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From Seeing to Perceiving: The Audiovisual Construction and Embodied Experience of Rural Space in Documentaries

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Abstract

This paper discusses some recent Chinese documentaries with rural themes. These documentaries use audiovisual codes to help audiences move from “seeing” spaces physically to “sensing” multidimensional spaces, triggering embodied experiences. Owing to a general tendency to focus on “what kind of space is depicted” in documentaries, scholars have systematically neglected the basic link of “how they trigger audiences’ sensory experiences”. Taking some recent documentaries including *Remembering Nostalgia* and *Beautiful Countryside* as examples, this paper intends to argue that there is a central argument in these documentaries: That is, documentaries “guide” viewers visually and “envelop” them aurally, making them an attractive textual body. That is, first, visually, mobile shots “guide” audiences to experience space as if they were “walking”, close-ups “stimulate” audiences to feel emotions, and changes in lighting effect create spatial atmosphere, which turn viewers from merely “seers” of spaces into active “explorers” of spaces. Second, aurally, a carefully designed soundscape and affective voice-over create a surrounding acoustic space that “envelops” audiences. In sum, the entire audiovisual strategy not only depicts images of countryside, but also effectively “mobilizes” viewers’ bodily memories and affective feelings to trigger embodied experiences, that is, “being there”. By exploring the sensory aesthetics and experiential construction in documentaries, this paper reveals how documentaries can help audiences leap from “seeing” spaces to “sensing”.

Keywords: audiovisual construction, embodied experience, rural space, sensory aesthetics, Chinese documentaries

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Questions

This paper intends to explore in a systematic way how contemporary Chinese rural documentaries, through the creation of new audiovisual codes, deeply transform the representation of rural space into an emotional mobilization. The research question of this paper is: How do documentary creators use certain kinds of audiovisual codes to establish emotional channels between viewers and rural space so that viewers go beyond a mere visual consumption of rural space and can produce embodied spatial experiences and emotions?

The above-mentioned research question can be further concretely divided into three interrelated dimensions: First, in terms of visual construction, how do documentaries use camera language (including the organic combination of shot type, designed camera movement trajectory and style treatment of lighting) to transcend the planar limitation of frame and produce an immersive visual environment to guide viewers to have a “being-there” sensory experience? Second, in terms of auditory construction, how do documentaries use designed soundscapes (including the spatial reproduction of ambient sound, emotional guidance of voice-over

narration and the rhythmic control of sound elements) to produce more three-dimensional space and then evoke viewers' emotional memories and produce a holistic perception of rural space? Third, in terms of the integrated audiovisual level, how do visual and auditory elements use construct a kind of "sensible space" which is resonant with the discourse of rural development in the new era and also with the audience?

Those questions are not only related to the analysis of documentary techniques but also related to some theoretical issues concerning media communication, emotional mobilization and cultural construction.

1.2 Literature Review

As the deep media integration is gradually realized, how audiovisual media represent rural space has attracted increasing attention from scholars. Existing studies promote the academic discourse on this issue from three dimensions.

First, existing studies focus on the representation of rural space and its narrative turn. Wang Yuwei and Yang Shan (2024) systematically reviewed the narrative image of rural areas in the media, and found that its image has undergone a significant transformation from a poetic "utopian" imagination to a critical "pre-modern" symbol, and then to the "livable, workable, beautiful, and harmonious" image of the new era. The narrative turn of the image of rural areas reveals the deep connection between media representation and social ideology. From the perspective of communication studies, Zhang Huiyu (2024) found that the audiovisual technology has brought new visual impact and emotional experience to the cultural communication of rural areas, and enabled the rural areas to shift from a "disadvantaged" position to a representative of "livable, harmonious, and valuable" spaces in the digital age.

In terms of audiovisual technique, scholars have conducted relatively in-depth exploration. Wang Xinying and You Yaowang (2024) systematically analyzed the audiovisual presentation of documentaries on the revitalization of rural areas, and explained the basic function of technical elements such as shot selection, lighting application, and sound design in spatial construction in detail. Zhao Li (2024) expanded the scope of analysis to more visual media, and analyzed the overall use of camera language, editing rhythm, and sound design in the discourse of rural areas, while emphasizing that the audiovisual media can reconstruct the cultural value of rural areas.

The above-mentioned theoretical breakthroughs in technique have laid a solid foundation for the analysis of documentary audiovisual grammar. More importantly, the theoretical model of multidimensional space has been introduced. Starting from the spatial theory of Lefebvre and Hafique, Wang Yuwei and Yang Shan (2024) constructed a tripartite analytical model of material space, spiritual space, and social space. This theoretical model breaks through the traditional understanding of rural areas as a single geographical space, redefines the rural areas as a complex field filled with cultural meaning and social relations, and provides a powerful theoretical model for the in-depth interpretation of rural areas.

Although they have made these great achievements, current research finds a theoretical blind spot: most of the existing studies remain at the descriptive level of what documentaries construct and which techniques they use. Very few studies focus on the deep level of how form and content jointly influence the audience's sensory experience. Existing research is very good at analyzing the "representation" of space, but they seldom explore the "experience" of space; they are very good at explaining the symbolic meaning of audiovisual signs, but they do not clearly reveal how audiovisual signs mobilize the audience's bodily perception to make them feel a "sense of immersion" or an embodied experience. This necessary transition from "representation" to "experience" is what this article intends to promote.

