Breakthroughs of Imagination About China in the Field of Video Social Softwares Around EU Region---- A Case Study of Youtube and Kwai

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Abstract

With the continuous popularity of network technology, social media has become an important platform for people to acquire information in the web space, participate in interactions, and share discussions, which has brought about a change not only in people's daily life but also in international communication. This paper analyzes Chinese images through video social software such as Youtube and Kwai. Mainly focused on the cognitive breakthrough imagined in China after the use of video social software in the European Union to study the perceptions of Chinese images in the original European Union region, how these perceptions changed after the use of video social software, and why China used different algorithms when making video social software outputs. To construct a new idea for the international diffusion of Chinese image.

Keywords: Chinese image, social media, EU countries

1. Background

The European region has always been an important partner of China in international communication, especially since the Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the cooperation initiatives of "New Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" in September and October 2013, respectively. After the cooperation initiatives, on March 28, 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce jointly issued the "Promoting the vision and actions of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road ". As of January 30, 2021, China had signed 205 joint documents on the construction of the "Belt and Road" with 171 countries and international organizations. Thus it can be seen that the "Belt and Road Initiative" occupies an important place in the partnership between China and the European countries. From 1998, China began to establish a partnership with the EU, and in 2003, China and the EU upgraded to a strategic partnership. In recent years, the strategic partnership between China and the EU plays an increasingly important role in the international political structure. Moreover, due to the rapid development of 5G in recent years, with the new generation of social medias such as Instagram focusing on short videos that are more suitable for mobile social platforms, social software giants such as Facebook and Twitter have also begun to shift their positions to develop their own short video platforms and applications, which have further known by the Internet industry. Meanwhile, Chinese Internet companies have also begun to seize the market of international short video applications. For example, softwares like Tiktok under ByteDance and Kwai, the overseas version of Kuaishou, have gone overseas for the huge market. As a result, some scholars believe that "videos represent the present, and short videos represent the future." Therefore, the research of breakthroughs of imagination about China has important implications in EU's video social softwares.

Through careful reading of previous researches, we found that these previous researches had explored the image of China or studied the specific national image on a single social media by investigating the public, face-to-face interviews, traditional media reports about the image of China and researching about mainstream media accounts of social media. These researches mainly focused on micro levels and were difficult to control integrated communication situation from a big picture. Moreover, the research on the breakthrough of imagination about China in the video social software in EU region is very rare. There is almost no relevant research by foreign

scholars, the same for domestic scholars. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on the comprehensive research on the cognitive breakthrough of imagination about China through video social softwares in the EU region.

2. Research Topic and Method

This paper focuses on the breakthrough of imagination about China in video social softwares in the EU region, and analyzes the different perceptions of imagination about China in the EU region after using such social softwares in today's video social software. Furthermore, which kind of cultural output Chinese government uses to convey national image by video social softwares. This paper will study from the original cognitive imagination in the European region to the existing Chinese image symbols of video social software in the European region, and in the end to the breakthroughs of imagination about China in the European region assisting by video social softwares. The research data is mainly based on Kwai and Youtube which are big video social software platforms. The research selects typical cases for research, takes advantage of programming programs to intercept bullet screens and comments about "China" and "the image of China" or other related high-frequency vocabularies for data mining, analyze the breakthroughs of imagination about China in video social softwares in the European region. Furthermore, it tries to analyze the original imagination about China in the European region with the method of questionnaire.

3. The Imagination About China Under the Original Consciousness of EU

3.1 The Image of China Under Artwork Output, Including Movies, TV Series, TV Programs, Literature, Paintings, Music, etc.

