Short Video as a Weapon: Strategies and Dissemination of Social Mobilization on Douyin

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Abstract

This thesis applies Thomas Harding's concept of video activism and focuses on the videos using the hashtag *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum* on the Douyin platform, exploring the use of short videos as tools of video activism in social mobilization. The short drama Escape from the British Museum was selected as a case study to empirically research how short videos mobilize public participation in cultural preservation movements. The thesis is divided into three main parts: first, it analyzes how strategies such as ritual of communication, identity by antithesis, metaphorical rhetoric, and collective memory are used in the short drama to facilitate social mobilization; second, it describes the data collection and coding processes; finally, through a content analysis of video content, auditory and visual elements, emotions, and dissemination effects, the mechanisms by which short videos stimulate public emotions and actions are revealed. The result of the content analysis highlights different types of background music aligning with the emotions conveyed in the videos, where inspirational music typically enhances positive emotions, and sad music intensifies negative ones. The study further notes that the duration of videos is carefully tailored to their thematic needs. Influencers contribute to the campaign's reach and impact in this social mobilization. The case of *Escape from the British Museum* sparked extensive social discussion and underscored the significant research value of video activism in addressing broader societal issues. Future research could expand on this foundation, exploring video activism's impact on more common societal concerns.

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Introduction

In August 2023, the *Global Times* issued an editorial formally requesting the British Museum to return all Chinese cultural relics acquired through improper channels to China at no cost (Global Times, 2023). This editorial reflects a common demand among China and other nations affected by cultural plundering, illustrating the strong desire of the Chinese people for the repatriation of their cultural heritage. In the context of this, Douyin influencer JianbingGuoZai (Jianbing) produced a series of short dramas titled *Escape from the British Museum* to enhance the dissemination effectiveness and highlight the demand of the Chinese people. It is a three-episode fantasy online short drama. The first episode premiered on Douyin on August 30, 2023, and the series concluded on September 5 of the same year, totaling 17 minutes in length. The production team consisted of only four people: Jianbing, the director and the actor who played the Chinese journalist; Xiatian, who portrayed the jade pot; and two assistants. They together created this high-quality short drama. By this short drama, Jianbing and his team mobilized public participation in the action advocating for the return of Chinese cultural relics. These videos not only represent an example of video activism but also echo the collective appeal of the Chinese populace.

According to the Chinese National Radio and Television Administration (2022), short drama is defined as "a series with episodes lasting from a few seconds to about 15 minutes, featuring a relatively clear theme, and a continuous and complete plot." As an emerging form of film and television, short dramas have advantages and influence on social media platforms. The widespread availability of smartphones has lowered the barriers to creation, making short dramas a form of content expression that everyone can participate in, creating a vast potential pool of creators. Additionally, the development of short video platforms has greatly facilitated interaction between creators and audiences, from inspiration and creation to

dissemination and discussion. Short dramas are a collaborative outcome between creators and audiences. *Escape from the British Museum* is a typical example. It defined its theme through interaction with users, breaking away from popular TV drama themes and unfolding its plot around the loss and return of cultural artifacts. It expands its reach and impact through interactive communication, allowing for real-time discussion and plot interpretation with viewers, helping them better understand the content and strengthening emotional connections.

Jianbing stated that their original intention for creating this short drama was to contribute their modest efforts in this era of rapidly developing information, to awaken everyone's memories with their video work, and to bring cultural artifacts back home (Zhang, 2023). Similar to previously successful cases of online activism, they all take social media as a platform for mobilization. Advancements in information technology have transformed how people access and engage with information. This extends not only to various multimedia forms, including text, images, audio, and video but also to expanded opportunities for expressing opinions and engaging in social interactions (Nandwani & Verma, 2021). Platforms like Douyin and TikTok are recognized not merely as venues for popular culture and trends, but also as pivotal platforms for social justice activism, particularly in the United States (Haslem, 2022). Douyin has become an important platform for activism.

What distinguishes Douyin from other social media platforms is its content is primarily video, especially short videos. The brevity of these videos allows for effective use of users' fragmented time and captures their attention efficiently (Liu et al., 2022). The method of engaging in social mobilization through video content can refer to video activism, a concept proposed by Harding (2001), who asserts that video activism uses videos as a tactical tool to promote social justice and environmental protection. This thesis examines the practice of social mobilization through Douyin short videos from the perspective of video

activism, conducting both a case study of the short drama *Escape From The British Museum* and content analysis on videos tagged with *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum*, aiming to provide insights into the mobilization strategies of short video and their dissemination effects.

Background

The short drama *Escape from the British Museum* released its first episode on August 30, followed by the second and third episodes on August 31 and September 5. Centered on the theme of the return of Chinese cultural relics housed in the British Museum, the short drama conveys the sorrow of these artifacts being stranded abroad and the pain of their inability to return home. The history of the country being violated and cultural relics being plundered has always been a grief memory for the Chinese people (Kraus, 2009). The short drama reveals the British Museum's indifference and encroachment towards Chinese cultural artifacts, sparking audience attention and calls for the return of these artifacts lost overseas to their homeland. The *BBC* noted that the short drama evoked a strong resonance among viewers for the repatriation of cultural relics (Cai, 2023). A mix of sadness and anger has risen among the viewers. User @83538092249 commented: "In the British Museum, they are merely numbered items, but to us, they represent the ancestors of an era. As each stroke and dot they paint or carve, they also etch them into the lineage of future generations. What we cherish is not their exquisite appearance, nor their unattainable value, but that they come from China, they depict their own stories to us, and they convey the spirit of our ancestors. We weep for their inability to return home, for their existence in a foreign land, for the grievances they hold in our hearts. A cup of turbid wine for a journey of thousands of miles, the mountains and rivers await your return."

Screenshot 1

Comment by User @83538092249

无道

在大英博物馆中，它们拥有的只是编号，但在我们的眼里，它们是那个时代的祖辈，在为它们一笔一划一勾一点时，却也同时刻入后人血脉，我们喜欢的并非那精美的外貌，并非那高不可攀的价值，仅是它们来于华夏，它们以身向我们描绘那份它的故事，它们传我们传递祖辈的精神，我们泣，泣它们的无法归家，泣它们流于异地，泣它们存于心中委屈，浊酒一杯万里路，山河永盛待君归 收起

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This short drama's significance lies in its artistic representation of the plight of cultural relics abroad and in building up Chinese national sentiments. The repatriation of cultural relics is a serious topic where traditional videos tend to directly present the historical facts experienced by the artifacts to the audience, trying to stimulate patriotic feelings and drawing attention to the return of national artifacts. However, *Escape from the British Museum* takes a different approach by tenderly addressing this serious topic: it breaks away from traditional expressions by combining narrative storytelling with rhetorical metaphors, presenting the plight of Chinese cultural artifacts abroad to the audience. Through humor and touching scenes, the short drama displays the interactions and conflicts between cultural artifacts and people, allowing the audience to experience the emotions and connections between artifacts and humans amid laughter and tears. Coincidentally, just a few days before the trailer was released, a theft scandal broke out at the British Museum. A large number of precious artifacts went missing, drawing global attention and prompting several countries to demand the return of their cultural relics from the museum (Dafoe, 2023).

According to the British Museum reports, on August 16, 2023, a collection of small pieces, stored at the British Museum for academic and research purposes and not recently displayed, was stolen (The British Museum, 2023). These artifacts included gold jewelry,

gemstones, and glass items dating from the 15th century BC to the 19th century AD. Established in 1753, the British Museum is one of the world's most-visited museums. (The British Museum, n.d.) Among its vast collection are over 2,000 Chinese cultural relics, displayed long-term, ranging from the Western Zhou dynasty to the Ming and Qing dynasties, including bronzes, porcelains, murals, and paintings. On August 26, George Osborne, chairman of trustees of the British Museum, stated that it was still unclear how many items were missing, estimating approximately 2,000, though he noted this is a provisional figure. Museum director Hartwig Fischer resigned on August 25, acknowledging that the institution did not take the proper actions regarding the artifacts. The day after the announcement of Fischer's resignation, the trailer for *Escape from the British Museum* was released.

According to Newrank (2023), the first episode of E*scape from the British Museum* garnered 7.94 million likes on Douyin within seven days of its release, and the eponymous hashtag exceeded one billion views in just five days. To date, the three episodes have amassed over 430 million views on Douyin[1], with the associated hashtag *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum* reaching 2.23 billion views[2]. Following the release of the third episode on September 5, topics such as *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseumFina*l rapidly ascended into the top ten trending topics on Douyin. During the drama's release, the British Museum was facing a crisis of artifact theft, and the audience, connecting the plot with current events, felt an even more urgent need for the museum to return the artifacts.

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[1] Jianbingguozai. (2023, August 30). Escape from the British Museum, episode one [Video]. Douyin. Retrieved Jan 18, 2024, from https://www.douyin.com/video/7272961291529030912
[2] Douyin. (n.d.). #EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum. Retrieved January 18, 2024, from https://www.douyin.com/hashtag/1755910567894093

The short drama has sparked a widespread online movement of secondary creation, propelling the hashtag *#EscapefromtheBritishMuseum* into a heated discussion. Douyin users actively responded to this call, creating a surge of internet-based video activism. Douyin influencer Xiangxiang created a video titled "Restoration of Tang figurines," depicting artifacts in distress and longing for their homeland, which received over 791,000 likes[3]. Similarly, the DIY influencer LuoCheng replicated a Yuan Dynasty blue and white vase with the dragon pattern housed in the British Museum using cake, in support of the call for repatriation. This response video on Douyin has garnered over 742,000 likes[4].

Escape from the British Museum became a hit not only due to its entertainment but also because of its profound emotional resonance and the cultural values it has expressed. Using video as a tool for activism that conveys emotions and content, has awakened viewers to reflect on cultural heritage and stimulated cultural confidence and national sentiment.