Based on the existing research on representation of space and audiovisual technique, this article will first present the theoretical perspective of "embodied experience". Then, based on careful analysis of the accurate audiovisual syntax of contemporary rural documentaries, this article will explore how they transform macro-level discussions of countryside into emotional experience that can be felt bodily by audience. This is a research path that transcends the usual question of "what kind of countryside does documentary show?", and explores further "how does documentary make the audience feel that kind of countryside with their whole being?". This is what this article can contribute to current documentary studies on sensory aesthetics and mechanism of experience construction.

1.3 Research Methods

This study adopts textual analysis as its core approach. Through systematic close reading and critical analysis of the documentary films' system of signification and logic of spatial construction, this study attempts to provide an interpretation of documentary films. The adoption of textual research method is based on the epistemological position that documentary films are complete semiotic systems and carriers of meaning. Such an epistemological position demands that the researcher should go beyond simple description of film contents and explore the productivity of form itself, that is, how the audiovisual language through its specific organization produces certain spatial perceptions and emotional effects by itself.

In terms of operation, this study builds a two-dimensional analytical framework based on structuralist narratology and film semiotics. The analytical framework builds on the combinatorial relations of concrete technical aspects in audio and vision. The visual dimension analyzes the combinatorial patterns of stylistic elements such as shot scale, camera movement and lighting/color. The auditory dimension analyzes the rhetorical functions of elements such as voice-over narration, sound effects and music. The establishment of analytical framework enables the analysis of the abstract concept of “audiovisual construction” to rely on concrete and perceptible technical aspects, and thus provides a systematic way to analyze texts.

In terms of research texts, this study follows the principles of typicality and representativeness and selects mainstream rural documentaries produced since 2012 that have had a wide social influence as samples. The study takes authoritative series such as *Remembering Nostalgia*, *Beautiful Countryside*, *The Field of Hope: By the Lalin River*, *Beautiful Village* and *Searching for Craftsmanship* as main samples. These works are authoritative in terms of broadcasting platforms. They have distinct practices in exploring the audiovisual language, and together can reflect the overall landscape and aesthetic features of rural narratives in the new era.

The process of textual analysis follows the principle of progressive analysis, from surface meaning to underlying meaning, and from form to significance. First, it involves detailed viewing and description, and then records representative audiovisual segments and their technical characteristics accurately. Second, the observations are organized in the analytical framework to analyze the combinatorial relations and internal grammar among different audiovisual elements. Finally, based on the formal analysis, it conducts interpretation analysis to explore the rhetorical intentions and cultural logic embedded in specific audiovisual structures, and analyzes how they achieve emotional mobilization and meaning construction through providing sensory guidance. This study explores a layered analytical approach to establish an analytical chain from technical form to cultural meaning, and provides a systematic textual basis to explore the rural visual narratives of the new era.

2. Visual Strategies: How to Make “Messages” Visually “Moving”

As we have stated above, we are dealing with documentary texts, not the real world. Therefore, the spatial narrative that is being examined here is not the spatial narrative that is built in the world, but the narrative that is built in the filmed image. How do documentaries build space in the visual frame? What techniques are used to build this space?

It should be noted that there is often confusion in regard to the study of spatial narrative in visual media and in literature. Narrative in literature is based on “words,” while film and documentary do not have the idea of the “word.” As Pier Paolo Pasolini (1984) stated, “There is no dictionary of images. There are no images that are ready to be used. If we were to imagine such a dictionary, it would have to be an infinitely large one... The film director has no dictionary; he has nothing but infinite possibilities.” What then is the language of film? Knowing the answer to this question is the key to knowing the language of documentary used in the visual construction of space.

The well-known French film critic and theorist André Bazin, in his book *The Evolution of the Language of Cinema* (1980), studied and conceptualized “film language.” According to Bazin, “visual composition,” “montage techniques,” “cinematography and editing,” “image and sound,” “deep focus,” and “shot breakdown” are the basic elements of the language of cinema. Film and documentary use this basic language primarily to create narrative and, ultimately, certain artistic effects.

Indeed, the art of the moving image is inherently dependent on both “seeing” and “hearing.” The language of film and documentary encompasses a variety of visual and auditory methods. The spatial narrative in documentary is thus built upon the foundation of the visual image and sound. This analysis will proceed in two parts: first, how the documentary’s visual image constructs screen space, and second, how documentary uses sound to shape that screen space.

Our earlier discussion noted that film language includes commonly used, conventional techniques like “visual composition,” “montage,” “cinematography and editing,” “image and sound,” “deep focus,” and “shot breakdown.” However, film language is not a natural language. Jean Mitry (1988) contended that film expresses meaning directly through itself; therefore, speaking of its language, utterance, or concepts is merely metaphorical. As a form of direct signification, film is cognitively metaphorical because cognition involves the distinction between expressive thought and the object of thought. Conversely, scholar Warren Buckland suggested that film can be considered a language, or at least a grammar, noting that a shot is somewhat analogous to a word, and linking shots through editing resembles forming syntax.

Thus, the film language system constitutes a rich system of signs and coded meanings, whose organization and application are highly diverse. Building upon conventional film language, cinema develops distinct languages that correspond to specific film themes, styles, and discourses. For instance, film language manifests in concrete and unique ways according to a film’s theme, style, and discursive framework.

