's commentary, Qilu Evening News asked the county mayor in a question-and-answer mode, "What is the reaction to the memes?" and "Which meme is the most interesting?". Compared to Xinhua News Agency's attitude towards "Tuwei Cao county meme", her answer is more neutral or even more optimistic. "There is not much malice" and "both positive and ridicule" are the main answers of the county mayor. "Not much malice" was the county mayor's first reaction when she saw the "Tuwei Cao County meme". It is an expression worth examining because people often respond in direct ways such as "good" and "positive" or "malicious" and "negative" when faced with questions. Positive expressions such as "no malice" can often be seen as an opposite attitude towards the event. It can be seen that the mainstream's long-term "maliciousness" towards "Internet Trending" makes people more inclined to associate negatively with it. However, the mayor of Cao County's face-to-face response and the belief that "even ridicule is also an expectation of netizens" shows that although Cao County has a huge gap with the large cities of "Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou", it reflects "a sense of pride in the hometown".

Before analyzing social practice, we usually think that news reports, as a typical form of "text and practice", tend to speak for politics. Through the use of various discourse strategies, a point of view, proposition, and worldview is repeatedly demonstrated or promoted in a socialized, suggestive and explicit manner. People gradually accept and recognize this concept of identity and the corresponding model of identity and interest (Almond, 2007). From the above analysis, it can be seen that mainstream media reviews have a clear purpose and strategy for presenting Internet

identity subjects. The review of Xinhua News Agency focused on the description in Cao County and tended to inspire the development of county-level units. Among different narrative discourses, this article has subtle changes in its attitude towards the Internet, a social and cultural practice full of subjective construction. Not only that, the article's suggestions for the future development of Cao County also reflect the mainstream and official views on the development of the county. In order to discover how this exclusive interview tends to narrate its own future development, this study has counted the modal verbs in the last two paragraphs in order to analyze them visually.

Table 2   Use of modal verbs in Xinhua News

	Speech	Modal verb	Degree
1	Cao County is booming on the internet, and we should understand the public expectations behind it.	should	moderate
2	To realize rural revitalization, ..., we must find the path of character development.	must	strong
3	Taking development as the main theme can counterattack. Let small counties also have the strength of hot search.	can; let	moderate
4	County economy..., only by opening can release more energy.	can	moderate
5	Rather than "a Trending overnight", Cao County must think about how to develop steadily.	must	strong

The narrative logic presented in the table is: the development of the county seat of Cao County needs to implement the "rural revitalization" policy and find a path for characteristic development. The narrative of this paragraph responds to the title and responds to the development of the county. For the dissemination and application of ideology and worldview in news reports, critical discourse analysis not only explains how power relations in discourse practice restrict and control production, but also clarifies how the structure of discourse practice constructs hegemony.

Similarly, Xinhua News Agency's comments started from Cao County and ended up guiding the county's development. Here, for the construction of subject and object, Cao County's identity is transformed into an object. The relative social positions of counties and cities, localities and the central government pre-determine the relationships among these groups. Therefore, power is recognized as a result of objectification, and the government and mainstream media have become a natural and irreproachable powerful group. Cao County's own development also possesses the power of both subjective and objective identities, but the narrative in the article uses a stronger modal verb to narrate. For example, " We must find the path of characteristic development";

"taking development as the main theme can counterattack". Under such a strong narrative, the mainstream media gave the standard answer on behalf of the government, which shows that Cao County has become an object in the county's development policy.

Cao County's own closeness to the Internet is that their development and fame are related to the Internet. In the "future development" segment in the interview manuscript of the Qilu Evening News article, the county mayor naturally talked about county economic development. Compared with the strong attitude of Xinhua News Agency, the county mayor's narrative points out that "Cao County is a populous county, and talents are the key", and it is coordinated with the "investment policy and talent introduction policy" to promote development. The county mayor's answer puts "low costs of starting a business and low cost of living" as the focus of emphasis. In doing so, the mayor has managed to achieve a reversal of discursive power by defining urban disease as that of "the other", while championing Cao County's advantages as a desirable place for business and living, with Internet popularity and a newly achieved subjectivity.