In recent years, China has begun to lay emphasis on the national image and cultural output, increases the output of artworks with more energy. Especially, Chinese network literature spread overseas in recent years with a phenomenal increase. According to the statistics from China National Data Network, China had outputted 5,618 different types of art copyrights to Europe and the proportion increased year by year. As shown below:
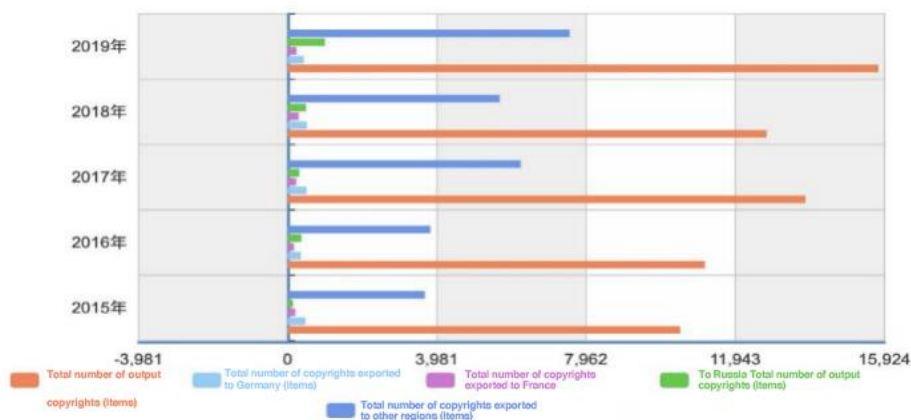

Figure 1

Based on the statistics from China National Data Network, we sent 5,000 questionnaires to the EU countries, chose 70% of the local people and 30% of the local Chinese as samples to carry out data investigation research. Through the questionnaires, we found that different countries had very different perceptions of the imagination about China under the circumstance of artwork output by China. France and Germany's perceptions of the imagination about China are higher than the countries in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. Italy, Spain and other Western European countries also have higher visibility of imagination about China. The original imagination about China in EU countries is basically based on traditional "Kung Fu" movies and most of the Chinese elements are still rested on some ideographic scripts such as scenic spots, Chinese Tea, Kung Fu, Pandas and so on. It can be found that people who have not been to China for a long time would have limited cognitions of imagination about China in film and TV works through the questionnaire data. However, the Chinese image symbols in most output film and television works still remain at the level of ideographic cultural symbols, which can not show the inner content of Chinese culture specifically. The image of China and imagination about China received by EU people still remain on ideographical level and do not have profound perceptions about the whole

Chinese culture. Thus it can be seen that compared to the countries with cultural soft power, China still has a wide gap in the aspect of cultural output. Therefore, China need to do more path constructions and propagation method optimizations for the breakthroughs of imagination about China, and need to dig deeper of Chinese traditional culture.
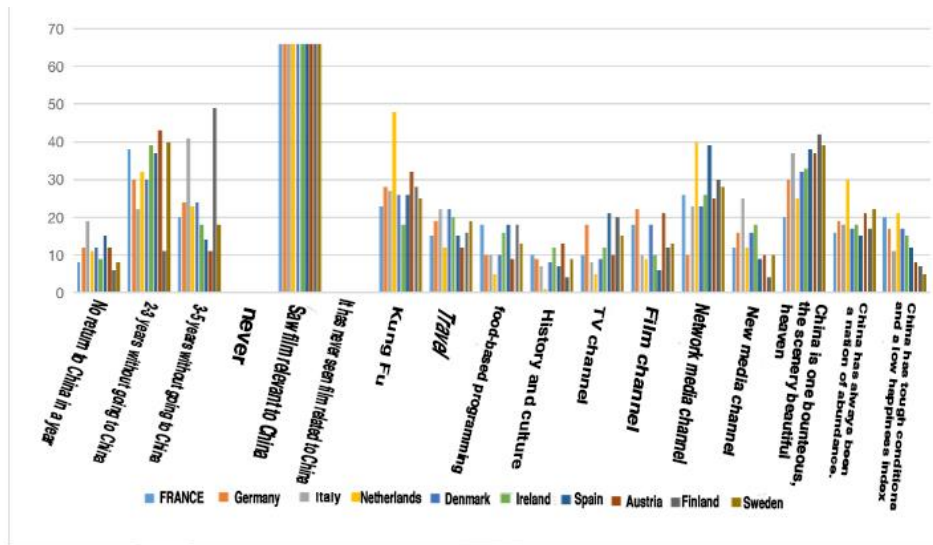