Video activism

Video activism originated in the 1960s as part of media activism. This form of activism employs films and videos as tools for social mobilization (Harding, 2001). Sonza (2018) identifies that video activism can aid Native Americans in their quest for self-identity and sovereignty. As a mobilization for promoting social justice and reform, video activism varies in its goals, methods, and outcomes. However, its commonality lies in identifying and contemplating issues through civic action. Activists use the production, distribution, and screening of video works as means of consciousness awakening, capacity building, and

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[3] Xiangxiang de Xiangxiang. (2023, August 29). Restoration of Tang Figurines [Video]. Douyin. Retrieved Jan 19, 2024, from https://www.douyin.com/video/7272926198387248399

[4] Laoban LuoCheng. (2023, August 30). Together, Waiting for Them to Come Home! [Video]. Douyin. Retrieved Jan 19, 2024, from https://www.douyin.com/video/7273048172774149410

empowering the public. Through the process of video production, they seek to gain support and foster positive social change.

Scholars generally agree on the significant role of video in mobilizing social movements through media. Hermida and Hernández-Santaolalla (2018) emphasize the empowering role of Twitter and video activism, offering an alternative journalistic perspective on police violence during social protests in Spain. Chanan (2012) underlines the influential role of Web video in activism, noting its capacity to stir public sentiment and influence political events. Askanius (2012) explores how video is innovatively utilized in social movements to merge mourning and tribute with witnessing and evidence production, thereby influencing social change. Yu (2021) observes that Chinese consumers effectively use short videos to attract media and government attention to their concerns.

However, video activism does not always possess a high degree of influence. Treréand Yu (2021) notes that the impact of hybrid video consumer activism varies, depending on the mobilization of social, cultural, and economic capital. Although there are varying conclusions about the impact of video activism on social mobilization, scholars generally agree that videos remain a powerful tool for disseminating information and mobilizing public action.

Social mobilization

In the previous literature, there is no unified definition of social mobilization. Deutsch (1961) defines it as a process of change, which includes the evolution of needs for new patterns of group affiliation and new conceptions of personal identity. The World Health Organization (2008) describes social mobilization as "the process of bringing together allies to raise awareness of and demand for a particular programme" (p. 168).

Rogers et al. (2018) define it as an effort to mobilize many people to perform behaviors. Providing a space beyond the traditional mass media controlled by authorities, Tang (2018) believes that the emergence of social media has facilitated social mobilization. The inclusion of social media has changed the definition of traditional social mobilization. To analyze the different degrees to which social media promotes participation in online mobilization, Cardoso et al. (2016) define social mobilization as "one particular dimension of political participation." They consider "liking" to be the lightest form of engagement, followed by commenting and posting content.

In summary, this thesis concludes that social mobilization is a process in which values and attitudes shift toward unity under the influence of certain social factors. It involves establishing dialogue across various social strata and building partnerships (World Health Organization, 2008). During communication, mass media plays a role in establishing channels (Short, 1992). Social media is a strategic method for activism (Chon & Park, 2019), and the use of social media has enhanced civic engagement in political behaviors (Boulianne, 2015). Given the internet's characteristics—its rapid dissemination of information with less geographical limitations, and its broad coverage—digital social mobilization reaches a wider audience (Bestvater & Loyle, 2023). The internet provides an open platform for audiences, thereby reducing the limitations on digital social mobilization.

Method

This thesis employs a case study method to examine the mobilization strategies of the short drama *Escape from the British Museum* on Douyin and a content analysis of videos posted with the hashtag *#Escape from the British Museum*.

Case Study

This thesis takes the *Escape from the British Museum* series of short drama as the subject of the case study. The series consists of three episodes. The first episode was released on August 30th; the second episode was released on August 31st; and the third episode was released on September 5th. Due to the limited number of episodes, all three episodes were chosen for analysis to interpret the mobilization strategies of the short drama through rhetorical methods, collective memory construction, and plot design.

Content Analysis

Douyin serves as one of the primary platforms for the dissemination of and interaction with the drama. A hashtag named after the drama, *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum*, was created. Under this hashtag, users actively posted videos, with a total of 52,300 authors contributing content to date. The time frame for this study spans from August 30 to September 12. Within this time frame, any short videos that were deleted are excluded. From all the videos that could be collected, those in the top 10% daily in terms of likes were selected as samples. Thus, the total sample size is 420. Two coders encoded the sample videos. Videos that are irrelevant to the topic, not able to be visible, or that have commercial intentions were considered invalid samples. The results of the content analysis are used to discuss the dissemination content and effects of the hashtagged short videos, analyzing the most common content types and the relationship between content and effects.

Structure

The main content of the thesis includes three parts: mobilization strategies, dissemination content, and dissemination effects. The first chapter explores how the video conveys issues of cultural heritage protection to the public and fosters cultural identity. This section serves

as the starting point of the research. The second chapter establishes the methods for

collecting and encoding data, such as video content, emotion, and the number of likes,

setting the stage for the analysis in the subsequent chapter. The third chapter analyzes video

dissemination content and its effects through content analysis. It examines and summarizes

the methods and impacts of public participation in discussions on social topics, providing

insights into the dynamics of social engagement through video content.

Chapter 1: From Videos to Action: Mobilization Strategies in *Escape from the British Museum*

The short drama *Escape from the British Museum* was jointly created and produced by popular influencers JianBingGuoZai(Jianbing) and XiaTianMeiMei (Xiatian). The creators aimed to use this miniseries to awaken public interest and respect towards Chinese cultural relics and to advocate for the British Museum's prompt return of these artifacts to China. Following fervent calls for updates from numerous fans, the series concluded at the end of summer 2023, achieving over one hundred million views. Why have seemingly simply produced Douyin short videos succeeded in breaking through in a significant cultural discourse? And why has there been an unusually focused attention on what seems like distant and substantial cultural relics? This chapter aims to discuss the strategies that made the short drama succeed in mobilizing.

The Origin of the Video, "Wait for Me"

Since the first episode of *Escape from the British Museum* aired on Douyin, it has continuously sparked widespread discussion across the internet and received widespread praise from both official media and the public. The discussion about the return of cultural artifacts gained momentum in early 2023 when Douyin user HeXiangBeiBetty posted a one-minute video of her visit to the British Museum[5]. Visiting during the Chinese New Year, she reflected on the artifacts as parts of China that were lost, saying that they must also long for home during a time for family reunion. Sharing her emotions as a Chinese visitor seeing these artifacts.

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[5] HeXiangBeiBetty. (2023, January 21). They say: "China's best cultural relics are all in the British Museum." They must miss home during family reunions [Video]. Douyin. Retrieved Jan 26, 2024, from https://www.douyin.com/video/7191282982315969830

In her comment, a user suggested creating a short drama about the artifacts turning into humans and returning to their homeland, titled *Escape from the British Museum.* Upon seeing this comment, Jianbing immediately replied: "Wait for me." Since then, the creators paused their updates for three months to conduct extensive research and traveled to the UK for shooting (JianbingGuozai, 2023). The trailer for the series was released on August 27, and the series officially premiered on August 30.

Screenshot 2

The short video by HeXiangBeiBetty
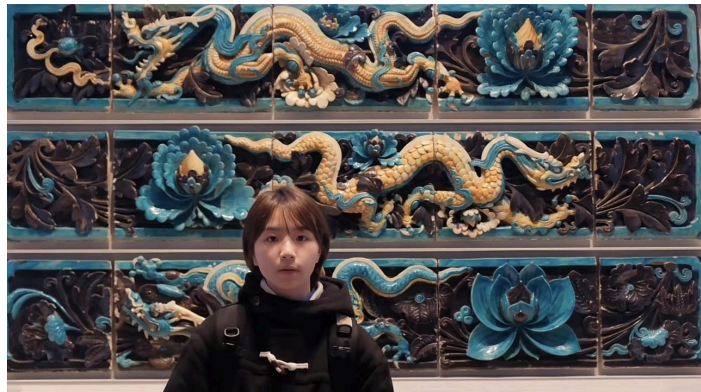
Screenshot 3

JianBing's comment: "Wait for me"

In the drama, Xiatian portrays a jade pot that transforms into human form and escapes from the British Museum, while Jianbing plays a Chinese journalist, Zhang. Their chance encounter on the streets of England sets off a fantastical journey of returning home. At first, Zhang does not believe the jade pot's claims that she was the lost jade pot. However, as the

plot unfolds, he gradually comes to believe that the girl insisting on returning to China is indeed an artifact housed in the British Museum: the thin-bodied jade pot with a Chinese branching pattern.

The jade pot featured was not looted from China during times of war but was crafted in 2011 by the artist Yu Ting and was acquired by the British Museum in 2017. The creators explained that the choice of the jade pot as the protagonist was because the British Museum has scant information and images of many Chinese artifacts. This particular jade pot was sent to the UK to promote Chinese culture and prove that Chinese jade carving techniques had not been lost. Its provenance and age are the clearest, and to quote a viewer, "She was not plundered, she remembers the way home." (Zhang, 2023). Her return to China was for a specific mission. She needed to help those artifacts still confined in the British museum, unable to return home, to deliver the letters they had written back to their homeland. After successfully returning to China, the jade pot visited several Chinese museums, reading the letters aloud to their family members—the artifacts akin to siblings. This moment, where the touching content of the letters moved the audience to tears, is the climax of the drama. Having this mission completed, the jade pot resolutely returned to the British Museum. Saying that she is waiting for the Chinese artifacts to be brought back rightfully. The three-episode series vividly conveys the artifacts longing to return home, reflecting people's hopes for the repatriation of cultural artifacts. CCTV highly praised *Escape from the British Museum* for touching people's hearts and resonating with reality (Movie News [CCTV 6], 2023).

