

Digital Resonance and Symbolic Reconstruction: An Analysis of the Media Sociology of Gen Z's Chinese-Style Music

Cao Yang, Han Yu*

School of Political Science and Law, University of Jinan, Jinan, Shandong, China

**Corresponding Author.*

Abstract: Against the backdrop of the interweaving of digital technology and the revival of traditional culture, Chinese-style pop music has become a key carrier of cultural confidence among young people. Based on the framework of media sociology, this study explores through qualitative interviews how Chinese-style music leverages technological empowerment, symbolic translation, and community interaction to drive young people from "passive inheritance" to "active reconstruction" of cultural confidence. The research finds that the Z generation, through practices such as "counter-hegemonic creation" and "algorithmic dissemination", integrates traditional and modern elements to form a symbiotic cultural symbol system, resolving the cultural tension between globalization and localization. Platform-based dissemination and intergenerational feedback further construct a virtual-real coexisting cultural community, achieving the digital regeneration of traditional cultural memory and the ritualized expression of identity. The study proposes a "media cultural confidence" model, revealing the collaborative mechanism of technology, symbols, and communities, providing theoretical insights for the mutual construction of youth subculture and mainstream values as well as cultural policy innovation.

Keywords: Media Sociology; National Style Pop Music; Cultural Confidence; Symbolic Capital

1. Introduction

With the development of modern computer science and the emergence of the World Wide Web, digital technology came into being and gradually became closely intertwined with

people's lives, ushering in the digital era of human society. Negroponte (1995) pointed out that all media will be rapidly digitized, and computers will be able to perform face and voice recognition and interact intelligently with users[1]. Digital technology has not only reshaped the basic face of social life, but also changed people's cognition and way of thinking to a great extent. The digital society driven by big data and dominated by algorithms, the research about music is also deeply branded with digital technology because of its technical sensitivity and cultural inclusiveness, and at the same time, it is an important research field reflecting the changes in the development of social, economic and cultural development in the digital era[2]. The white paper "Chinese Youth in the New Era" points out that Chinese youth worship the splendid civilization of the Chinese nation from the bottom of their hearts, identify with it from the depths of their spirits, are more conscious of inheriting Chinese cultural genes, and their sense of national pride has increased significantly. Under the tension between globalization and localization, Chinese youth groups are facing the "double anxiety" of cultural identity: on the one hand, the infiltration of Western pop culture has impacted traditional values; on the other hand, the policy advocating the revival of local culture urgently needs to find a practical carrier that suits the characteristics of the youth generation. At this time, the rise of national popular music has become a "cultural antidote" to this structural contradiction, and digital media technology has given traditional elements a modern aesthetic expression, becoming an important symbol for the construction of youth cultural confidence. To summarize, this paper attempts to explore from the perspective of communication sociology theory how contemporary youth can build cultural confidence under the background of

national style popular music. Specifically, this paper analyzes the new subcultural characteristics of young people in the context of the digital era, and how digital media technology is involved in the process of constructing youth cultural self-confidence.

2. Literature Review and Problem Formulation

In the digital era, "national style pop music" has been revived among the youth with a strong connotation of nostalgia, deeply integrating traditional culture and pop music, which is not only an innovation of music form, but also influences the youth's cultural cognition and careful construction in a subtle way. The practitioners and audiences of "national style pop music" have not only realized the style construction and meaning production of music subculture, but also formed a peculiar discourse mode of cultural interpretation and identity. From the perspective of media sociology, we can clearly see the deep logic and rich connotation behind this cultural phenomenon. Media sociology has developed an "active and rich discourse practice" in the process of dialog between communication and sociology[3]. Denis McQuail, a British scholar, puts forward a hidden but powerful hint to define the metaphorical relationship and tension between "media/material" and "society/culture" in the real world[4]. Under this set of tensions, the mediated "material" appropriation and subjective participation in "national popular music practice" jointly evoke a theoretical dialog between media studies and youth sociological studies, on the basis of which this study extends the "demand-driven-capital-accumulation-social" concept. On this basis, this study extends the logical chain of "demand-driven-capital accumulation-social interaction", and compiles and reviews the relevant literature.