Figure 2. The Cognition of Imagination about China by the local Chinese in EU region through Film and Television Works
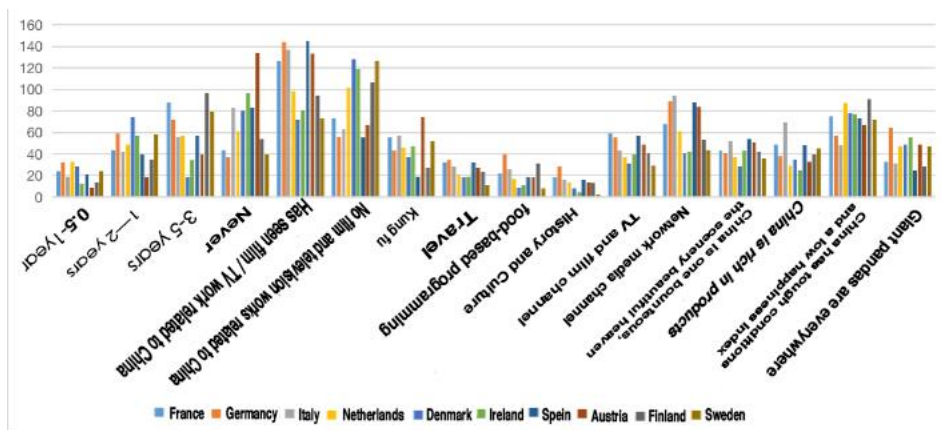

Figure 3. The Cognition of Imagination about China by the local people in EU region through Film and Television Works
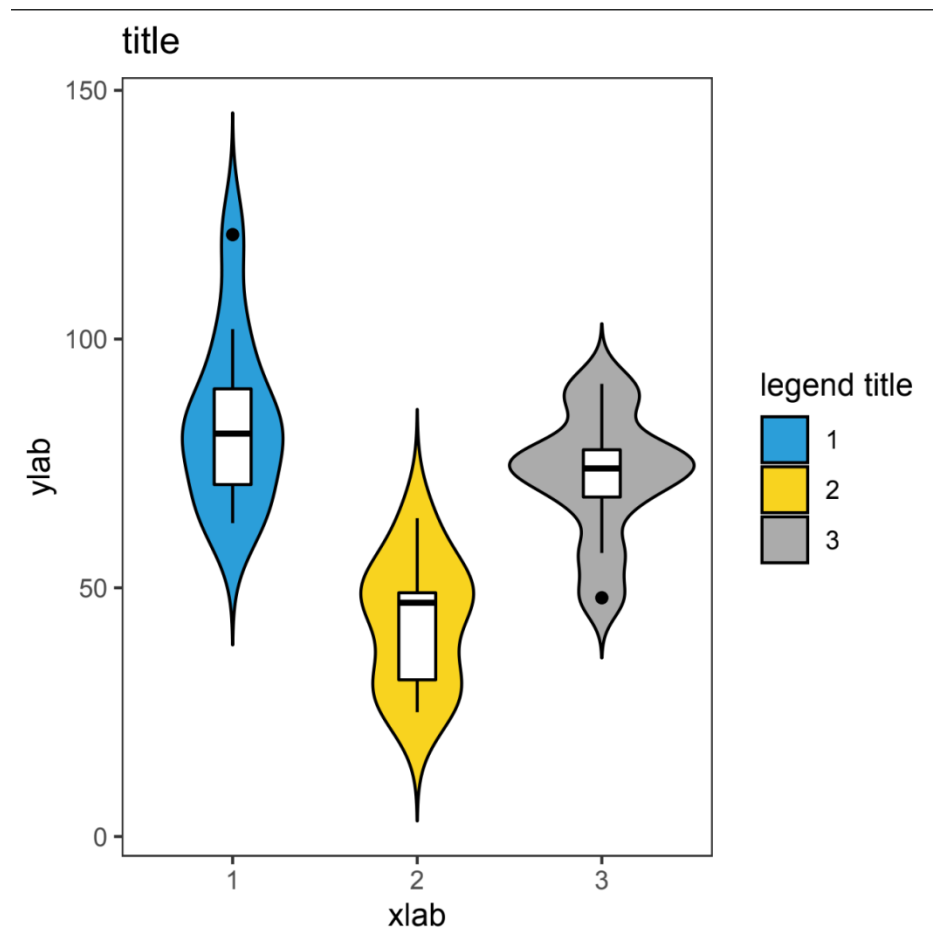
Figure 4. Cognitive Appraisals of Imagination about China from the People in EU Region

Note: The X-axis represents the appraisals about China (1 means positive, 2 means neutral, 3 means negative)