Explored audience reaction to this short drama by searching *EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum* on Weibo, where many users expressed being moved to tears after watching the series:

User 1: "Why am I not watching *Escape from the British Museum* until just now? [crying] It made me cry so much [crying]"

User 2: "*Escape from the British Museum* made me cry to death"

User 3: "I watched the third episode of *Escape from the British Museum* while eating, and I cried as I ate"

Some users expressed their appreciation for the short drama :

User4: "The idea of *Escape from the British Museum* is absolutely brilliant"

User5: "This short drama is really meaningful"

User6: "It's really good, although very short, it's incredibly moving"

Other users mentioned their willingness to share the short drama with more people:

User 7: "Today, I watched *Escape from the British Museum* with my class. I loved the final part the most: 'We belong to a great nation, and Chinese people do not engage in petty theft. One day, we will return home gloriously!'"

User 8: "I must find an opportunity to show the children *Escape from the British Museum*!"

User 9: "After class, I showed my students *Escape from the British Museum*"

Despite some users criticizing the plot as cliche, the overall reaction from users was positive.

Four Strategies to Drive Video Mobilization

Through the analysis of Douyin short drama *EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum*, this research indicates that Douyin is becoming an important platform for the dissemination of historical and cultural topics, establishing a cultural community identity and an interactive communication model. This method of communication not only enhances the dissemination effect of cultural identity emotions but also generates a profound resonance on both

emotional and cognitive levels. It helps in shaping collective memory and value identification, ultimately achieving the goals of cultural identity and video activism. This thesis underscores the strategic use of narrative techniques and emotional engagement in digital platforms to foster cultural awareness and encourage active participation in cultural and historical issues, demonstrating the transformative power of short drama in contemporary social movements.

Ritual of Communication Drives Cultural Identity

The short drama *Escape from the British Museum* employs anthropomorphism, transforming a Chinese jade pot into a life-like human character, thereby infusing it with a vibrant life. The series converts the jade pot's longing for home into vivid, three-dimensional visuals, creating a profound atmosphere of homesickness. The jade pot likens the relationships between cultural relics to familial bonds, resonating with the anthropomorphic narrative established at the beginning. This approach has rekindled historical memories for many viewers within the context of cultural relics. As the popularity of the video increased, it sparked a widespread discussion on the internet about the repatriation of cultural artifacts, with many people beginning to adopt the anthropomorphic artifacts approach to create makeup-imitating short videos. These videos express a longing for artifacts that have been dispersed abroad, reigniting interest in the topic of repatriation of cultural artifacts. Under the hashtag *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum*, videos utilizing anthropomorphism and emotive physical expressions stimulate cultural identification among viewers and facilitate ritual communication mediated by the internet.

James Carey's ritual view of communication suggests that the manifestation of communication is the "construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action" (Carey, 2008, p. 18). In this

view, communication traditionally refers to a sacred ceremony that brings together a community or people with a shared identity. The ritual view emphasizes maintaining society over time through shared information, stressing the importance of sharing and exchange. As Carey posits:

> "A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs." (Carey, 2008, p. 18)

In other words, the ritual view of communication is a sacred ceremony that draws people together around a group or shared identity. From establishing a cultural stance to invoking media rituals, *Escape from the British Museum* employs a thoughtful creative approach to broadcasting China's cultural relics and cultural symbols. By narrating the stories behind these artifacts, the series stimulates the audience's recognition and reflection on their own cultural identity.

According to Hall (2014) and Friedman (1988), cultural identity is seen as a communal construct characterized by identification, sharing, integration, and unity, utilizing symbols such as history, memory, culture, and intrinsic biological connections like race, kinship, and family. As Hall (2014) articulates:

> "Cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth." (p. 226)

Friedman (1988) discusses a crisis in national identities, highlighting the weakening of traditional national identities and the rise of new forms of identity. These new identities are based not on abstract notions of citizenship within a defined territorial state but on primordial loyalties such as ethnicity, race, local community, language, and other culturally concrete forms:

"This crisis consists in the weakening of former national identities and the emergence of new identities, especially the dissolution of a kind of membership known as 'citizenship in the abstract meaning of membership in a territorially defined, state-governed society, and its replacement by an identity based on 'primordial loyalties,' ethnicity, 'race,' local community, language, and other culturally concrete forms." (p. 62)

Escape from the British Museum leverages the ritual communication of figurative artifacts to inspire audience identification with their cultural identities, awakening emotional resonance and cultural consensus, thereby creating an imagined space of national community and an atmosphere of communal cohesion.

Metaphorical Rhetoric and Storytelling: Enhancing the Readability of Culture Through Dialogue With History

The dilemma of cultural communication in the new era, beyond value identification and emotional resonance, often lies in its perceived dullness regarding historical and cultural topics. *Escape from the British Museum* exemplifies a model of cultural communication that combines high-quality audiovisual elements, dialogue filled with rhetorical metaphors, and storytelling narrative techniques. While the setting might seem trite, it cleverly targets current hot topics. Visually, the series subtly embeds details of cultural relics within its frames, igniting a flame of national sentiment with its implicit and warm presentation, thus enriching the audience's romantic imagination.

The dirty makeup of the jade pot serves as a metaphor for Chinese artifacts in the British Museum that are not protected by glass casings. When the jade pot reacts to the big space of the room rented by the Chinese journalist with surprise, saying, "Such a big cabinet for just two people?", it implicitly expresses its cramped and improperly managed conditions at the British Museum. The plot progresses through the escape of the jade pot, and its journey

back to China, where it eagerly connects with its cultural roots and carries out its mission of the letters commissioned by other artifacts. As the story unfolds, the core of national sentiment hidden beneath the exterior of a soap opera gradually emerges: the heavy and sorrowful scars of history are articulated, and the displaced Chinese artifacts seem to mourn by our side.

Escape from the British Museum begins its narrative with the jade pot encountering fellow countrymen in a foreign land, expressing through direct and simple language its determination to return home. The plain and straightforward dialogue vividly sketches the wandering journey of cultural relics abroad. It turns inanimate objects into speaking characters. It conveys Chinese history, achieving memory transmission through imagination and emotion. This short drama series, by using the perspective of the jade pot and its dialogues with modern characters, enhances cultural understanding and readability. It provides ordinary audiences with a means to engage in dialogue with history, focusing on national sentiment. Eventually, the jade pot returns home, bringing letters to the artifacts displayed in domestic museums. This clever and lyrical presentation of connected artifacts resonates with viewers, triggering our national emotions. *Escape from the British Museum* is not only a dialogue with artifacts but also with history, condensing the emotional consensus of many across time and space.

Shaping National Identity Through Antithesis

The artifacts displayed in the British Museum carry with them Chinese history, encapsulating historical stories and memories. They are relics brought back by invaders from wars. CCTV reported (Morning News [CCTV], 2019) that, according to statistics from the China Cultural Relics Academy, since the Opium Wars in 1840, over 10 million Chinese cultural artifacts have been lost to countries and regions in Europe, America, Japan, and

Southeast Asia. Additionally, UNESCO statistics indicate that approximately 1.6 million Chinese cultural artifacts are dispersed across 47 museums worldwide (UNESCO, 2013).

The short drama uses these cultural relics as a narrative hook, linking the repatriation of artifacts lost overseas with the Chinese modern history of humiliation under the aggression of colonial powers. Burke (1973) introduced the concept of identification by antithesis as a strategy of identification, which he describes as "union by some opposition shared in common" (p. 268). Identification by antithesis involves building a close relationship with the audience to achieve a common goal, often by constructing a mutual adversary or shaping a common enemy to unite and encourage joint action (Cheney, 1983). This strategy fosters a sense of shared identity between the speaker and the audience, thus facilitating cooperation and action.

Imperialist aggressors, led by Britain, have become the common enemy in the narrative of artifact preservation, resonant across various media including TV news reports on CCTV and China Beijing TV Station, as well as in newspapers such as People's Daily and Guangming Daily. For example, during the Second Opium War, two bronze head sculptures looted from the Yuanmingyuan (Old Summer Palace) were put up for auction in Paris in 2009. The National Cultural Heritage Administration of China made multiple statements on February 24 and 26, 2009, expressing "firm opposition and condemnation of all auctions of illegally exported cultural relics" (Zhang & Zhang, 2009). This mobilization included a group of 81 Chinese lawyers and three foreign lawyers who organized a campaign to halt the auctions, though their motion was ultimately rejected by the Tribunal de Grande Instance in Paris (Xinhua News Agency, 2009).

From late October 2008, major Chinese media outlets such as the People's Daily, Guangming Daily, CCTV, and China Beijing TV Station closely followed and reported on the

auction of the Yuanmingyuan bronze heads. According to the China Core Newspaper Databases, there were at least 56 articles reporting on this issue from October 24, 2008, to November 20, 2009. An article in China Youth News even stated: "Buying back cultural relics is to accept a second plunder by the plunderers" (Teng, 2009), indicating the broad societal concern and the emotional charge surrounding this event.

Benedict Anderson (1983) described the nation as an imagined political community where residents conceive themselves as members of a nation, a group that shares knowledge, rituals, and symbols and legitimately occupies a territory, fostering a collective sense of belonging that "makes it possible for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (p.7). Looking at content both on and off platforms like Douyin, the image of the imperialist aggressors had already been formed before the theft incidents occurred. After the British Museum artifact theft, public memory was refreshed with recollections of the invaders' violent acts in China, deepening negative sentiments toward these aggressors. In the discussion under the hashtag *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum*, several videos received high engagement, with titles reflecting deep national sentiment:

> User 1: "They snatched me, locked me up, they couldn't move me so they cut me in half, and now strangers gaze upon me... I want to go home."

> User 2: "It pains me each time I watch it, having taken them without right, what right is there not to return them without compensation?!"

> User 3: "Our artifacts are not only in the British Museum; those countries that plundered us have a part too!"