Overall, although the mainstream media does not have a positive attitude toward Tuwei trending, they still borrow the popularity of Tuwei culture and participate in hashtag discussions to realize the practice of power when guiding the development of the county to follow the "rural revitalization" policy. Besides, the local media seized the opportunity in this Tuwei trend to realize their own "county economy" as the main body of development, and the popularity on the Internet has made the county known throughout the country.

Chapter 5.

Understanding Tuwei: Tuwei Culture in the Deep Power Relations

5.1. "Rejuvenation" of Tuwei: A Strategy for the Revitalization of Rural China

Tuwei culture has undergone a process of being criticized and then gradually "redeemed". This phenomenon is deeply connected with the mainstream attitude towards the rural background of Tuwei culture. China has a background of a dichotomy between urban and rural development. Different development plans for urban and rural areas have historically established a political and economic power hierarchy. The Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen have been pilots for market reforms since the 1980s and have received political and economic support to a large extent that is not available to other regions. For example, Shenzhen has developed from a small fishing village with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of only 1.96 million CNY in 1965 to a first-tier city with a GDP of 500 billion CNY in 2005 due to unprecedented support from the central government (Tam, 2017). In addition, due to the process of urbanization in China, the household registration management system strictly divides urban and rural household registration. Furthermore, since 1958, there have been policy restrictions on rural to urban migration (Chan & Zhang, 1999). Foucault (1977/1995) argues that a regime of truth emerges when "a corpus of knowledge, techniques, 'scientific' discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power" (p. 23). In other words, truth is constructed by a specific knowledge system through the practice of power or knowledge power. China's political economy has long caused the unbalanced development of urban and rural areas and created a hierarchical regime of truth in favor of urban areas. Under this background, rapidly developing cities have accumulated more economic capital and political power and formed a city-led culture. Economic reforms centred on big cities and the household registration system have created a strong bias against rural areas and small counties such as Cao County.

However, the criticism of Tuwei's cultural evaluation system becomes loose, which means that the rural landscape represented by Tuwei is once again hopeful of

getting rid of criticism, partly because of the concern for rural development. In other words, the rural area gradually grasped the subjective power of development amid favorable changes in policies, which promoted the popularity of Tuwei culture. In December 2017, Xi Jinping emphasized that rural revitalization must reshape the relationship between urban and rural areas in the rural work conference. Adhere to the priority development of agriculture and rural areas and the dominant status of farmers (Xinhuanet, 2017). Regarding the mainstream attitude towards Tuwei culture, on the one hand, in the "truth" system proposed by Foucault, the countryside is no longer a place of low-brow cultural production. On the other hand, not only the political and economic aspects, but also the strengthening of cultural construction and ecological civilization construction has made rural culture no longer representative of backwardness. For example, Shanxian County of Shandong Province, through the development of eco-cultural tourism resorts, highlights the development of eco-cultural tourism and achieves good regional development. In fact, as discussed in Chapter 3, the mainstream discourse has become more moderate in attitudes towards Tuwei culture since 2018.

Not only the mainstream policy itself, but also the development of the countryside has gained more autonomy and has gradually become the main body of its own development. The county economy mentioned in the commentary article of Xinhua News Agency is a regional economy with the county-level government as the main body of regulation, with regional characteristics and complete functions. The county itself has full independent development power, and it is easier to locate its own characteristics for rapid development. In interviews with local media, the county mayor of Cao County first expressed her positive attitude towards the Tuwei meme on the Internet. Subsequently, the characteristics of its own economy can relieve the pressure of the city to cultivate the characteristics of the county, using its own "Internet presence" and "policy of being close to the people" to become its main identity. The Tuwei culture represented by the countryside has become a tool for the mainstream to approach the countryside to maintain its own policy operation (truth), and it has also become a tool for the countryside to express themselves and promote economic development.

If the long-term unbalanced urban-rural development is the prerequisite for the rural area to be defined as a representative of low-brow culture. As the urban-dominated truth system undergoes policy changes and conscious inclination, the countryside itself will be supported by policy and this autonomy will lead to its own development as a

subject. In other words, the mainstream uses Tuwei culture to achieve policy guidance, and local media and groups use this culture to achieve the development of their own subjectivities.