From the figure above it can be seen that the appraisals about China from different EU countries have characteristics of balancing distribution after the artwork output. However, negative appraisals are in the majority of the whole appraisals and most people still think that the overall happiness index of China is relatively low, or Chinese people are all good at Kung Fu and Pandas are everywhere. Affected by the epidemic, many Chinese people in Europe could not go back to China and Europeans were unable to have travels, which gave rise to the deviation of cognition about China even more. As a result, most Europeans who like Chinese culture can only know China through films and Television works. The explicit symbols in questionnaire show that the imagination about China of EU people still remains on traditional Chinese prejudice like "conservation", "cunning", "pollution", "prefer boys to girls", etc. Thus we China should pay more attention to the unequal cultural transmission and the fault in cultural reception, which caused by the difference of cultural and artistic fields when China promotes the national image in video social media channels. Moreover, in the cross-cultural communication, it's noticed that the different influences and differences in understanding caused by different cultural and artistic fields, and whether the Chinese-style aesthetic spirit is inapplicable in cultural exchanges in the EU region.

4. Chinese Image Symbols in Video Social Software in the EU Region

Due to the development of 5G in recent years, video social softwares have sprung up like mushrooms, like TikTok, Kwai and other softwares choose to develop abroad. We found that in areas where video social software is more developed, people's perception of China will be more inclined to contemporary China (such as China's speed, the new four major inventions, etc.), while in areas where video social software is less popular, people's perception of China will be more inclined to the output art works, such as Kung Fu, martial arts and pandas, etc. Moreover, the imagination about China also stays in the traditional prejudice about China. Furthermore, the

Chinese people who do not go back to China for a long time know nothing about the life in China nowadays and China is still like what they think in their minds.

First of all, we take advantage of programming program to retrieval comments and bullet screens containing "cina" and "china" in Youtube and Kwai, then import these data into database for data cleaning, data analysis. After these, we can divide these video comments and bullet screens into politics, economy, culture, military, society and sports for research. The result is as follows:
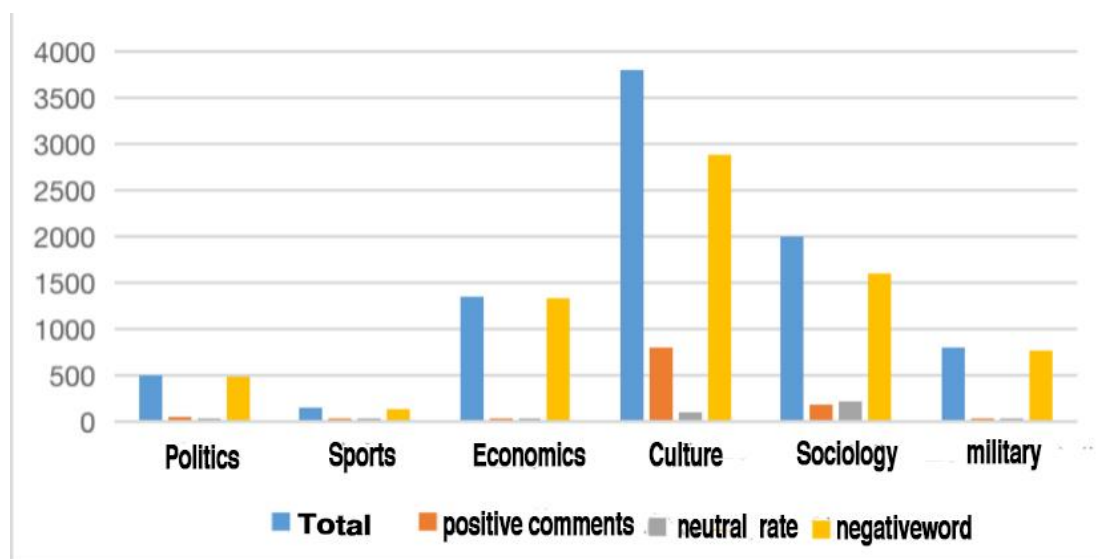

Figure 5. Comments and Bullet Screens Under Different Types of Topics

Through the analysis of bullet screens and comments and the weight of word frequency outcomes, it can be seen that most evaluations about the imagination about China and the image of China from EU people, especially in terms of Chinese culture and society. It can be found that most comments about China go with derogatory parts, they think Chinese politics is not democratic and too despotism and Chinese people are oppressed every day Or the explicit symbols in the comments show their recognition and envy of the development of China nowadays, such as the large growth of Chinese economy, the rapid development of science and technology in recent years. However, the implicit symbols can express more feelings like concern or contempt, which show the tone of China threat theory.