2.1 Two-Way Interaction Between Media Materiality and Cultural Reproduction

The sociology of youth has always paid close attention to material issues, because youth culture and subculture itself is a very typical material culture, which is visible in a wider social context by virtue of the aggregation of "stylistic objects" of different natures[5]. The "national style popular music" happens to form

a connection between the medium, the subject's behavior, and the reproduction of cultural meaning. This year, media research has developed the epistemological paradigm of Materialism Turn, which emphasizes the subjective position of "human" in the process of cultural creation, and reflects on the connection between human and object, culture and matter from the perspective of "matter". From the perspective of "matter", it reflects on the possibility of the connection between human beings and objects, culture and matter[6]. Media sociology emphasizes the interactive relationship between media technology, social structure and cultural practices. In the dissemination and acceptance of national style music, the media is not only a technical carrier, but also an "intermediary field" for the construction of cultural identity. The rise of national style music is inseparable from the popularization of digital media technology, and platforms such as B Station and Little Red Book embed national style music into the daily cultural consumption scene of young users through algorithmic recommendation, forming a cycle of "audio-visual-interaction-reproduction". The combination of virtual idols and holographic projection technology breaks the time and space limitations of traditional music performances, gives traditional culture a sense of the future, and attracts a two-way flow of secondary and mainstream audiences[7]. This kind of technical empowerment makes national style music permeate from subculture to mainstream culture, and become the "cultural adhesive" in the mediatized society. In turn, the "media" related objects are treated as independent social forces, components of political and economic structures, and objects of interaction with people in social practices[8].

2.2 Symbolic Practices of Youth Groups

Under the background of globalization, the cultural identity needs of youth groups show a "duality", influenced by Western popular culture on the one hand, and reconstructing their identity through local cultural symbols on the other. Sociological research has always been sensitive to the materiality of youth culture. John Strawley points out in Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture that youth subcultures achieve social visibility through a collection of "stylistic

objects", which are not only mediums of cultural expression, but also figurative representations of power relations. National pop music has reconstructed the cultural identity of youth through traditional and nostalgic media practices, and formed "symbolic connections" through music inheritance and secondary creation, sublimating individual aesthetic preferences into collective cultural identity. This identity is not a one-way indoctrination, but a result of the youth's active choices in media interaction - national popular music provides them with a material and cultural foundation to resist the hegemony of Western culture, and helps them seek a balance between tradition and modernity in the context of globalization. This practice confirms Bourdieu's theory of "cultural capital", in which young people accumulate symbolic capital by appropriating and transforming traditional material symbols, so as to compete for discourse power in the cultural field. This kind of media practice of the youth group is regarded as a special cultural style, "using symbolic resources to shape myths about space, time, and authenticity, so as to reconstruct self-identity and shape symbolic rights in a society in transition.[9]"

However, the youth audience of "national style popular music" has not personally experienced the era of national style, and has not generated a dialog with their own past life experience. Therefore, compared to the nostalgic discourse of media practice, the practice of "national style popular music" by young people is more like an embodied media archaeology driven by the subject. Under the perspective of media archaeology, traditional literature and poetry, musical instruments and rhythms are reproduced through the media in the digital era, which reflects the failure of the technological continuum and media dualism, and opens up a new perspective for understanding media relations[10]. The media practice of Chinese pop music builds up the "culture as practice" in Zygmunt Bauman's words, and impacts on the linear narrative of media evolution and its "culture as structure". The creative and critical process of media practice presented by young audiences in their participation in the practice of "national popular music" constitutes the object of research and the goal of this paper.