In today's era of information diversity, crafting the image of the aggressor as a common enemy facilitates a stronger identification with the community, enabling the public to actively participate in cultural heritage protection. Discussions and exchanges of opinions

related to the Theft at the British Museum topic help forge a community that vehemently criticizes the aggressors, providing new avenues for public engagement in social issues and national affairs. This identification by antithesis transforms historical hatred of wars and aggressors into discourse generation in digital spaces, thus forming an imagined community.

Collective Memory: Historical Facts Deepening National Sentiments

In the third and concluding episode of *Escape from the British Museum*, the little jade pot returns to China and travels through the mountains and landscapes of its home country, where it comes to read letter after letter from far away in front of the artifacts displayed in the exhibition hall. Many cultural relics have been displaced overseas for many years, a hundred years ago they were cut, damaged, and transported in sacks across oceans, they not only embody historical memories but are also marked by the more recent scars of modern history's conflicts. As these memories coalesce, they reawaken our collective memory, deeply stirring emotions as we follow the jade pot's journey home. The theft of artifacts from the British Museum thus ascends to the status of a national collective memory.

Halbwachs (1992) expanded the concept of individual memory to the societal group level, introducing the notion of collective memory. According to Wertsch (2008), collective memory is "a representation of the past shared by members of a group, such as a generation or nation-state" (p.120). For members who cannot experience the past, collective memory is the fundamental source of their group identity.

Halbwachs emphasized, "Yet it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (p. 38). Short video platforms, as significant mediums of video information dissemination, play a crucial role in maintaining memories through rapid and intense emotional input, thereby shaping the audience's collective memory.

Escape From The British Museum connects historical footage with current events and uses auditory and visual elements like background music and narrators to create an emotional channel linking periods of aggression to the present peaceful era. This continuity fosters societal collective memories and cognitions about being invaded and looted. Using visual symbols, narrative storytelling, and shifts in perspective in short videos also cultivates a vivid and intense cultural identification and media-involved collective memory. Repeated emotional descriptions of artifacts, tragic portrayals, historical reviews of the War against China, and the poignant details of artifact plundering present cultural identity emotions from the perspective of the lost artifacts, making it a focal point for both triggering and constructing collective memory. In these videos, the transformation of narrative text into audio-visual symbols communicates the denotative story information and conveys the connotative ideological implications.

Throughout the emotional transmission process in short videos, the displayed symbols and images provide a strong sensation, allowing viewers to feel the regret and sorrow of others over artifacts looted during wars like the Opium Wars. This perception ignites national sentiments and collective identity, generating negative emotions. The representation and reconstruction of these symbols also significantly influence the understanding, value, and impact of historical events, forming a historical symbolic language that deepens comprehension and fosters the construction and transmission of historical collective memory. The construction of collective memory is the result of the interplay between individual cognition, group psychology, social structure, and historical facts.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Influenced by the short drama *Escape from the British Museum*, tens of thousands of Douyin users have utilized the eponymous hashtag to post short videos on cultural themes, advocating for national rights. While there are works of literature that include various case studies on media activism, research exploring social mobilization through short videos in China, particularly from the lens of video activism, remains limited. Given the expanding impact of short videos, it is crucial to examine their role as a platform for online social mobilization. This chapter investigates the short videos using *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum*, taking content analysis as a method to explore video dissemination content and effect.

Based on this, this chapter proposes the following research questions:

1. What contents are prevalent in the dissemination of Douyin culture short videos, and how do these contents reflect the underlying cultural narratives?
2. What are the observable effects of the dissemination of Douyin culture short videos on audience engagement and cultural perception?
3. Who are the primary disseminators of Douyin culture short videos, and what characteristics or attributes categorize them as influential in video activism?

Contextual Framework

The distinctive user-centered algorithm of TikTok has outperformed Facebook in terms of user engagement (Rach & Peter, 2021) and emerged as the most downloaded app globally and in the United States in 2022 (Koetsier, 2023). Furthermore, TikTok has exerted influence on users' political behaviors, purchasing habits, and self-reflection to varying extents (Sodani & Mendenhall, 2021; Flecha et al., 2023; Seekis & Kennedy, 2023). The

unique properties of new media make it more prominent in terms of the effectiveness and speed of social mobilization compared to traditional methods of communication. For instance, Wang et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study and concluded that the public nature, feedback mechanisms, and frequent checking are the reasons why Facebook has a quicker pace at social mobilization compared to email. Similarly, Short video platforms, as a form of new media, extend the online public sphere for expressing emotions and opinions among internet users. With its characteristic of short and fast dissemination, mobile short videos further empower people's autonomy in expression and serve as an additional platform for social mobilization alongside Facebook. In contrast to platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which primarily rely on text and images, Douyin's emphasis on videos provides a conducive environment for the flourishing of video activism.

In the #MeToo movement, survivors from diverse backgrounds were encouraged to come forward and share their experiences through videos, undercover the prevalence of sexual harassment, and powering the MeToo movement (Field et al., 2019). At the same time, the hashtag has created an online community for survivors with similar experiences (Cook & O'Halloran, 2023). During the Arab Spring, the protests gained visibility, partly due to video documentation, pressuring authoritarian regimes to address citizen demands and leading to political transitions in several countries. From #MeToo to the Arab Spring, the involvement of video activism shows that stakeholders, especially marginalized groups, seek their strategies and discourse power in these conflicts.

There are countries having organized movements to promote their national cultural heritage and history while seeking to recover national artifacts scattered around the world. #MiPatrimonioNoSeVende (#MyHeritageIsNotForSale) campaign led by the President of Mexico, convening people globally to search for Mexico's looted cultural heritage. Over 9,000 pieces were recovered by the campaign through collective efforts (Nair, 2022). Social

mobilization that strengthens cultural identity can create unity and cohesion (Wolford, 2010), enhance citizens' sense of responsibility (Procentese & Gatti, 2021), promote cultural diplomacy (Saaida, 2023), disseminate culture and shape the national image (Whyke et al., 2022), and enhance national soft power (Adoui, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Social mobilization involves various changes, including the need for new patterns of group affiliation and new images of personal identity (Deutsch, 1961). The viewpoints disseminated through media are accepted by people, resulting in shifts in attitudes and persuasive impacts, which further institutionalize influence on society.

Both the Resource Mobilization Theory and Almeida's framing process view effective social mobilization capacity as a prerequisite for the occurrence of collective action or social movements. Almeida (2019, p. 81) mentions that the condition for initiating movement activities is to have the capacity to frame current conditions into appropriate models for mobilization. Generally, the stronger the capacity for social mobilization, the more favorable the mobilization effects; conversely, weaker mobilization capacity yields less satisfactory outcomes. To be convincing, frames and ideological appeals must resonate with local cultural beliefs, symbols, and norms (Almeida, 2019).

Scholars like Winkielman and Gogolushko (2018) believe that images speak more directly to us than words. In other words, images possess a social impact that transcends verbal communication. Video activism, that is, uses film and video as tools for social mobilization or information dissemination. However, media activists perceive mass media as being controlled by power elites, serving political power and commercial interests (Herman & Chomsky, 2010). Mainstream media often merely echo official opinions, while marginalizing and demonizing dissenting voices (Atton, 2002, p. 492). Therefore, video

activists need to use the mass media to mobilize external resources for publicity and mobilization on the one hand, and at the same time, they also need to build their own channels of communication that are free from external control. Utilizing platforms like TikTok, activists can create accounts that serve as independent media outlets, allowing them to disseminate their messages, images, and perspectives directly to the public without interference. This approach enables them to maintain autonomy over their content and ensure their messages are conveyed as intended.

Data Collection

Due to the vast amount of video data, intricate categories, and dynamic changes on Douyin, achieving comprehensive coverage of all pertinent videos poses a challenge. This study primarily focuses on the social mobilization research of short videos on the Douyin platform, centered around the theft incident at the British Museum. The release of videos with the trending hashtag "Please return the Chinese cultural relics" surged rapidly.

Figure 1

Video posted with the hashtag #Escape from the British Museum
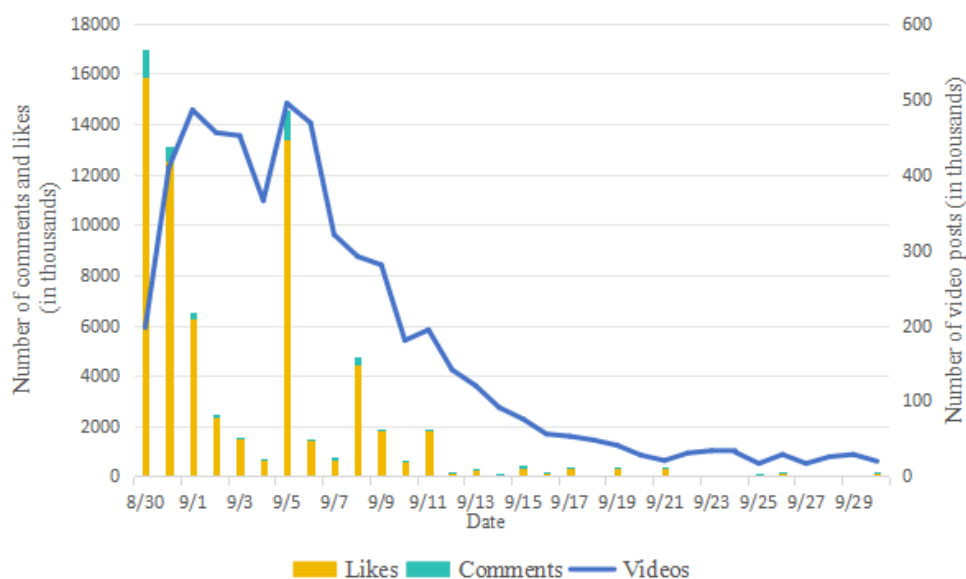
To investigate the social mobilization facilitated by video activism within the realm of cultural identity, this study employed *#Escape from the British Museum* as a key search term on Douyin. According to the number of video releases (as illustrated in Figure 1), the peak of video releases occurred within two weeks following the first episode of the short drama, rising with the release of the following episodes. The discussion gradually cooled down after September 12th. Therefore, videos from the two weeks between August 30th and September 12th were selected. In line with the findings of Kim (2018), which suggest that messages with higher likes are perceived as having greater influence, this study assumes that high likes videos are more representative of effective videos. Consequently, the top 10% of videos based on the number of likes were chosen as samples for this study, amounting to a total of 430 videos. Before the collection process, some videos were deleted after posting, which prevented their inclusion in this study. Therefore, the 430 videos analyzed represent a sample of the videos that were still available and could be collected, rather than a comprehensive representation of all videos originally posted.