With the rapid development of a mediated society, people around the world are increasingly relying on Internet social media for social interaction, so the dissemination of China's image also depends more on the Internet and video social media. However, with the process of globalization of world culture has accelerated in recent years, the producers and transmitters of Chinese videos lead to an idea that we are more convergent about culture in the global village. Nevertheless, the Chinese aesthetic spirit have a kind of " The true face of Lushan is lost to my sight, for it is right in this mountain that I reside" cultural transmission features of blank space, which cause the Chinese transmitters and producers think everyone's cognition about the image of China is the same, but it's not. The recipients of the EU think that China is still the China they perceive it to be, but it is not. As a result, understanding differences in cross-cultural communication have arisen, leading to misinformation and misunderstanding.

Therefore, when we establish the construction of China's image, we should pay attention to own artistic positioning and communication methods, form our own style and establish the Chinese fields for cultural recipients. For example, the well-known American style, French style, etc., are all the accurate positioning of each country when they do cultural output to China.

5. Breakthroughs of Imagination About China Assisting by Video Social Softwares

5.1 Comparison of Popular Video Social Media in Mainland China and the EU

We compared the hot video contents of domestic and foreign versions of Kwai and TikTok for studying the

breakthroughs of imagination about China in video social softwares in EU region. Since 2021, the hot contents under the China section had included the Chinese epidemic, the Chinese space station, the migration of wild elephants in Yunnan, and the heavy rain in Zhengzhou, etc. We conducted the same search on the international version of the software with the same topic and found that there were differences in the output content. In Chinese TikTok and Kwai, we could see more entries about poverty-alleviation and rural revitalization construction when we saw the videos about the migration of wild elephants. Regarding the epidemic, there were more repeated epidemics in various places and the state of home isolation. For the topic about Chinese space station, there were more emotional comments and were tend to "proud" and "development" in general. Under the topic of heavy rain in Zhengzhou, there were more videos about the local situations, such as water and power cuts, supermarkets sold out. The most striking thing was the problems of communication base station led to network outage, which caused the mobile payments unused and the whole city paralyzed. However, for the International App, we could not find the relative videos about poverty-alleviation, paralyzed city, supermarkets sold out and so on. The output videos were more about economic development, national construction, the government's effective control in the face of natural disasters and videos about environment protection that were beneficial to the national image. The hot videos under the international version included more art, social culture, and personal vlogs. On the overseas versions of tiktok, kwai and even YouTube, there were many vlogs of "experiencing and sharing life in China", and there were also topics about "we from china" on tiktok, and some of these videos had also received a high number of views. Among them, the comments with high likes also expressed their goodwill towards China and bloggers. China also takes advantage of video social softwares fully to output its national image at present. There are many videos on TikTok reflecting Chinese style and features. Making "hot" videos can output the image of China by combinative way with self-shaping and other-shaping. Moreover, the likes, bullet screens and comments under the videos can also let us know the differences in the cognition about Chinese culture by overseas audience under different cultural backgrounds. As a result, we can know whether it has misunderstanding in cultural output and can analyze the reasons of misunderstanding. Therefore, we can evaluate the communication effect of "cultural symbols".

5.2 Comparison of Linguistic Signs

In semiotics, it is proposed that language symbols are formed by sound and meaning. "Sound" is the material representation of language symbols, which is denotation. "Meaning" is the content of language symbols, which is signifier. Only the combination of sound and meaning can refer to actual phenomena and can consist of the symbols of language. Language symbols are tools for communication between people and are one of the most important communication media in human society. People use language symbols to express their thoughts, feelings and knowledge. "In a philosophical sense, ideas are expressed through language. Thinking is the "core" of language, and symbols are the "shell" of language. Therefore, when we study the bullet screens and comments under the video, expect the explicit symbols expressed by the language, we need also study the core of the language - the implicit symbols.