In *The Sociological Imagination*, Wyatt Mills

profoundly pointed out that the mission of social science is to reveal the intertwined connection between individual life experiences and the grand historical process, and that the two are by no means isolated. The uniqueness of Chinese pop music lies in its cultural duality: not only does it need to follow the market rules of pop music, but it also undertakes the mission of building cultural identity, which makes it a typical sample for observing the cultural transformation of contemporary Chinese youth. Based on this, this paper takes "national style pop music" as the object of study, focuses on the participation logic of the youth group in its discourse construction, material practice and media interaction, and attempts to analyze how this cultural phenomenon becomes a microcosmic cutout for the collision of tradition reversion and modernity under the macro-historical background of globalization and digitization. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions: First, how has national pop music inspired the digital aborigines of Generation Z to reconstruct traditional culture in an "archaeological" manner? How does this cultural practice of searching for roots map out the group's identity anxiety and search for meaning in the context of technological iteration? Secondly, how do heterogeneous actors such as young creators, listeners, platform algorithms, and traditional symbols achieve networked connections through national style music? How does this connection promote the creative transformation and mediated reproduction of cultural memory?

3. Research Methodology

This paper takes qualitative research as the basic orientation, and specifically examines the youth audience of "national style popular music" through in-depth interviews. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of an average length of 30 minutes with 10 young participants in the practice of national style music by snowball sampling, and formed detailed interview records. In the interviews, the researcher invited the interviewees to talk about their own stories of national popular music from the perspectives of audio-visual style, creative experience, and the process of encountering national popular music, in an attempt to explore the unique

meaning of "national popular music" and its production of meaning in the process. The interviewees of this paper were informed of the purpose of this study and provided relevant information in a uniform manner. The information of the interviewees is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Interviewee Profiles

ID	Year of Birth	Gender	Occupation	Interview Date
F1	2000	Female	Student	2024-11-29
F2	2001	Female	Student	2024-11-30
M3	2000	Male	Teacher	2024-12-01
M4	2002	Male	Teacher	2024-12-02
F5	2001	Female	Employee	2024-12-03
F6	2001	Female	Student	2024-12-04
M7	1998	Male	Freelancer	2024-12-09
F8	2002	Female	Employee	2024-12-25
F9	2009	Female	Student	2025-01-10
M10	2002	Male	Freelancer	2025-01-18

4. Research Results

A systematic examination of the practice of Generation Z youth in the field of Chinese music reveals that the cultural practice of this group runs through the entire process of music creation and production, the construction of communication networks, and the shaping of receptive subjects, and that the logic of their behavior is rooted in the reconstruction of the value of the symbolic system of Chinese music and the cultural translation of Chinese music. As a symbolic system carrying historical memory and national aesthetics, national style music has become a ritualized medium for young people to construct cultural identity and realize intergenerational identity through the dual mechanism of symbolic interaction and meaning circulation. Through the meaning cycle of "encoding-communication-decoding", the platform-based communication mechanism facilitates the intertextual dialogue between traditional music elements and modern youth culture, forming a symbolic exchange system with intergenerational characteristics.

4.1 Cultural Confrontation and Symbolic Translation in Music Production

The difference in creative logic between Chinese music and pop music is essentially a confrontation between the logic of cultural symbols. Pop music relies more on algorithmic recommendation and data-driven industrialized production mode, the core of which is

standardization and efficiency priority, such as electronic synthesis precision frequency and mixing technology, and this technical path strengthens the attribute of music as a "cultural consumer product". Guofeng music uses the poetic expression of traditional culture to awaken collective memory, and its creative process digs deep into traditional elements, contrasting sharply with the industrialized path of pop music, which relies on algorithmic recommendations to reflect immediate social reality. This differentiation has shaped the unique "cultural heterogeneity" of Guofeng music, which is reflected in the classical imagery and melodic tension of the lyrics, as well as the collage aesthetics of traditional costumes and modern media in stage performances. These qualities have become media attractions for young people, inspiring them to practice re-mediation of traditional cultural techniques.