Michel Foucault's (1986) definition of discourse is very useful here. He defines discourse as meaningful statements made in certain historical periods, under certain historical conditions, according to certain rules and practices. Foucault defined the term "discourse" as a collection of statements that offer a kind of language, a way of talking about or representing something (Foucault, 1986: 94).

It is necessary to introduce the relationship of "film and discourse" because the Chinese countryside films in this new era to some extent possess the features of what Foucault once called "discourse". Entering a new era, the Chinese countryside has undergone tremendous changes and a new look. These new-era villages are new and beautiful, post-poverty alleviation villages, and they have characteristics of "goodness, beauty and truth". In order to produce the discourse of "goodness, beauty and truth", the documentaries need certain visual and auditory forms to create the linguistic syntax suitable for them.

As a visual art form, documentary forms spatial imagery through its visual language. In contemporary Chinese rural documentaries, the visual artistic language is complicated and diverse, but it tends to be a discourse of "beauty" overall. This beauty includes the beauty of space in terms of grandeur and aesthetics, the beauty of social space in terms of order and harmony, and the beauty of spiritual and cultural space in terms of emotion and intellect. In order to produce images of these three types of beauty, documentaries create their features of "beautiful space" and "virtuous/beautiful space" through their visual languages, such as shot scale, light and color, and camera movement.

2.1 The Spatial Dialectics of Shot Scale: From "Grand Narrative" to "Micro-Emotion"

Shot scale is one of the basic visual means for spatial narration. As Marcel Martin (1980) puts it, the shot is the most elementary unit of the language of films — the material of cinema. It is both the objective reproduction mechanism that mechanically recreates the image and an important manifestation of the director's intention. These cinematic elements include many aspects, and shot scale is of particular significance.

Be it in literature or in images, any subject can be depicted from its scale and scope. In cinematic arts, shot scale refers to the area and spatial range that a scene or character takes up in a frame. In general, documentaries use extreme long shots, long shots, medium shots, close-ups, and extreme close-ups as cinematic frames, presenting scenes or characters in different spatial ranges within the frame. And the choice and use of shot scale is closely related to the documentary's discursive context.

In contemporary Chinese rural documentaries, shot scale is a routine language for visual space construction, and full shots present a more overall picture of the spatial landscape of new-era countryside. Moreover, in some documentaries, certain shot scales become defining stylistic elements in the visual language of documentaries, shaping its visual style and discourse through constraining the use of shot scale.

The documentary *Remembering Nostalgia* uses extreme long shots and close-ups as defining stylistic elements. These two shot scales are polar opposites in cinematic language. The extreme long shot means the largest range of depicted space — the environment setting is the absolutely overlord element of the image. People almost disappear in the frame, becoming just color patches or lines before the grand view. While the close-up means the compression of the depicted visual space, magnifying and highlighting certain specific parts of scene or characters, almost excluding the environment setting of the scene.

Remembering Nostalgia uses a lot of extreme long shots to present the picturesque visual spaces of China's new-era countryside and arouses the audience's deep nostalgia. The director uses many extreme long shots and innovative aerial filming. Aerial filming means filming the scene from the sky or a high position, creating a panoramic view from a distance. At the same time, it also creates a view of omniscient bird's eye view, showing the overall geographical layout of villages and homelands.

When shooting Chakeng Village, the documentary uses aerial shots to show villagers drying tangerine peels in the courtyards. The whole frame becomes a painting. The aerial shot gives the audience a very poetic visual experience (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Drying Tangerine Peels in Chakeng Village from *Remembering Nostalgia*

The long shot not only presents a real scene but also can evoke people in Chakeng Village to remember the places in their childhood when they have left the village. In *Remembering Nostalgia*, the director uses long shots and empty shots (no people, only the scene) to create a mood. For example, a shot of a “sea of clouds” over Maihuayu Village, the camera shows the fog gradually dissipating and revealing the shape of the village clearly to the audience. This way, the visual space appears to be bigger. By showing these wide views, the film tries to display ecological environment beauty of China new-era countryside.

The long shot can greatly expand the rural space on screen, and long shots make the feeling of nostalgia more profound.

Remembering Nostalgia also uses many close-up shots. These shots try to reveal the emotional world in rural stories. Close-ups are completely different from long shots. By moving the camera close to the subject, close-ups focus on showing facial expression, hand gesture, or the texture of an object. This way, close-ups are more effective at evoking the audience’s emotions.

In the episode about Taoyuan Village, the director uses close-ups to show a girl’s feelings. The story is about entrepreneur Wu Xiaobo. When Wu talks about the difficult time when he started his business in his peach orchard, a series of close shots on his tear-filled eyes and his hand wiping the tears away are shown. These close-ups not only show that Wu feels guilty for returning to his hometown to start his business for his mother, but also make the audience deeply sympathize with him. The emotional distance between the close-up and the viewer becomes very short. The personal feelings of Wu are feelings that the viewer also has.

These close-ups are important to tell this story. Wu Xiaobo’s quick thinking and knowledge help him become the first person in the village to sell peaches online. At this moment of success, the director uses a close-up on Wu’s eyes, which are now filled with happy tears, as Wu says, “I am still my mother’s pride.” These close-ups used at the low and high points connect the different parts of Wu’s life and show Wu as a brave and capable new countryside person.