In International video social softwares, we can see many comments and bullet screens appear with envy about the development of China at present, such as "how could China become so powerful all at once?" "Shouldn't the title be how did the top 1% of country and people become so powerful?" "Why is China's carbon dioxide emissions per capita almost half of ours?" "China has started building its own space station!" "China's economic development has already surpassed ours. Why does China still call yourself a developing country?" "I am very happy that Taiwan has performed well in the 2020/2021 Tokyo Olympics. Supporting Chinese athletes is like supporting Xinjiang Cotton. Who knows what human rights were violated in order to achieve such excellent athletic performance." These comments express the approval and envy of China's current development, but if we dig deeper, we will find that it may not be as simple as it seems. The end of envy always means a kind of worry and resentment. Many people in EU region are worried about the development of China, they are afraid that the rapid development of China will impact their own interests and even endanger their national security.

5.3 Signifier Contrast of Cultural Symbols

Cultural symbols are signs with a special connotation or special meaning. Cultural symbols have highly abstraction and rich in connotations. Cultural symbols are the abstract embodiment of the unique culture of an enterprise, a region, a nation or a country, and are an important carrier and form of cultural connotation. Linguistic symbols are mainly formed y signifier and signified and a kind of conventional sign; the relationship between signifier and signified of different cultural groups is different and has national specificity. Therefore, when we studied the breakthroughs of imagination about China in video social softwares in EU region, we found that before using video softwares, these people's comments about China's image were mostly from the impacts of films and Television dramas. Most of these comments were "Chinese people all have pandas" "Chinese

people eat everything" "It seems to be relatively poor" "feudal consciousness" and so on. After the popularization of video social software, people in the EU began to have positive comments such as "great land and resources", "rapid economic development" and "developed technology" in the imagination of people in the EU region. Maybe there are still "China threat theory" views behind these comments, but it cannot be denied that EU people's perception of imagination about China has begun to change with the development of video social media today. Moreover, they start to realize the development of China gradually and also realize that the rapid development of China may impact their countries' development.

5.4 Breakthroughs of Imagination About China Assisting by Video Social Softwares

The image of China is objective and a generalized external environment. However, people in EU region obtain their imagination about China with a whole process, which combines their own experience with analyzing and summarizing from external information during human communication. In the original imagination about China of EU people, they established the original imagination about China into their minds with the spreading of Chinese films and Television dramas. And then Web 2.0 era arrived and video social softwares were popular, so that EU people absorbed the output of China's image unconsciously in their work and life, they started to doubt the existed cognitive structures of imagination about China. As a result, they started to re-understand the image of China with critical thinking. In the end, EU people overthrew their previous cognitive composition and created a new imagination about China's image. The reconstruction of imagination about China has broken the original imagination of people in the EU region, and has a new understanding of China's image.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Under the Concept of the Internet Global Village, It Is the Borderless Exchange of Information and the Undifferentiated Expression of Culture

With the Web 2.0 era and the rapid development of 5G today, Internet has occupied more and more proportions in our daily life. The whole world is also connected closer due to the rapid development of Internet and the whole world has gradually become a "global village". After the concept of Internet global village and the popular of video social media, we can find that the information exchange begins to be borderless and cultural communication also has undifferentiated expression. After studying the cognition of imagination about China from EU people using video social softwares, it can be seen that people who use video social softwares frequently prefer to have the imagination about China's modern and specific situations. After analyzing the comments, it can be seen that there is a high degree of consistency in the comments under the popular videos. All of these fully show that the global people start to exchange the information borderless and cultural cognition has undifferentiated expressions.

6.2 The Chinese Government Has Manipulated the Output of China's Image

After researching the popular content under Tiktok, kwai and Youtube, it can be found that the popular videos about China's image in the app (Tiktok, Kwai) independently developed by China are quite different from YouTube. Most of the videos are about negative issues and neutral discussions about the epidemic, politics, and the economy of the image of China. On Chinese domestic video software, it's hard to see negative videos about China in the hot content. Moreover, after comparing the international and mainland version of the video software, it can be found that the content with feudalistic superstition like "insect feast" can not be searched in the international video version, but there are many content in mainland video version. From this, we can find that China's self-developed apps have two different algorithms for screening videos uploading, one for domestic audience and the other for overseas. Thus the image of China can be controlled in cultural output.

6.3 The Phenomenon of Controlling Comments in the EU Region Is Just Like Controlling People's Consciousness

When we analyzed the comments in video social softwares, it could be found that there were still many comments and bullet screens about "China threat theory" under the videos about China's development. They try to control their people's perception of China as much as possible, and try not to achieve the situation that their people are "Chine-friendly".

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