The production process of Guofeng music reflects a resistance to fast-food music generation. The high production cost of traditional instruments and the complex tuning process make it impossible to easily rely on the industrialized assembly line model for the creation of Guofeng music. From social debugging to recording, each step is filled with obsessive polishing of details, and this in-depth practice transforms the production process into a ritual of guardianship of cultural values. z-generation youth actively intervene in the production of cultural symbols by participating in the transmission of lyrics, covers, and arrangements of Guofeng music, forming a reflexive response to algorithm-driven, fast-food-oriented music. The resistance production of national style music is essentially a breakthrough experiment in the construction of youth cultural identity in the digital era. In the translation of traditional symbols, post-subcultural practices and cultural hybridity, Generation Z can not only fight against the homogenization of the globalized music industry, but also reconstruct the meaning of local culture through its technological framework. This strategy of "resisting the system within the system" reveals the complex logic of survival of youth subcultures - resistance is no longer a dichotomy, but the regeneration of the cultural subject through layers of innovative practices. Through the participatory creation of "lyrics

and cover songs" and "national style arrangements", the national style music community is actually carrying out cultural archaeology in the digital age - they are trying to reconstruct the way of perceiving traditional culture within the framework of modern technology. They try to reconstruct the perception and meaning system of traditional culture within the framework of modern technology, thus realizing the creative transformation and innovative development of cultural traditions in the transformation of media technology paradigm.

4.2 Symbolic Politics of Chinese-Style Music in Digital Communication

The process of "breaking the circle" of national style music profoundly reflects the shaping power of digital media technology on cultural ecology. Early ancient style music relied on relatively closed communities such as forums and posting bars to form circle barriers, while short video platforms have reconfigured the communication logic through algorithmic recommendation and UGC ecology[11]. On Tik Tok, "*Chiling*" is widely disseminated by combining opera clips with ancient dance challenges, and the element of opera is transformed from a "non-legacy heritage" to a "traffic symbol". This kind of technological empowerment not only dissolves the temporal and spatial boundaries of communication (real-time interaction of live broadcasting and fragmented consumption of short videos), but also reshapes the evaluation system of cultural value with data indicators (number of broadcasts, number of likes), and the "elegance and secularity" criterion of traditional art is replaced by the "potential to break the circle". The traditional standard of "elegance and popularity" of art has been replaced by "potential to break the circle". The conspiracy between mainstream media and digital platforms has further pushed national style music to the center of media events: Henan TV's "Tang Palace Night Banquet" recreates the flourishing Tang Dynasty with the help of XR technology, triggering "tap water dissemination" in social media; CCTV's Spring Festival Gala's "Only This Green" creates an immersive stage through AI holographic projection, transforming "Thousands of Miles of Rivers and Mountains" into a cultural memory shared by the whole

nation. CCTV's Spring Festival Gala "Only This Green" transformed "Thousand Miles of River and Mountain" into a cultural memory shared by all. These practices show that media technology is not only a content carrier, but also a right device for meaning production - the stage aesthetics and communication strategy are carefully designed to encode national style music as a symbol of "national soft power" and complete the transformation from subcultural resistance to mainstream ideology adoption. The transformation from subcultural resistance to mainstream ideology has been completed.

The deep involvement of platform capital has accelerated the industrialization shift of the production mechanism of Chinese-style music. Tencent Music's "Sound for the Future" competition, which uses big data to screen entries from 586 universities, builds an industrial chain of "creation-incubation - promotion". After transforming from an interest club to a professional label, MIMAN Culture Media has achieved the dual goals of breaking out of the circle and commercialization through online live streaming and offline concerts. The essence of this production model is the symbolic exchange of cultural capital - the platform quantifies the value of traditional culture into market data such as play counts and copyright earnings, and then empowers it into the capital cycle of the global music industry. Technological empowerment is accompanied by the loss of cultural connotations, but AI composition batch-generated "Chinese-style" melodies fail to reproduce the tremors of guzheng strumming, and the clipping of the "15-second" musical climax in short videos severs the integrity of Chinese-style music. In the face of technology-rational marriage, Generation Z reconstructs the network of meaning through participatory practices such as "remix and edit" and "bullet screen interaction". This dynamic balance reveals the deep logic of the interaction between technology and culture: digital media is both an accelerator of cultural transformation and a battlefield of meaning games, Generation Z reconstructs cultural fingerprints in fragmented symbols through creative practices, and platform algorithms and mainstream discourse constantly

redefine the value coordinates of "national style" in the competition for traffic.