Documentaries about ICH are especially good at using close-up shots. With the development of China, people’s interest in culture traditions gradually increased. This has led to many documentaries about rural ICH, such as *The Great Hidden Craftsmen*, *Searching for Craftsmanship*, *Guardians of Chinese Crafts*, and *Heritage at Your Fingertips*. These films show heritage keepers and their crafts. Close-up shots are very important to show the dedication of artisans and the texture of crafts.

For example, *Searching for Craftsmanship* presents crafts such as dough figurines, pottery, and papermaking. When introducing these crafts, close-up shots are indispensable. Close-up shots allow viewers to see the details of the craft being made and also capture the clear trajectory of the artisan’s movements, their expression of concentration, and their intense gaze (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

In total, the scale of shot helps create the visual space of the film. The use of close-up shots in the new-era Chinese rural documentary is very appropriate, and it also closely corresponds to the cultural theme of the new era.

Figure 2. *Searching for Craftsmanship*Figure 3. *Searching for Craftsmanship*

2.2 The Spatiotemporal Sculpting of Light: From “Physical Illumination” to “Spiritual Revelation”

Light is an important visual means of spatial narration. It is an essential component of the composition, creating different effects in the space within the frame. First, light is closely related to screen space. Light appearing in the visual frame gives emphasis and definition to the spatial environment. In Western classical painting as early as in the 16th century, light has been used to create spatial perspective and depth on the two-dimensional canvas. After the invention of film, light still bears the same function. For example, zonal lighting can break the uniform illumination, increasing the spatial depth of the image (Wang Juren, 2022). In documentary filmmaking, using light is also indispensable. Creators shape three-dimensional and volumetric space by using lighting to transcend the two-dimensional plane.

Second, the relationship between light and color should be closely examined. Light in cinematic arts can be divided into natural and artificial lights. The sun is a source of natural light; the color temperature of natural light varies with the time of day. Artificial light is man-made; it can emit lights of different colors. In film and documentary, the use of natural light and artificial light creates diverse and colorful images.

Finally, the relationship between light and shadow cannot be ignored. Light falls on the plane and forms bright areas; the shadow part is removed by light. This lighting ratio, the contrast between light and dark, models the three-dimensionality of the image and enhances the spatial effect.

The main topic of the documentaries in the new era is the new era itself, that is, protected and developed ecological environment, harmonious co-existence of man and nature, comfortable and suitable living environment, and more comprehensive cultural prosperity. In this regard, light, as an important element of cinematic art, plays a vital role. In the process of shooting documentaries, creators use light for modeling, which is not only essential for creating the overall atmosphere and emotional feeling, but also for modeling the visual space of the image.

Documentaries use light to reflect and represent the tranquility and harmony of the new Chinese countryside. In the process of filming, cinematographers use natural light and shadow effects to create the atmosphere of the visual space. For example, in the documentary *The Field of Hope: By the Lalin River*, it records the rapid development of Dujia Town in Wuchang City, Heilongjiang Province, known as China’s “Land of Rice” (Figures 4 and 5). Through depicting the prosperous life of the people in Dujia Town, who live on the Wuchang rice nourished by the Lalin River.

During the *Grain in Ear* period, it is seen that the Lalin River sparkles in the sunlight, irrigating the vibrant green rice seedlings. In the harvest season, the golden rice fields undulate like waves under the sun. In winter, Dujia Town is covered with snow; the sunlight reflects on the snowy ground, making the vast land look majestic and splendid.

Figure 4. *The Field of Hope: By the Lalin River*Figure 5. *The Field of Hope: By the Lalin River*

The series *The Best Time of the Year* broadcast by Hunan Satellite Television records how the villages in Hunan Province had been lifted out of poverty and became *beautiful countryside*. The eight episodes of the series authentically reflect the beautiful landscapes and rich cultural heritage of Hunan's countryside. The simple and naturally beautiful lives of villagers are presented in the series.

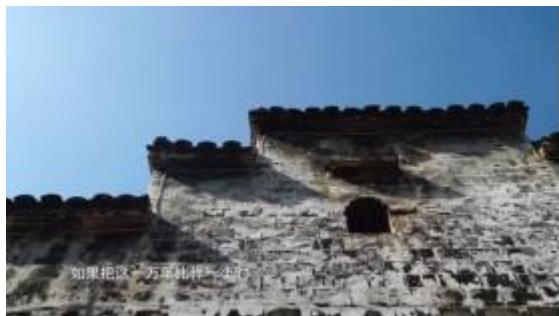
There are many scenes reflecting the beautiful sceneries of the countryside in Hunan in the documentary. For example, the morning sun shoots through the mist and illuminates the fields; an old farmer works on the land. Light and shadow make shadows on the face of the old farmer telling a story of his hard work during his lifetime. All these reflect the beauty of the countryside in Hunan and the happy lives of villagers.

In addition, documentaries use light to reflect the historical and cultural spiritual space of the new-era Chinese countryside. Compared with urban documentaries, not only can rural documentaries use light to reflect three-dimensional space and visual beauty of rural life, but also use light to reflect psychological emotional space and reflect the spiritual space of rural history and culture. Documentary filmmakers shoot light into the lens and audience sees the light and objects illuminated by light. Xiang Xianghu said that "human consciousness can impose an *a priori* form on the sensory field, grasping the visual structure as a whole" (Xiang Xianghu, 2018). Visual beauty can stimulate psychological response, arousing space of memory, emotion and spirit. It is the same in shooting rural documentaries with the theme of nostalgia.