5.2. "Sharing" of Tuwei: The Integrated Strategy of the City in China

The previous section applied Foucault's theory of truth to explain why Tuwei would be revived. In this section, I use Stuart Hall's term as the regime of difference to explain that Tuwei culture has changed from the past of consumption and viewing by a single group to a situation shared by urban and rural areas. The first issue that needs to be solved is discovering the subject that defines the concept of vulgarity. When a dominant cultural order is established, there will be a hierarchical system that reflects this rural and urban historical and cultural construction because the meaning of culture is assigned to different positions in the cultural system to reflect. Therefore, the marking of 'difference' is the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture" (Hall, 1997, pp. 329-330). By re-appropriating and clarifying Tuwei's representative system, the mainstream media successfully defined Tuwei as something different from what should be regarded as the mainstream—according to *People's Daily*, mainstream culture is a white-collar, middle-class "elegant" lifestyle (Ma, 2017). Classes and intellectuals have become the main body representing popular culture on major media and social media platforms (Ma, 2017). Media discourse categorizes Tuwei culture as rural and culturally low, and at the same time, strengthens the historical and cultural inertia of the region.

However, under the historical background of the dichotomy of urban and rural development in China, the rapid development of cities has also brought about development problems, which make citizens feel the burden of life. Among many first-tier cities, housing, education and commodity prices are the primary sources of public life pressure (Wang, 2019). Like the Weibo meme analyzed in Chapter 4, "I would rather have a bed in Cao County than a house in Shanghai" is an accusation against the high housing prices in first-tier cities. With the high pressure of urban life, urban development has transformed the development mode of mega-cities and promoted urbanization with county towns as an important carrier (Development and Reform Commission, 2021). It can be seen that, as a combination of urban and rural areas, county towns have become an important area to promote the integrated development of urban and rural areas.

Moreover, it is also a creative area where Tuwei culture continues to emerge. Under the guidance of new policies, the high-level and low-level "differences" created by the Tuwei culture are gradually shrinking for those continuously established cultural orders with "asset and elegant life" as the high-level.

In addition, with the accelerated pace of high-pressure urban life, high-level culture has continuously encouraged the mainstream media to mass-produce and mimic. In the field of social media, short videos based on middle-class aesthetics feature beautiful composition, smooth editing, and elegant music. However, under the fast-paced pursuit of profit by capital, the deliberate pursuit of "perfection" not only makes cultural products excessively standardized and homogenous, but also makes cultural works lose their authenticity and charm. The audience's enthusiastic participation in rustic and even some rough Cao County memes reflect their love of this type of culture to a certain extent. Other industries that have observed this phenomenon has also used Tuwei cultural elements to express the concept of "close to the people." On the whole, in order to relieve the pressure of urban life itself and balance the homogenization of mainstream culture, urban-based mainstream culture is incorporating the elements of Tuwei. This brought about changes in the positionality of Tuwei culture at the bottom of the Chinese cultural order.

5.3. "Carnival" of Tuwei: Mutual Achievement of Platform Capital and Tuwei Culture

Combined with the Xinhua News Agency commentary in Chapter 4, the mainstream media in China describe the popularity of Tuwei culture on the Internet platform in a way that is reflective Bakhtin's carnival theory. In each hashtag on the short video platform, a bantering carnival is carried out on any subject through the way of universalization. In such a field, people from the bottom and the top have realized a brief dialogue of equality and freedom. In a sense, the carnival constitutes a temporary second world (Guan, 2016).

Through the encouragement of capital, the short video platform has promoted the creative enthusiasm of users, and it has also completed the accumulation of capital. The rules of short video platforms to encourage creation have escalated the popularity of Tuwei culture. As discussed in Chapter 3, live streaming and e-commerce have become

a way to obtain capital. In this context, accumulating a large number of audiences and popularity has become a prerequisite for profit realization. Any phenomenon can become a hashtag on its platform, and netizens can participate in it by publishing short videos. There is a symbiotic relationship between the popularity of the topic and the number of video views. Therefore, such a model can allow a large number of users to participate in discussions and productions and become part of the Tuwei culture in the hashtag. As popularity becomes a snowball, it rolls bigger and bigger. However, under the promotion of commercialization, the content of short videos has gradually appeared stylized and homogenized. The characteristics of production make every short video producer want to share the benefits of popularity, but they are losing creativity in the process of creation.