4.3 Symbolic Interaction and Identity Weaving: Young Audiences' Awakening Practices and Rituals of Feedback

Through cultural appropriation and symbolic innovation, the youth group transforms traditional music resources into a new type of cultural capital. This transformation mechanism involves two directions: the reproduction of aesthetic habitus at the individual level, and the construction of a cultural community based on the relationship of interest at the community level. In this process, the digital media not only serves as a technical carrier, but also assumes the function of cultural memory storage, so that the symbolic value of traditional music continues to add value in the communication network of real and imaginary.

The essence of symbolic innovation in national style music is the practice of Generation Z's subjective reconstruction of traditional music resources through cultural appropriation. Under the framework of the theory of symbolic interaction, young people take traditional cultural symbols such as ancient poems, opera cadences, and silent scales out of their original historical contexts, and splice them with modern music forms (such as electro-acoustic music and rap) to form a hybrid symbolic system of "traditional-modern". "When I first swiped the mashup of The Case of the Green Jade on B-site, the east wind releasing thousands of flowers at night was paired with cyberpunk, and 15 seconds directly got me into the pit, which is more useful than memorizing ancient poems." (F1) Through the inter-temporal dialog of symbols, the "cold" label of traditional music has been dissolved and transformed into a "cultural code" that can be perceived by the youth. "The song 'Chiling' at first only felt that the opera cadence was particularly sensational. Later, when I read the lyrics carefully, it is simply an instruction manual for the Internet persona of contemporary young people. I am a person outside the theater during the daytime when I work part-time, and I am a person in the theater at night when I turn on the game and put on the headphones." (M3) This kind of translation is not a one-way cultural inheritance, but an interactive negotiation of

meaning. When decoding traditional symbols, young people synchronize and inject individual experiences, making national style music a media container for self-expression.

Tencent Music 2021 data shows that electro-acoustic and rap-acoustic styles have achieved growth rates of 200% and 90% respectively, suggesting that youth groups are being "re-mediated" through genre fusion strategies and digital media. This allows traditional culture to escape from archival existence and transform into "living heritage capital" that can be activated by bodily practices[12]. The core of this capital transformation lies in the reproduction of aesthetic habitus: when Generation Z clicks on national style song lists on short video platforms and music software, they are not passively accepting the cultural ghost villages, but are actively constructing the cognitive schema of "traditional fashion styles" through symbolic interactions, and ultimately forming the closed-loop reinforcement of "aesthetic preference-cultural confidence". Finally, a closed-loop reinforcement mechanism of "aesthetic preference - cultural confidence" is formed.

The dissemination of national style music has given rise to an identity network community that intertwines the virtual and the real. 2021, QQ Music's "Sound for the Future" competition attracted 1,442 submissions from students at 586 universities, and was essentially an experiment in building a community based on the national style as a link between the community and the community of interest. Through the collaboration of lyrics and music arrangement, the participants embedded their individual creations into the collective cultural memory, forming a sense of ritual of "creation and inheritance". This kind of interaction based on digital platforms not only breaks down geographical and class barriers, but also reconstructs cultural authority through UGC content production, and many grassroots young creators obtain legitimacy certification through traffic data, realizing the democratization of anti-class division culture. In the intergenerational dimension, national style music has spawned a unique landscape of reverse cultural feedback. After Yun Sumire's "Divine Feminine Chopping", a character from the game "Original God", went online, players around the world initiated a wave of secondary

creations on YouTube, and Generation Z popularized the knowledge of opera to their parents through the game's narration, subverting the one-way transmission mode of traditional culture whereby "elders teach the younger generation". The essence of this kind of feedback is a kind of redistribution of symbolic rights, in which young people become a new generation of agents of traditional culture interpretation by virtue of the technological advantage of digital media. When traditional culture is encoded as "national symbols", the flow of cultural capital between generations shifts from "vertical inheritance" to "horizontal diffusion".