Taking *Remembering Nostalgia* and *Chinese Villages* as examples, using light to shoot ancient historical buildings in the countryside reflects beautiful sceneries. Not only can it construct the architectural and structural space of the village in the frame, but also it can arouse the psychological response of audience. Arouse memory, emotion and a spiritual space of specific histories. I believe that in shooting nostalgia-themed rural documentaries, filmmakers successfully use light to connect the two-dimensional visual space of documentary and the psychological space of audience. That is, viewing is no longer a two-dimensional visual experience, but a connection of internal space of documentary and mental space of audience. It breaks the "fourth wall".

In *Remembering Nostalgia* and *Chinese Villages*, the director intentionally plays with the light and shadow effects to display the beauty of ancient historical building and landscape in the countryside (Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). These old villages and buildings are "static" and "silent". But to give them "vitality" and "energy", to make them "come to life", to record the documentaries the light that falls on these villages and buildings for a period of time will certainly be "flowing space". This "flowing space" makes these villages and buildings appear three-dimensional and alive. This "come to life" visual effect will certainly trigger an internal response in the audience. They will trigger audience to imagine walking in the space unconsciously. For those who once residents but have left behind will have a special affection and magnetism for these images. They will trigger memories of history and old years and attract them to enter in this emotional space of "nostalgia".

In a certain sense, the old Chinese countryside should release its internal driving force. Even these old villages and buildings that represent old history and culture, if the flow of light and shadow helps them to become a dynamic and living space in the image of the new era.

Figure 6. *Remembering Nostalgia*Figure 7. *Chinese Villages*Figure 8. *Chinese Villages*Figure 9. *Chinese Villages*Figure 10. *Chinese Villages*Figure 11. *Chinese Villages*

2.3 The Spatial Weaving of Moving Cameras: From “Static Observation” to “Dynamic Immersion”

Composite shots with multiple angles and directions are an important way to express space in rural documentaries. As Jiao Xiongping pointed out, Louis Giannetti uses different English terms such as “Movies,” “motion pictures,” and “moving pictures” in his book *Understanding Movies* to define the form of camera movement. Both of them show that moving pictures have rich meanings of motion and essential meaning. René Clair once said that movement was “the very substance of film esthetics.” Thus, motion is its nature and makes a distinction with other arts.

Unlike static shots, moving shots can change the optical axis of the camera and the position of the camera or even the lens angle to realize the movement such as dolly-in, dolly-out, pan, track, follow, crane-up and crane-down. In fact, these kinds of movements are only the simulation of human’s own way of observing. That is to say, they just simulate people’s behaviors of approaching, distancing, following, panning, and changing viewpoint and direction. Therefore, different kinds of movement forms would realize different visual effects. That is, one moving shot can present one certain space or connect several spaces together; moving shots often do not realize only one kind of movement in one take, that is, they would appear as composite shots with two or more kinds of movement forms in one take. These kinds of composite shots would realize rich viewpoint changes, that is, change of angle, direction, and height, and allow people to observe space in full view. Simply speaking, as audience watch different kinds of elements in one scene of documentary, they would realize space from the motion of camera and changing of several viewpoints. In addition, different kinds of movement forms would realize different kinds of visual spatial effects and atmosphere. For example, dolly-in would realize tension, excitement, or concentration; dolly-out would realize breadth, freedom, or relaxation; and pan would realize a rotating, dynamic, and lively visual effect.

First, overall, moving shots with multiple scales, angles, and directions would realize stronger expressive power and deeper level of spatial narration in new-era rural documentaries. On the one hand, they would allow people to better realize the spatial layout and environment of countryside. For example, flying over fields and orchards or following streams would realize geographical features and natural environment of countryside. On the other hand, they would allow people to record and realize activities of villagers. Following villagers who come back from working in fields or children playing at the village entrance would allow people to better realize life of countryside. In addition, moving shots would also allow people to realize different speeds of movement. Different speeds would allow people to realize countryside at different rhythms. For example, slow tracking would realize tranquility and peace; fast moving would realize vitality and change. They would also allow people to realize and speed up or slow down documentary. For example, when documentaries focus on seasonal changes, they would allow people to realize process of growth, flowering, and fruiting of plants. It would allow the documentary to realize more lively and vivid narrative pace. In addition, they would allow people to realize documentary in different visual effects and make documentaries more attractive. For example, using drones to follow and shoot fields and landscape from the point of view of animal would allow audience to realize different kinds of visual effects.

Second, moving shots can connect disparate, individual spaces into a cohesive whole through specific movement patterns. Within the visual frame, this helps viewers form an overall impression of the filmed space. Unlike perceiving real-world space, the space presented within a shot is always limited. Moving shots, however, can traverse from one space to another, or to multiple spaces, presenting space panoramically within the cinematic world.

Take the three-episode series *Beautiful Countryside* from Zhejiang Satellite TV as an example. It tells the story of Gejia Village in Ninghai, Zhejiang, where resident artists used art for rural construction activities. It vividly shows how the artists, “using the village as a platform and art as the medium,” transformed the countryside, shaped and depicted its beauty, and contributed to rural revitalization. Divided into chapters titled *Artists Came to the Village*, *Villagers Became Artists*, and *A Beautiful Countryside Today*, the creators made extensive use of moving shots. These shots follow the villagers of Gejia Village as they go about their daily productive lives and activities within their familiar rural spaces, while also showing them renovating their own village, inspired by the resident artists. These moving shots give the audience a comprehensive impression of Gejia Village’s overall spatial layout, introducing spaces that were, or had the potential to be, transformed. The use of moving shots in the documentary resonates with the words of resident artist Cong Zhiqiang: “For rural revitalization to be truly achieved, villagers themselves must become active participants.”