There are many types of Chinese cultural videos on Douyin, spanning historical texts, traditional culture, intangible cultural heritage, and artifacts, among others. The reason for selecting this particular event as a case study for examining the social mobilization of cultural identity videos is its widespread dissemination and profound impact, effectively mobilizing the public for artifact protection efforts. Qiu, the Deputy Director of the Supreme People's Procuratorate of China, remarked that the popularity of *Escape from the British Museum* prompted relevant departments to strengthen legal policy. In response to fervent appeals, China's State Administration of Cultural Heritage listed the recovery of lost artifacts as one of its key tasks for 2024. On August 24th of the same year, Switzerland returned five illegally imported artifacts to China. Although this movement did not directly meet the public's demand for the British Museum to return the artifacts, it played an important role in raising

awareness of artifact protection and transforming the public's identity into custodians of the artifacts. This, in turn, indirectly protects artifacts still situated within Chinese borders and increases public willingness to donate artifacts back to China, further pressuring artifact thieves to return artifacts obtained through illegitimate ways.

Coding Scheme

In studies on short videos, it is believed that the dissemination effects of short videos are influenced by factors such as video type, theme, auditory elements, visual elements, and emotional factors (Dai & Wang, 2023; Zhang et al., 2022) The analysis of short video content is typically conducted through two key dimensions: the content of the video (what is said) and the form of the video (how it is said), informed by Alley and Hanshew's (2022) analysis of U.S. academic libraries' use of TikTok. Alley and Hanshew's content analysis focuses on discerning which categories of video content garner popularity. Similarly, this research builds upon such a foundation, employing coding of sample video content to ascertain which categories resonate most profoundly with the audience.

Therefore, this thesis establishes categories based on previous research, and examination of data samples, focusing on the construction of categories from four aspects: video content, Audio-visual element, emotion, and dissemination effects. Fifty videos were randomly selected for pre-coding, and category values were adjusted.

The specific category construction and coding operations are outlined as follows:

(1) Video Content

The content of the videos manifests across four facets: video titles, video themes, disseminators, and video forms. video themes were divided into seven categories. This

classification draws on Shutsko's (2020) examination of TikTok content, which distilled

twenty-eight video categories. By integrating these with the pre-coded samples, the following

seven categories were summarized:

a. Creative Production: Videos crafted using innovative storytelling, dynamic visual and auditory elements, or distinct editing techniques to engage viewers

b. Current Affairs Review: Presenting the affair's background to the audience, including information about the museum and the history of relic losses.

c. Short Drama Review: Viewer introductions and comments on the short drama *Escape from the British Museum*, including personal perception and drama appreciation.

d. Hot Topic Comments: Personal and organizational views and comments on the theft of cultural relics.

e. Relic Appreciation: Focusing on cultural relics, mainly showcasing their artistic value and historical significance.

f. Media Reporting: Coverage of the theft of cultural relics by media outlets.

g. Other: Any other forms of content related to the theft of cultural relics.

Disseminators refer to the identities of the account owners who publish the videos.

they can be classified into the following six categories based on personal profiles, account

content, account verification information, and number of followers:

a. Celebrities: Officially certified celebrity accounts, including actors, singers, hosts, and sports stars.

b. Government Accounts: Official national accounts controlled by the government.

c. Media Organizations: News media organizations.

d. Douyin Influencers: Identified based on account profiles and content, often with a significant number of followers.

e. Content Creators: Have a small number of followers, typically focus on producing short videos centered around a consistent theme

f. General Public: Accounts not falling into the above categories, typically owned by ordinary individuals.

Video forms typically refer to the file format of a video. Few studies categorize video forms based on their production methods. Perceived costs were defined as "the unit cost which a consumer thinks he incurs by undertaking a particular activity" (Neuburger, 1971, p. 370). Videos with more complex production processes are perceived as having higher costs. These perceived costs can influence an individual's willingness to participate in a social movement (Klandermans, 1984). By coding the video form, one can verify the relationship between the willingness to participate and the perceived costs in this case. Video forms are categorized into the following categories:

a. Image Compilation: Sequential presentation of multiple images.

b. Dramatization: Short videos that present relics-related themes through designed and arranged plots.

c. Animation: Computerized or hand-drawn animation

d. TV Program Clip: Videos created by re-editing and combining existing video clips.

e. On-site Shooting: Videos filmed at the location of the event or relevant sites.

f. Hybrid: Short videos that combine the above two or more formats.

(2) Visual and Auditory Elements

Research has demonstrated that the duration of the video (B. Wang et al., 2020), background music (Kämpfe et al., 2010), and narration (Krings, 2013) are audiovisual elements that influence the perception of videos.

Background music serves a multifaceted role in the presentation of short videos. According to Herget (2021), music holds the power to influence the perception and interpretation of a film. It supplements the auditory sensory experience of short videos, enhances content comprehension, and deepens impressions. Additionally, it has the power to evoke emotions in the audience (Peters, 2021). Matching appropriate background music with

video content can better promote cultural understanding and identification. The Geneva

Emotional Music Scale categorizes the emotional space expressed by music into nine overall

types, including Wonder, Transcendence, Tenderness, Nostalgia, Peacefulness, Power, Joyful

activation, Tension, and Sadness(Zentner et al., 2008). Combining the pre-coded video

background music analysis, here are the categories of background music types:

    a. Inspiring

    b. Lyricism

    c. Sadness

    d. Calm

    e. Joyousness

    f. No music

Expressions through voices represent one of the most individualized and instinctive

forms of conveying subjective self-expression (Önen, 2021). The addition of narration can

provide information and connect viewers with documentaries (Chovanec, 2020). Ideally, the

closer the connection between the audience and the drama, the more significant the

mobilization effect. According to Chovanec's classification method, narration can be divided

into on-site recorded sound and post-production voice-over narration. Here, narration is

coded as a category, with the following classifications: On-site sound, Voice-over narration,

Both, None.

The duration of a video serves as a distinct characteristic of short videos and

underpins their rapid dissemination. According to Dai & Wang (2023), online videos have

higher transmission efficiency compared to traditional long videos. This thesis intends to link

the duration of the video with its mobilization effect. Therefore, the duration of the video will

be recorded.

During the process of forming beliefs about certain things or viewpoints, individuals often experience a tendency or preference toward certain emotions. Plutchik's Wheel of Emotion model categorizes emotions into eight basic categories: anger, anticipation, joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, and disgust(Plutchik, 1980). For this research, it was necessary to adapt these categories to more accurately reflect the unique emotional contexts presented in cultural identity videos. By analyzing the emotional content through pre-coding, this study identified a subset of emotions that are most frequently and intensely represented in the subject matter. The emotions observed in the videos have been refined and classified into six distinct categories: Anger, Concern, Pride, Sadness, Touched, and No clear emotion.

(3) Dissemination Effect

The four metrics offer a direct reflection of the short video's dissemination effectiveness, as well as its popularity and acceptance among the public. In the analysis of this research, the number of shares, comments, likes, and favorites of sample short videos are collected. Finally, minor adjustments were made to the category with discrepant results. The construction of the overall category table for content analysis and coding in the research is as follows:

Table I

Overall coding categories

Category	Subcategories	Code
Video Content	videos themes	Creative Production Current Affairs Review Short Drama review Hot topic Comments Relic Appreciation Media Reporting Others

	Disseminator	Celebrities
		Government Accounts
		Media Organizations
		Douyin Influencers
		Content Creators
		General Public
Audio-visual element	Video format	Image Compilation
		Dramatization
		TV Program clip
		On-site Shooting
		Animation
		Hybrid
	Background music	Inspiring
		lyricism
		Sadness
		Calm
		Joyousness
		No music
	Narration	On-site narration
		Voice-over narration
		Both
		None
	Duration	0-15s
		16-30s
		31-60s
		over 60s
Emotions	Emotional tone	Anger
		Concern
		Pride
		Sadness
		Touched
		No clear emotion
Dissemination Effect	Likes	
	Comments	
	Shares	
	Favorites	

Chapter 3: Dissemination Content and Effect

In the new media forms of participatory culture, there has been a gradual rise in dissemination strategies such as plotting, emotional engagement, and video dialog, all of which are reflected in the construction of video content. One example of video activism in China is the documentary *Under the Dome* by journalist Chai Jing, released in 2015, which catapulted environmental issues into the spotlight. This documentary directly triggered a massive movement against smog, serving as a powerful tool in the dissemination process.

Similarly, the short drama *Escape from the British Museum* uses a unique expression to showcase the longing for cultural artifacts lost to wars over the past century for their homeland. The narrative unfolds through the chance encounter between the escaping jade pot and a Chinese journalist, with the story being told from the perspective of the jade pot. This approach elicits emotions such as touch and sorrow, facilitating an emotional resonance with the audience. By constructing a story around cultural relics seeking their way home, the drama communicates its underlying message of artifact preservation and inheritance, further elaborated through historical reviews and commentary on hot events, thereby conveying the full content of the series to its viewers.

This chapter undertakes a comprehensive content analysis of 475 videos collected for the study. Two proficient coders meticulously coded these videos, with deleted videos, irrelevant content videos, and commercially oriented videos excluded from the dataset. Consequently, a total of 372 videos were retained as the sample for this thesis. The analysis within this chapter looks at five key aspects: video content, auditory and visual elements, emotions, and dissemination effects. The ensuing section presents the findings derived from this analysis.