5. Conclusion

This study, through a systematic examination of the practice of Chinese-style music by Gen Z youth, reveals the complex mechanisms and socio-cultural implications of the reproduction of traditional culture in the digital age. The study found that traditional Chinese music is neither a simple replication of tradition nor a passive compromise of modernity, but rather a new type of dialogue relationship between traditional culture and digital civilization through the creative practice of the youth group, in the multiple tensions of symbol decoding, technical translation and cultural negotiation. The youth have double-coded the symbols of traditional Chinese music through digital media: they have retained the poetic charm of traditional music and incorporated the audio-visual grammar of the algorithmic age. This practice not only enables the digital storage and intergenerational transmission of cultural memory, but also establishes a circular ecosystem of "creation -dissemination -reception". In this process, Chinese music has evolved from a cultural consumption object to a ritualized medium for identity construction. Through participatory creation, the youth group has transformed individual aesthetic experiences into collective cultural capital, ultimately forming a digital cultural community based on interest and connection. In the future, Chinese music will be able to reach a wider range of youth groups, cover more diverse cultural circles, gain a broader cultural space, and ultimately transform into solid cultural soft power to better promote the "going global" of Chinese culture through its cross-media and integrated media development

and deep integration with the cultural and tourism industry. The inter-structure between platform capital and traditional culture can be further explored in the future regarding issues such as the transformation mechanism of economic capital in the practice of Chinese style music and the intergenerational cultural power game. In addition, how to balance the creative efficiency of artificial intelligence with the value conflict of the "physical practice" of traditional art may become a key proposition for the innovation of traditional culture in the digital age.

Acknowledgments

This paper is supported by National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences (No. 21CSH072).

References

- [1] ZHAO Yizhang, WANG Mingyu. "Digital Sociology: Origins, Development, and Prospects from an International Perspective" [J]. *Sociological Studies*, 2023, 38(02): 26-48+226-227.
- [2] LI Nana. "Research on Youth Music Subcultures in the Digital Age: A Perspective of Autotelic Analysis" [J]. *China Youth Study*, 2021, (09): 89-95+47.
- [3] LI Hongtao, HUANG Shunming. "From the 'Crossroads' to the 'Middle Ground': Boundary Work and Legitimacy Construction in Anglo-American Media Sociology" [J]. *Journalism and Communication Research*, 2020, 27(04): 39-57+126-127.
- [4] Postman N, *Amusing ourselves to death*, London: Penguin Books, 2006, p10.
- [5] John Storey. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* [M]. Translated by CHANG Jiang. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2019, p. 267.
- [6] ZHANG Gehao, ZHANG Lei. "Objectified Absence and Material Remembrance: The Material Turn in Media and Cultural Analysis" [J]. *Global Media Journal*, 2019(02): 103-115.
- [7] GUO Kejian, LI Lu Xingyu. "Traditional Opera and National Trends: Leading a New Aesthetic in the Contemporary Era" [EB/OL]. *China Social Sciences Net*, 2025-04-07[2023-10-25].
- [8] DAI Yuchen. "The 'Materiality' Approach in Communication Studies: Clarifying

- Core Issues" [J]. Journal of Fujian Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 2021(05): 142-152+171.
- [9]DING Fangzhou. "Returning to Authenticity: A Study of Nostalgic Discursive Practices Among Chinese Youth in Cyberspace" [J]. China Youth Study, 2019(04): 98-104.
- [10] MA Xinyao. "Continuity and Disruption: The Death and Rebirth of Instant Cameras" [J]. Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication, 2023, 45(02): 156-176.
- [11]YAO Yanting, WANG Tong. "How Online Video Platforms Build High-Quality Content Ecosystems: A Case Study of Bilibili" [J]. Media, 2024(02): 70-72.
- [12]ZHANG Yan. "From Panorama to Metaverse: A Media Archaeology Perspective" [J]. Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art, 2023, 43(01): 30-41.