Moving shots can follow characters through space, allowing the audience to also perceive the width, length, and depth of the environment alongside them. For example, following a person, creating a subjective point-of-view shot, can give the audience a sense of spatial immersion and experience. In the first episode of *Beautiful Countryside*, *Artists Came to the Village*, which primarily depicts artist Cong Zhiqiang’s initial arrival in the village, the cinematographer uses shots from multiple angles, directions, and movement types to show Cong exploring every corner of the village on foot (as shown in Figures 12, 13, 14, 15).



Figure 12. *Beautiful Countryside*



Figure 13. *Beautiful Countryside*

Figure 14. *Beautiful Countryside*Figure 15. *Beautiful Countryside*

3. Auditory Strategies: How Does Sound “Construct” an Ideal Countryside?

As any sound recordist knows, when a microphone and recorder are set up in a supposedly ‘quiet’ environment, a multitude of previously unnoticed sounds inevitably emerge, precisely because the microphone is non-selective (Bordwell, D., Thompson, K., & Smith, J., 2010). This indicates that an absolutely “silent” space does not exist in the real world. As a spatial art, film and documentary rely not merely on the medium’s capacity to record sound, but more fundamentally on sound itself being an integral component of space. A space without sound is incomplete and cannot be fully realized (Chen Gong, 2016).

In addition, extending analysis of space to the auditory dimension, the appearance of the “soundscape” substantially enriches our knowledge of the “sound-space” relationship. The soundscape was defined by R. Murray Schafer as follows: “an acoustic environment as perceived by an individual or society, focusing on how we perceive and conceive it”. The term “scape” is always linked to “seeing”, and therefore has imagery and visibility. How can sound be seen? In fact, when a certain sound appears in our ears, we can imagine an image of the sound, and then, according to the image, we can draw a concrete spatial image according to our experience (Chen Yan, 2015).

After the introduction of the concept of the soundscape, it is widely used in fields such as sociology, art studies and acoustics. Based on the introduction of the soundscape theory, the film soundscape concept has gradually been proposed. What is the film soundscape? In general, it is the sonic landscape in the film. Its connotation is reflected in the following aspects: first, the objectively recorded sonic documentation; second, the holistic consideration of sound in the process of sound design and musical composition; third, the spatially embodied and immersed experience and aesthetic perception in the film’s audiovisual aesthetics; fourth, the relationship between the sonic environment and people in the film, as well as the structural relationship between the film sound and the audience (Hou Dandan, 2023). The concept of the film soundscape fully recognizes the important position and role of sound in the expansion of visual space and immersion.

In the new-era Chinese rural documentary, sound also plays an equally important role, so the analysis of its auditory construction method is especially important. However, it should be noted that the narrative focus of the new-era documentary is fundamentally different from that of the previous documentary. Not only tell China’s stories well and speak for China, but also, through a creative model of “voice-over narration + music”, narrate the stories of ordinary people in the Chinese countryside, display the simple beauty, cultural connotation and national feeling of *Chinese villages*, but also actively introduce China to the world.

3.1 Voice-Over Narration: From “Informational Commentary” to “Spatial Navigator” and “Emotional Resonator”

The use of voice-over narration is quite common in rural documentaries. It is a written text, created by the director at the stage of scripting to describe the image, read from the camera and then recorded as a voice. Functioning as commentary, the voice-over explains and supplements the visual. As an important part of the soundscape, the voice-over assists the audience in forming an auditory space outside the visual. Not only does it enhance the audience’s understanding of the space on the screen, but also triggers their imagination of the space outside the screen through sound. As a result, the voice-over plays a vital role in diminishing the audience’s dependence on the visuals themselves, enhancing their perception of space both inside and outside the frame through a whole space outside the screen, and assisting them in forming a clear idea of the total environment.

First, the use of voice-over narration crafts an experience of the realistic space within the rural visuals for the audience. In documentaries, voice-over serves important narrative functions: it works in concert with the images to drive the plot and supplements the visual information. Through voice-over, viewers can achieve an “immersive” spatial experience. When watching rural documentaries, the combination of imagery and

voice-over allows for a more authentic perception of the presented space, creating a strong sense of “being there.”

In the fourth episode, “*Gazing at the Hometown*,” of the new-era documentary *Chinese Villages*, the creators used voice-over to depict the salt-drying practices of Tibetan people in China. The narration described: “Every spring, in the Grand Canyon of the Lancang River, groups of women can often be seen walking briskly. Setting out from home early in the morning, they make countless trips back and forth throughout the day. Their task is to carry brine from the salt wells, bucket by bucket, to the salt fields to be dried into salt...” This commentary aligns perfectly with the visuals. Its use of numerous action verbs makes the salt-drying process more tangible and vivid. The audience not only gains a deeper understanding of the on-screen action but is also drawn in by the evocative description, feeling as if they are personally participating in the salt-drying process and immersed in the authentic living space of the Tibetan people.