Video Content

The video content within the sample includes three components: video titles, video themes, and disseminator. Video titles serve as descriptive supplements provided by the author upon publishing their videos. These titles can provide additional context that extends beyond the content of the videos themselves and help intelligent recommendation systems to target specific audiences effectively.

Video themes encapsulate the predominant subject matters explored within the short videos. These themes elucidate the central content of the videos, thereby facilitating an understanding of the author's dissemination objectives. The disseminator reflects the identities of the accounts responsible for publishing the videos. It can be categorized into various classifications based on factors such as follower count and social attributes, offering insights into the diverse origins and characteristics of the disseminated content.

Video Titles

Indeed, while the titles of short videos may not constitute the primary content, they function as supplementary elements that augment visual information (Ramanishka et al., 2016). Through a word cloud analysis of the titles of 372 videos, the five most frequently occurring words were identified as "British Museum," "Escape," "Cultural Relics," "Go Home," and "China." These words encapsulate the public's profound concern regarding the loss of cultural relics housed in the British Museum, the lament over the inability to return to their hometown due to various constraints, and the fervent hope for the repatriation of these cultural relics. Additionally, these terms convey a yearning for a robust and peaceful homeland. Mirroring people's confidence and pride in Chinese culture.

Table 1

Frequency of Key Terms in Video Titles

Word	Chinese Character	Word Frequency
British museum	大英博物馆	701
Escape	逃出	518
Cultural relic	文物	382
Go home	回家	138
China	中国	126
Personification	拟人	119
Jade pot	玉壶	76
History	历史	36
Peace and prosperity	永安	33

Figure 2

Distribution of Key Terms in Video Titles by Word Frequency
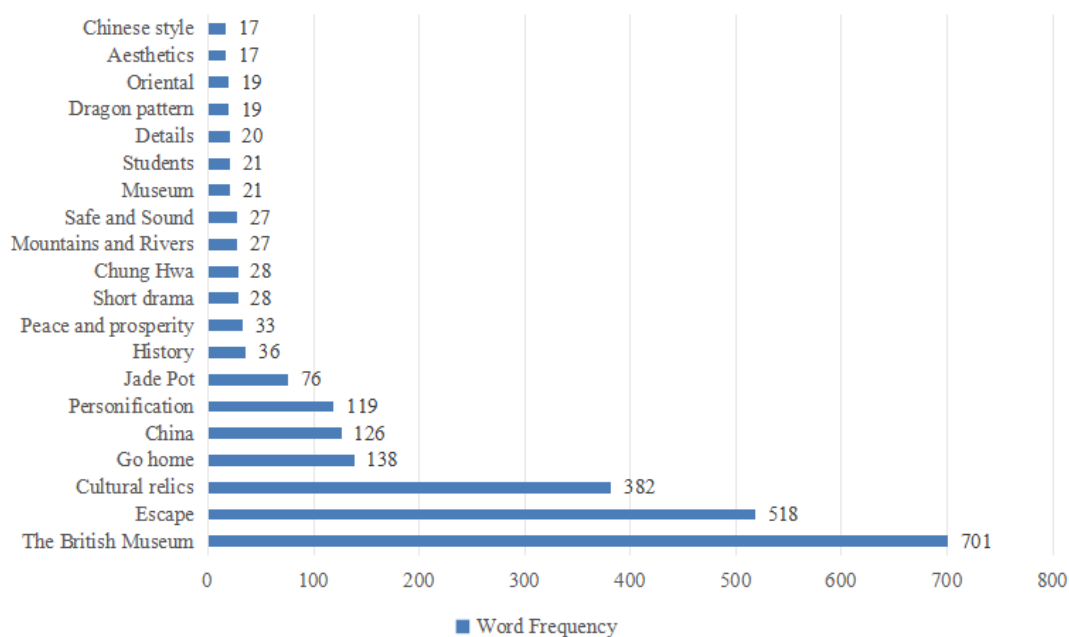
Video Themes

As indicated in Table 2, the majority of video themes are creative production, surpassing drama reviews and hot topic comments, with media reports and other video types representing a small fraction. Creative productions extend beyond narrative short videos to

include diverse forms such as makeup styling, dance, animation, and other short video formats inspired by cultural relics. Through further observation of videos under the category of creative production, these videos include protagonist dressing up as anthropomorphic figures of cultural artifacts and expressing their sentiments; drawing frames of the short drama into comics and sharing the process of drawing; or creatively creating other types of productions. For instance, Douyin influencer Cheng Luo, who is the son of a famous Chinese cake brand founder, crafted a cake modeled after a Yuan Dynasty wine bottle, leveraging his unique strengths and resources. This video garnered more than 910,000 likes. Such creative videos captivate users in innovative ways, leading to increased viewership, and promoting rapid and extensive distribution. They offer fresh perspectives and narrate stories through the lens of cultural relics, thereby resonating with cultural emotions, engaging a broader audience, fostering a collective cultural identity, and enhancing video mobilization.

Short drama reviews, particularly of Escape from the British Museum, represent the second most frequent theme, encompassing 83 entries and accounting for 22.3% of the total. One example is the short video posted by the user @ZhongWuChiLuoSiFen, which records her experience watching the drama with her students. She expressed that she finds the short drama highly educational and hopes it will stimulate her students to ponder the future repatriation of cultural relics. Commentary on current topics ranks as the third most common theme, with individuals from various backgrounds offering their perspectives on issues like the theft of artifacts and the situation of lost cultural relics. The user @BaiXiangGuoYuLe released a short video debating whether the British Museum would return cultural relics to China. The video analyzes the current international relations and expresses a positive outlook on the potential repatriation of artifacts. This category includes 57 videos, which account for 15.3% of the overall themes.

Table 2

Frequency of Videos by Video Themes

Videos themes	Frequency	Percent
Creative Production	169	45.4%
Short Drama review	83	22.3%
Hot topic Comments	57	15.3%
Relic Appreciation	34	9.1%
Current Affairs Review	22	5.9%
Others	4	1.1%
Media Reporting	3	0.8%
Total	372	

Screenshot 4

The Short video by Cheng Luo

Disseminator

To delineate the categories of various disseminators within Douyin for this research, it is essential to differentiate between the terms "celebrities," "influencers," and "creators," each defined by their unique attributes and influence. Traditional celebrities are recognized in specific fields outside of social media for their professional talents, such as actors and hosts (Klostermann et al., 2023). Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers are internet celebrities (also called 'micro-celebrities') who gain attention by sharing self-made content on social

platforms (Schouten et al., 2019). It is also suggested that influencers can have more influence than celebrities in certain domains (Nouri, 2018).

In addition, an influencer is defined as a user with a large following (De Veirman et al., 2017). Conde and Casais (2023) consider followers ranging from 1,000 to 100,000 as micro-influencers. This study adopts a median value, considering users with 50,000 followers as influencers. For those who create content around fixed themes but have not reached the 50,000 followers mark, I refer to them as creators. Thus, the source of attention and the number of followers are two criteria used to differentiate between celebrities, influencers, and content creators. The statistical data presented in Table 3 reveals that the primary voices on Douyin discussing the British Museum theft incident are Douyin influencers, who constitute 61.3% of the total sample. Influencers take advantage of their fan base on social media to get significant likes, comments, and shares. Influencers such as JianBing exemplify the new wave of media practitioners who have risen in the era of free creation, bearing social responsibilities. They champion social causes, driven by their enthusiasm for the media industry and patriotic sentiments, thus playing a pivotal role in shaping public discourse on these critical issues.

Table 3

Frequency of Videos by Disseminator

Disseminator	Frequency	Percent	Average Likes	Average Comments	Average Shares
Douyin Influencers	228	61.3%	212909	14065	32794
Media Organizations	48	12.9%	46746	1663	2541
General Public	39	10.5%	117182	8758	8178
Content Creators	37	9.9%	29916	1459	1304
Government Accounts	11	3.0%	97220	2929	4957
Celebrities	9	2.4%	220128	14130	13377
Total	372		130581	8585	17730

Figure 3

Pie Chart of Disseminator Distribution
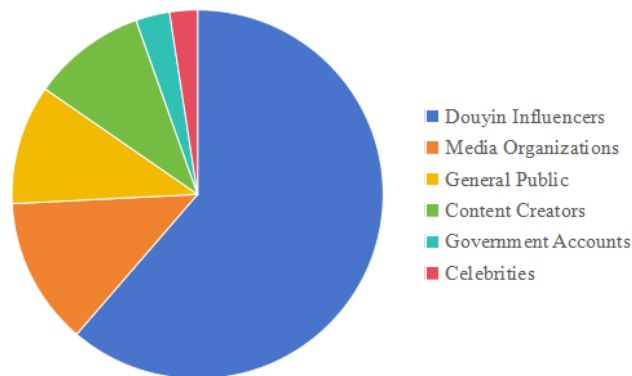
Visual and Auditory Elements

The visual and auditory elements, comprising video format and duration as well as narration and background music, play a crucial role in influencing the audience's emotional perception of the video. According to Chua et al. (2022), these elements can influence the audience's perception of the video's emotion. Effective use of these sensory components can enhance the communicative impact of the video, engaging the audience more deeply by aligning the sensory experience with the intended emotional tone of the message.

Video Formats

The main video format in the sample is on-site shooting, which does not necessitate elaborate preparation; it simply requires recording in real-time and undergoing basic editing. This method significantly lowers the barrier for users to create and publish videos, enabling widespread participation in video mobilization. The next most common format involves TV program clips that are re-edited from existing videos, which also do not require new filming; only the compilation and summary of existing footage are needed to generate new content.

These first two formats indicate that video production prioritizes efficiency and speed, allowing for the swift capture of trending topics and consequently, attracting more viewers.