The development of the short video platform itself makes it more willing to participate in the discussion and development of Tuwei culture. In the user portraits of the short video platform in Chapter 3, it is found that, whether it is Kwai or Tiktok, the composition of users is becoming similar. This trend has led to the homogenization of different positionalities across platforms. Constantly creating topics, attracting, and cultivating key opinion leaders, the number of users is gradually increasing. Because of the popularity of some MC singers, Kwai signed with them at a very high price. However, this culture was subsequently criticized and banned by the mainstream, leading Kwai to terminate cooperation with this singer and introduce strict regulations. Nowadays, the Cao County hashtag, which ranks at the top of the two hot topics of Kwai and Tiktok, still exists in the form of MC. It can be seen that the platform does not pay much attention to the representation of culture, but is more concerned about the commercial value it can bring. Therefore, as short video platforms use Tuwei culture to accumulate its wealth, it also enables this culture to become trendy and gain further exposure.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

This research project explored the changing status of Tuwei culture through the growing popularity of the Cao County hashtag on short video platforms to understood the development status of cities and villages in China. In mapping the changes in Tuwei's connotation over time, it discovered that Tuwei culture has changed from being criticized by the mainstream to being appropriated and incorporated by China's cultural order. It also explains the operating mechanisms of Tiktok and Kwai, the two social media platforms that have played pivotal roles in promoting Tuwei culture today. Specifically, these mechanisms include the combined content of UGC and PGC, the recommendation of each user through algorithms, and the ability to accumulate wealth through the production of short videos and live streaming. As indicated in the analysis, the narratives of today's Tuwei short video display rough but real, casual but enthusiastic characteristics. To a certain extent, these characteristics are different from the aesthetics of mainstream culture. The creation and discussion of memes by netizens on Sina Weibo reflect the developmental characteristics of the county itself, but also reveal the phenomenon of creating huge contrasting memes to release netizens' pressure from urban life. Xinhua News Agency and local newspapers' comments on this hashtag show that both mainstream media and local media are paying attention to the once criticized culture itself and using the popularity of this culture to practice and perform their discursive power.

In order to better understand the reasons why many parties have discussed Tuwei culture, the background of China's urban-rural dichotomy and related new policies have been discussed. First of all, as a result of China's long standing urban-rural dichotomy, some cities have been developed first to form first-tier cities. The fast-growing cities and the slow-developing rural areas have formed a significant economic gap, which has led policymakers to put forward the strategy of "rural revitalization." Tuwei culture represented by the countryside has become a tool for the mainstream to approach the countryside to maintain its policy operation (truth), and it has also become a tool for rural areas expressing themselves and promoting economic development. Secondly, the development of first-tier cities will also bring pressure to citizens, making

the differentiated performance of the Tuwei culture more suitable for ordinary people to express their emotions and get rid of the burden of long-term urban life pressure. Finally, the operating rules of the short video platform and the high participation of ordinary users have made many users willing to try to create capital accumulation, and the competition of the platform also makes them consciously let the Tuwei topic on the list to attract users.

In summation, the popularity of Tuwei culture is formed by the discussion and participation of netizens, mainstream media, and local media. Different authorities are using the Tuwei culture to complete the practice of their own truth system, which makes the position of Tuwei culture in the cultural order not as undisputedly regarded as low-brow as it used to be. In addition, many people of different professions in China are entering the world of the Internet because of short videos, and they have the opportunity to be seen by everyone. The narratives and scenes of Tuwei culture are enough to represent the true state of most people in China. Because the hometown invokes every user's emotional connection, the moderate roughness and randomness reflect the truth of the content. Today Tuwei culture is no longer the object of criticism, nor is it condemned to the bottom of China's cultural order. It is forming a new position, representing everyone who is working hard to live.

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