Just as in the above part of documentary about daily life of Chinese people in *beautiful villages*, the voice-over in *Beautiful Countryside* also describes the life in China in very expressive and poetic ways. For example, the voice-over in *Beautiful Countryside* describes the life in countryside as: “On the grass land under green trees, there are children running and playing with happy smiles, their happiness spreads to the whole village; next to the stove that is burning fiercely, there is an old person sitting quietly, smoking a pipe and enjoying this peaceful and happy moment”. Through the description in voice-over, the audience can imagine the scene as if they are really in the countryside of new era and enjoying the leisure and happiness. At the same time, the expressive voice-over also builds an ideal space of the countryside and triggers audience’s desire for a poetic life.

Second, as mentioned above, the voice-over not only can supplement the information of visual and also let the audience immerse in the on-screen space, but also can let the audience enjoy the description with feelings and trigger their empathy. Through the voice-over with rich feelings and reflecting the feeling of audience’s staying in the on-screen space, it triggers audience to immerse themselves in the emotional space beyond the on-screen space.

New-era rural documentary is different from other rural documentaries. It focuses on the feeling that Chinese people have for the countryside. The voice-over with feelings, reflecting the feelings that the creators have for the countryside, can more effectively trigger the audience to immerse in the emotional space beyond the on-screen space. In short, in addition to the experience of space in the rural visuals and drive the plot forward, the voice-over also on a higher level triggers audience to immerse in the emotional space beyond the visuals.

In *Beautiful Countryside* about “*Beautiful Countryside Construction*”, the voice-over has strong feelings. For example, in the *Beautiful Countryside* about *North of the Pass*, there is a voice-over as follows: “The once “Great Northern Wilderness” has now become the “Great Northern Granary”, but the black soil still bears the pursuit of happiness and the hope for future of generations of people living in this place”. This voice-over reflects the creators’ reflections on the huge change made by the development of countryside in Northeast of China from being a wasteland to a granary. This change brings both happiness and a sense of future. This kind of voice-over not only reflects the hard work of the people in Northeast China, but also prompts the audience to imagine the region’s developmental process and evokes emotional resonance.

In *A Bite of China*, the narration states: “On these open fields, spring blossoms to autumn fruits, and the cycle of life goes on. Every seed contains the power of life; every harvest is filled with gratitude and happiness. This gratitude and reverence for life that comes from our hearts towards nature”. This kind of voice-over with feelings not only strengthens the audience’s immersion in the on-screen space, but also triggers them to enter the emotional space beyond it.

3.2 Sound Effects: From “Environmental Background” to “Spatial Authenticator” and “Ideological Loudspeaker”

Sounds effects is one of the elements of spatial narrative in rural documentaries. Sound effects is an important part of film sound and film soundscape. In general, sound effects are the noises made by objects in the frame by movement, collision or impact. Sound effects can be further divided into two categories: natural sounds and mechanical sounds. Natural sounds are all acoustic phenomena that can be heard in nature but are not produced by living things. Natural sounds include natural phenomena such as wind, water flow, rain, thunder and dripping water, as well as animals such as cats, dogs, crows, bees, frogs, insects, cows, crickets, owls and cicadas. Mechanical sounds are noises made by human movement or machines, including human speech, sounds made by machines such as radios, and special effects such as door opening and closing, vehicle sounds, crackling flames, footsteps on snow, wind chimes, temple bells and creaking water wheels. Natural and mechanical sounds make up the basic elements of film soundscapes.

Hou Dandan (2023) finds that films mention the clear differences in soundscapes between villages, towns and cities. She also writes that with urbanization, many villages have been swallowed into the outskirts of cities, and

the original soundscapes of these places are becoming harder to distinguish from the city soundscape. Additionally, similar models of urban development have made the soundscapes of these villages less regional and authentic.

Cities and villages are two distinctly different kinds of space in the real world, and this difference is also reflected in the sounds. In cities, the sounds of machines can be heard — people's voices, machinery screaming, and houses under constant construction. In villages, the main sounds are natural — the rustling of rice and leaves, the swaying of bushes, and insects and birds chirping. So, in new-era Chinese rural documentaries, these real rural sounds are used to really set the authentic countryside atmosphere.

First, sound effects in rural documentaries enhance the three-dimensionality and spatial perception of the visuals. As argued, sound significantly increases the fidelity and credibility of the image, not just materially but also aesthetically. In rural documentaries, the high recognizability of sound effects markedly boosts the audience's spatial awareness. Creators integrate these sounds with the visuals, making the depicted space feel more tangible and authentic.

The documentary *Beautiful Countryside* uses sound effects to show the environment in areas with sound effects of rural fields in large quantities and makes people feel immersed in the environment when they watch the documentary. In portraying characters, gentle music and tender lyrics may reflect gentle and weak personalities, and nervous music and hasty and hurried sound effects reflect anxious and nervous mood. These sound effects enhance the realism of space in addition to the image.

Similarly, *Searching for Craftsmanship* pays meticulous attention to sound when showcasing traditional crafts. It carefully records the specific sounds of the creation process—the knife cutting wood, the hammer striking metal, the crackling fire during pottery firing, the clang of worked iron and copper, and the grinding of blades. These sounds allow the audience to accurately perceive the spatial environment of the workshop and feel immersed in the hands-on process of craftsmanship.