After these formats are short drama productions. Although creating short dramas presents a higher threshold due to their narrative complexity, they are less costly compared to traditional TV dramas and are thus more suited to the fragmented time of users on platforms like Douyin. Short videos with a plot receive significantly higher average numbers of likes and favorites than other short video formats. The narrative structure enhances the appeal of these videos, as pointed out by Downing (1997), who notes that melodrama provides a sense of vindication in the pursuit of one's convictions.

Table 4-1

Number of Likes by Video Format

Video format	Frequency	Average Likes	Median Likes	Maximum Likes	Minimum Likes
On-site Shooting	122	113413	15185	1583759	1965
TV Program clip	94	57757	14638	1443252	1837
Dramatization	71	478738	24175	10981311	1689
Animation	29	50203	10519	508143	1856
Image Compilation	29	93512	15427	789941	1807
Hybrid	27	77441	5838	1355677	1420
Total	372	130581	11156	10981311	1420

Table 4-2

Number of Favorites by Video Format

Video format	Average Favorites	Median Favorites	Maximum Favorites	Minimum Favorites
On-site Shooting	4510	882	50899	38
TV Program clip	4618	926	154792	55
Dramatization	32977	741	815037	22
Animation	3633	1602	34707	94
Image Compilation	9272	1413	149620	102
Hybrid	5569	339	118479	18
Total	8547	666	815037	18

Duration

According to Wired (2022), a quarter of the highest-performing Douyin videos are with durations ranging from 21 to 34 seconds. However, statistical analysis reveals that the duration of short videos in this study tends to exceed this range, with a median of 34 seconds, and a maximum of 598 seconds. The longest video in the sample was posted by the renowned Chinese TV host Tu Lei. In this extended video of the current affairs review, he detailedly introduces the history of Chinese cultural relics being stolen. While the short videos aim for shorter durations to engage users with limited attention spans, the length of the videos is often served to suit their themes and objectives. As demonstrated in Table 5, videos focusing on current affairs reviews tend to be longer than creative production, which are designed to quickly capture audience interest.

Table 5

Duration of Videos using the #EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum by Theme (in seconds)

Videos themes	Average Duration	Maximum Duration	Minimum Duration
Current Affairs Review	167	598	15
Hotspot Commentary	110	448	11
Short Drama review	62	231	4
Relic Appreciation	61	219	4
Creative Production	47	579	7
Others	46	144	7
Media Reporting	31	62	9

Figure 4

Histogram of videos using the #EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum by duration (in seconds)
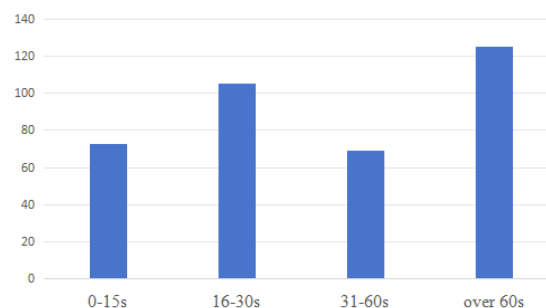
Narration

Among the 372 videos, 30% feature no narration, while the remaining approximately 70% incorporate either on-site or post-production voice-over narration, with the latter being the more common choice. Narration serves as a crucial medium for engaging with the audience and enhancing the content of videos. Narration enables more efficient communication of video content to viewers. Additionally, short videos often employ subtitles and video descriptions as alternative methods of expression, as the speed of reading text is typically faster than listening to speech, as noted by Brysbaert (2019). Considering these factors, narration may not always be the best choice for maintaining the compactness and fluidity of short videos. Therefore, some creators prefer textual expression instead. This is reflected in the data, which shows a shorter average duration for videos that do not use voice narration, suggesting that textual elements may be more suited to the concise nature of short videos.

Table 7

Frequency of Video by Narration

Narration	Frequency	Percent	Average Duration
Voice-over narration	182	48.9%	57
None	113	30.4%	23
On-site narration	72	19.4%	143
Both	5	1.3%	111
Total	372		66

Background Music

Short videos are a form of expression through both visual and auditory. Background music, as an element of sound, can enhance the power of conveying information to users in short videos (Li, 2023). Sound is instrumental in shaping the emotional atmosphere of a video

and in eliciting emotional responses from viewers (Holman, 2012). The study further explored this relationship by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient between the use of background music in short videos and their emotional tones. The choice of background music is intimately connected to the video's emotion. According to data from Table 8, there is a discernible pattern linking the type of background music used and the emotional expression of the video. Videos featuring lyrical or inspiring music typically convey positive emotions, such as pride and being touched. Conversely, those with sad music are associated with negative emotions like anger and sadness. Videos that incorporate calm music usually reflect neutral emotions, such as concern. This demonstrates how strategically selected music can align with and amplify the intended emotional impact of the video content.

Table 8

Correlation Between Background Music and Emotion

	Positive Emotion	Neutral Emotion	Negative Emotion
Inspiring	0.131*	-0.013	-0.133*
lyricism	0.190**	-0.017	-0.185**
Sadness	-0.198**	-0.07	0.319**
Calm	-0.029	0.113*	-0.044
Joyousness	-0.041	0.037	0.022
No music	-0.069	0.051	-0.079

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

Emotion

The emotions conveyed in the sample of short videos encompass sadness, touch, concern, anger, and pride. Statistical analysis, as detailed in Table 9, reveals that the main emotions expressed in these videos are sadness and touch. In this study, video emotions were characterized as follows:

Table 9

Frequency of Video by Emotion

Emotions	Frequency	Percent
Sadness	126	33.9%
Touched	114	30.6%
Concern	39	10.5%
Anger	38	10.2%
No clear emotion	36	9.7%
Pride	19	5.1%
Total	372	

(1) Mobilization with Negative Emotions.

The majority of short videos primarily evoke negative emotions. These typically express sadness over the displacement of national treasures that cannot be returned to their homeland and anger towards historical events like China being looted during the eight-nation Allied War against China. The construction of the storyline within these videos amplifies the emotions conveyed, reinforcing the overall impact of the short video. The highly liked video, posted by Douyin influencer Zhang Shuwen on September 5th, serves as an example. In her video, Zhang embodies a woman depicted in the Ming Dynasty painting Portrait of a Beauty and Blossom, narrating her creation by the painter Zhang Ji and her subsequent snatched to the British Museum. The video culminates with her dream of Zhang Ji finally bringing her home. Viewer comments such as "If missing home had a sound, it would surely be deafening in the British Museum" and "Hope the peach blossoms bloom perfectly next year and we can bring you home," highlight the deep emotional connection and the collective longing for the repatriation of cultural artifacts. The emotional portrayal not only shapes public sentiment but also deepens viewers' understanding of the cultural and historical significance of these relics, thereby enhancing the call to action.

Screenshot 5

The Short video by Zhang

是明代的一位画家

(2) Positive emotions mainly focus on touched emotions.

An illustrative example comes from a Douyin user (ID: LSS991107), who posted a video sharing an emotionally resonant experience: "I am comforted to watch *Escape from the British Museum* with my classmates during break time. It's heartwarming that my classmates and I share the same deep emotions! I hope the seeds of patriotism and love for our country can take root and sprout in your hearts." In the video, the students shared a sense of being touched. The positive emotion of being touched reinforces the audience's cultural identity.

Screenshot 6

The Short video by User @LSS991107
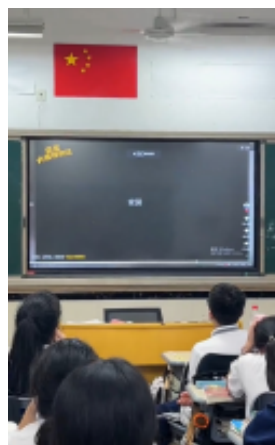
According to UNESCO (2013), over 1.6 million Chinese cultural relics have been lost overseas. The year 1900, marked by the invasion of Beijing by the Eight-Nation Alliance, saw extensive looting of numerous palaces and temples, including the Forbidden City. This tragic period resulted in the plundering of a vast array of Chinese national treasures. As stated on the official website of the British Museum, it currently houses approximately 23,000 Chinese cultural relics. These artifacts not only embody the magnificence of ancient Chinese civilization but also symbolize the pride of the Chinese nation. For a long time, the Chinese government and Chinese people have been advocating for the return of these national treasures from the British Museum to China, a sentiment that underscores a longstanding and profound pain felt by the Chinese people. There is a strong hope that, through legal avenues, these national treasures can be repatriated, enabling more people to witness and appreciate the depth of Chinese culture. The illegal looting and subsequent displacement of these relics have stripped them of their rightful ownership and historical context. The emotion of sadness and anger in short videos expresses the sorrow of being invaded and the longing for a strong nation.

Dissemination Effect

The data as shown in Table 3 highlights differences in the dissemination effects across various disseminators. Notably, videos published by celebrities and influencers garner the most robust online attention and interaction. This is followed by videos from the general public. The increasing diversification of media platforms and the lowering of technical barriers have democratized content creation, enabling the general public to play a more active role in media production and dissemination (Shi & Yang, 2016). Social mobilization around public events is no longer confined to traditional opinion leaders; it has expanded to include a broader range of voices from the general public.

By further analyzing and comparing the data performance at all levels, the video garnering the highest number of likes is the first episode of *Escape from the British Museum,* published by JianBing on August 30, 2023, followed by the third and second episodes of the same series. Since joining the Douyin short video platform in February 2020, JianBing has amassed 130 million likes and over 7.9 million followers. His videos, frequently incorporate elements of traditional Chinese culture, which can evoke the audience's national sentiments. At the same time, the release of this short drama coincided with the news of the British Museum's artifact theft incident, attracting unprecedented attention.

The top five most liked short videos from the sample are detailed in Table 10.

Table 10

Top Five Most Liked Short Videos using the #EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum

No.	Date	Description	Number of Likes	Publisher
1	8/30/2023	Escape from the British Museum Episode 1 #Escape from the British Museum	10981311	JianBingGuoZai
2	9/3/2023	Mountains and rivers remain unchanged; our country and homes are forever safe. #Escape from the British Museum	9753080	JianBingGuoZai
3	8/31/2023	Escape from the British Museum Episode 2 #Escape from the British Museum	8109941	JianBingGuoZai
4	9/6/2023	How can I not show it to my students? We are a great nation, and Chinese people don't engage in underhanded activities. We must guide them to ponder what it means to be a great nation, why falling behind leads to being bullied, and how we can rightfully and lawfully reclaim what belongs to us. Our patriotism is such a noble and precious asset! #EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum #BritishMuseum	1583759	ZhongWuChiLuoSiFen
5	9/3/2023	"That beauty has disappeared, only the peach blossom is still smiling in the spring breeze"#British Museum #Escape from the British Museum #Artifact Anthropomorphism	1522135	ZhangShuWen

Huang and Yeo (2018) pointed out that compared to general likes and comments, the act of sharing on social platforms represents a stronger sense of identification and higher engagement from the audience towards the content, and helps in constructing network identity through sharing behavior. Sharing behavior represents the audience's endorsement of the video content, aiding in amplifying its influence. The number of shares reflects the video's dissemination impact.

Reflecting on this insight, the study also analyzed the videos with high sharings, discovering that videos with significant sharing often contain strong elements of originality and emotional resonance. For example, YueyueTongxue released an original song titled *The Journey of Ten Thousand Miles* on September 9th. This song combines delicate lyrics with a rap style to articulate the perspective of cultural relics longing to return home. The repeated phrase "I wanna go back" at the end of the music continuously resonates with the audience. This particular video, which incorporates clips from *Escape from the British Museum* and pairs them with the original song, ranks among the top five in both shares and favorites within the collected samples. Its success can be attributed to the compelling integration of music and poignant lyrics, which not only captivate but also deeply engage the audience, fostering a shared emotion and reinforcing the collective resolve to repatriate cultural relics.

Screenshot 7

Short video by YueyueTongxue

Discussion

The popularity of *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum* is as a vivid example of how video mobilization is executed on Douyin by various content creators. Over 50,000 Douyin users participated in this hashtag, including many famous hosts and Douyin influencers. Among them, Douyin influencers contributed over 60% of the videos, positioning them as the driving force behind this mobilization effort. They typically employ creative production strategies to capture public interest, with on-site shooting being the predominant video format used. Moreover, the general public also contributed significantly to this mobilization. Short video platform popularizes content creation, enabling ordinary individuals to express their views and participate actively in ongoing discussions. This inclusivity fosters a diverse range of perspectives and enriches the discourse around such significant topics, amplifying the mobilization's reach and impact.

Textual analysis, such as word clouds from video titles, reveals that phrases like "cultural relics," "return home," and "China" are frequently employed, highlighting key thematic concerns. Moreover, background music enhances the emotional atmosphere, thereby deepening the sense of resonance with the audience. The length of videos is not fixed within a certain range but varies according to the different themes of the videos. Videos focusing on current affairs reviews and hot topic comments tend to have longer durations compared to the average, allowing for more in-depth discussion and analysis. Sad music and voice-over narration are mainly used in sample videos, helping to set the appropriate emotional tone. The effectiveness of these videos in capturing public attention and gaining recognition hinges on various factors, including the size and engagement level of the creator's fan base. Nevertheless, the quality of the video—its originality and the finesse of its content—is what truly resonates with audiences. By integrating visual and auditory elements effectively,

creators can enrich the forms through which cultural belonging is expressed. This, combined with smart recommendations and interactive online platforms, strengthens emotional resonance and fosters a deeper connection with the audience, thereby enhancing the overall impact of the video content.

The use of the hashtag *#EscapeFromTheBritishMuseum* on short video platforms like Douyin increases user engagement by facilitating easy participation in discussions surrounding traditional culture and cultural identity. This strategic use of hashtags effectively broadens the scope of video mobilization across various dimensions—time, space, and context—making it more accessible and resonant for a wider audience. The hashtag not only evokes strong emotional resonance but also fosters a community-like atmosphere where similar emotions and viewpoints are continuously reinforced.

Escape from the British Museum serves as a window to showcase cultural identity and sense of belonging. Through a Chinese jade pot, it connects one spiritual symbol after another, including Chinese cultural relics, Chinese culture, and national spirit, thereby tapping into the collective memory of culture and history deeply ingrained in the audience. Through this window, on one hand, we see the broad recognition of the value of Chinese excellent traditional culture and emotional expression among the people. Additionally, it mirrors the current resurgence of interest in traditional culture, underlying a bidirectional interaction between people and their cultural heritage.

In today's digital age, short videos have become one of the mainstream forms of communication. Content creators on platforms like Douyin bear significant responsibility in shaping narratives and constructing collective memories. The *#Escape from the British Museum* initiative exemplifies how Douyin creators are leveraging Douyin to foster patriotism and create meaningful content that resonates deeply with viewers.

Conclusion

This thesis uses *Escape from the British Museum* as a case study, exploring the strategies and effects of cultural preservation themes in Chinese social mobilization through video activism on the Douyin platform. The thesis analyzes the role of short videos in shaping public cultural identity and promoting social mobilization. The findings reveal innovative methods of advocating for cultural preservation through new media platforms and new video formats, providing strategic suggestions for future social mobilization using short videos. This contributes significantly to how media mobilization can more effectively support the protection of cultural heritage. Additionally, the paper acknowledges the limitations of the research and suggests that future work should further explore the influence of short videos within a broader context of social movements.

The thesis compiles and examines related short videos posted on Douyin from August 30 to September 12, analyzing these from four perspectives: video content, auditory and visual elements, emotions, and effects. It specifically assesses the transmission and effectiveness of cultural preservation campaigns on Douyin, offering insights that can refine media mobilization and communication strategies for cultural artifact protection in China. The study finds that short videos drive cultural identification through ritual communication, use metaphorical rhetoric and narrative storytelling to enhance cultural readability, and employ strategies like Shaping National Identity Through Antithesis and Historical Facts Deepening National Sentiments. The titles of the videos help convey the creator's intent, as exemplified by the frequent inclusion of terms such as "escape," "British Museum," "cultural relics," "Go home," and "China." Among various content categories, creative production dominates, which encompasses animation creation, fashion design sharing, and original song production. These short videos use creative outputs to capture the fragmented attention of

users. Influencers serve as the primary force in this campaign, demonstrating superior engagement and dissemination outcomes compared to other disseminators. Regarding the visual elements, the duration of videos is tailored to their video themes. Notably, video themes of historical reviews or comments on hot topics tend to be longer. The most common video form is on-site shooting, which simplifies the production process and reduces participation costs. In terms of auditory elements, these videos mainly feature sad music and often employ voice-over narration. Emotionally, the videos typically express negative emotions and create emotional resonance by evoking tragic historical memories. The effect of such videos is partly increased by the disseminators' fan base, yet the ability to resonate with and earn the acceptance of the general public hinges on the quality of the content itself. Videos that are crafted with care and originality tend to be more favored by audiences. Through the integration of visual and auditory resources, these videos enrich expressions of cultural belonging and enhance emotional resonance. The use of hashtags fosters community engagement and stimulates user participation.

Based on the conclusions drawn from the preceding analysis, several suggestions can be offered for future social mobilization efforts using short videos. In the content creation, distribution, and interaction phases of short videos, emotions are indispensable. The shared emotional resonance established through these videos connects them deeply with viewers, gradually transforming them from passive recipients to active participants. The dissemination effect of the campaign #EscapeFromTheBritshMuseum is partly dependent on the influence of Douyin influencers and celebrities. Leveraging their influence broadens the reach of the campaign, using their charisma and media influence to amplify the sound of social demands. In addition, the influence that influencers and celebrities have on the public makes the topic of heritage preservation emotionally recognized by some public from the very beginning. So much so that the public will pay attention, identify, and imitate under their influence.

This thesis makes an initial attempt to explore the use of short videos in social mobilization and draws several conclusions. Despite its contributions, it has several limitations that warrant further discussion.

The case examined, while generating significant discussion and attention within China, has not yet achieved the collective demands, specifically the repatriation of cultural relics by the British Museum. However, we are happy to see that the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Manhattan, New York, returned 38 cultural relics to China in April 2024. The Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law was held in April 2024 in Washington D.C. This meeting included a special forum on the repatriation of China's looted cultural relics. Huo (2024) believed that this issue had attracted attention from the US academic community due to the editorial from the *Global Times* dated August 28, 2023, titled "British Museum must return ChinesemCultural relics for free." The short drama Escape from the British Museum amplified this call. Laying a positive foundation for the return of Chinese cultural relics from the United States. Whether this return was a direct result of the campaign remains subject to further investigation. The platform discussed in this study, Douyin, is exclusively used by the Chinese. Which makes it restricts the direct international dissemination of the mobilization videos. However, the platform's strength lies in its culturally homogenous user base, which facilitates cultural resonance among its viewers. Additionally, The completeness of the data sample was compromised due to the deletion of some videos, which presents a challenge for comprehensive analysis.

A wider array of short video platforms beyond Douyin, such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts should be included. This expansion would allow for a comparative analysis of video activism across different cultural and geopolitical landscapes, thereby providing a more global perspective on the strategies and effectiveness of social

mobilization through short videos. Future research could implement real-time data tracking during active mobilization campaigns to ensure the collection and preservation of digital content before it is removed or altered, thus maintaining the integrity of the data and allowing for a more accurate analysis of social media dynamics and their impact. This thesis represents a preliminary attempt to explore mobilization through Douyin's short videos, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding its broader application to culturally relevant issues. Future research should delve deeper into this area to better understand and enhance the effectiveness of video activism in addressing and resolving cultural challenges.

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