Second, as a rhetorical device, sound effects help to imbue the new-era countryside with mainstream ideology.

Jacques Attali (1985) writes of the opposition between noise and music: Noise gives rise to chaos; music gives rise to power and subversion. Noise, if invested with particular tools and turned into sound, yields power, purpose and dreams — the very stuff of music. Attali places music in the midst of a rationalizing aesthetics, but also uses it as a haven of the irrational. He situates music as power and as play.

This perspective aligns with analyses of China's New Mainstream Cinema. Scholars note that these films utilize sound to express relationships with mainstream ideology and values. For instance, in *The Silent War*, the incessant ticking of telegraph signals evokes the mystery and peril of undercover work. In *The Founding of an Army*, the unified, rhythmic marching of troops sounds tense yet orderly. In *The Hundred Regiments Offensive*, the rumbling artillery fire conveys the intense brutality of war.

In the new era, in addition to displaying rural life, Chinese rural documentaries also bear the responsibility of promoting national mainstream ideology and social values. And it is precisely through the effective use of sound effects that these documentaries express their specific spatial discourse, meeting the new thematic requirements.

In *Beautiful Countryside*, one important theme is to display the local customs and natural scenery of China's villages. To create an atmosphere of picturesque scenery and a harmonious social environment, the sound recordist deliberately records various typical sounds in nature and in the countryside—the singing of insects and birds at dawn, flowing water, rain, and wind. The combination of these natural sounds audibly constructs the picturesque natural space of new-era Chinese countryside.

Similarly, in *Remembering Nostalgia*, which intends to display the hard-working, simple, and beautiful Chinese peasants and their inner world, the creator also records sounds of people talking and laughing cheerfully, the sounds of daily life ambience, and the sounds of labor.

In summary, in documentaries reflecting the development of Chinese countryside in the new era, in addition to creating atmosphere and expressing emotion, sound effects also bear the function of constructing ideological space for the new-era countryside. This function is of great significance to the thematic imperatives of the new era and the spatial discourse of the present, and it may also be reconstituted and passed down as collective memory in the future.

3.3 Integrated Soundscape: From "Elemental Overlay" to "Acoustic Archive of Collective Memory"

Voice-over narration and sound effects do not exist in isolation; they function synergistically. The narration assigns meaning to the sounds ("This is the sound of harvest joy"), while the sound effects provide texture and verification for the narration. Together, they weave a complete and persuasive soundscape.

The ultimate aim of all auditory techniques is to collectively construct the documentary as an "Acoustic

Archive" of the new-era Chinese countryside. This archive selectively collects and showcases those sounds that align with contemporary discourses such as "Beautiful Countryside," "Rural Revitalization," and "Cultural Confidence." These ritually presented sounds are not merely records of the present moment. They are designed to sediment into the collective auditory memory of the future, perpetually shaping how people perceive and imagine the Chinese countryside of this era.

4. Conclusion

This study systematically examines the visual and auditory construction mechanisms of spatial narratives in contemporary Chinese documentaries focusing on rural themes. The findings reveal that through visual techniques—including shot composition, lighting, and camera movement—these documentaries not only depict rural physical environments but also construct a multidimensional space integrating geographical landscapes, psychological emotions, and cultural memories. The dialectical application of long shots and close-ups creates a dynamic interplay between macroscopic narratives and microscopic insights. Lighting transcends its basic function of physical illumination to become a spiritual element that sculpts temporal dimensions and reveals historical connotations. Composite moving shots simulate embodied experiences, facilitating a transition from static observation to dynamic immersion in spatial perception.

On the auditory level, voice-over narration and sound effects collectively form a comprehensive system for "spatial construction through soundscape." Voice-over serves dual functions as both spatial navigation and emotional resonance, guiding viewers beyond visual frames into expanded emotional and imaginative spaces. Sound effects function not merely as environmental background but as authenticating codes for spatial authenticity and subtle vehicles for ideology, collaboratively shaping rural imagery that aligns with mainstream value expectations.

Visual and auditory elements are not employed in isolation; rather, they interpenetrate and mutually reinforce each other, constructing a highly integrated system of "spatial rhetoric." Ultimately, through this complete audiovisual syntax, contemporary rural documentaries successfully transform rural space from a mere geographical entity into a symbolic field that carries national discourse, zeitgeist, and cultural confidence. Their spatial narratives not only achieve aesthetic innovation but also profoundly participate in shaping collective memory about the modern transformation of "rural China" and in conveying ideological messages, thus establishing themselves as significant cultural practices for narrating China's stories and transmitting China's voice.

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The Politics of the Female Body: Reproductive Control and Sexual Censorship in China

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Abstract

This article examines how the Chinese state's governance of reproduction and sexual expression forms a gendered mode of biopolitical control, and why the recent shift from one-child restriction to two- and three-child encouragement has not led to greater bodily autonomy for women. Using feminist legal and human-rights critique alongside Foucauldian biopolitics, the study conducts discourse analysis across laws and policy documents, curricular and health materials, and platform governance rules.

The findings show that reproductive policy has changed techniques rather than logic. The state continues to determine which reproductive needs become recognised rights, aligning fertility with demographic and developmental priorities. At the same time, policy, media and administrative practice produce an “ideal woman” grounded in marriage, childbearing and care, while sexual expression is regulated through de-sexualised knowledge, platform soft control and selective punitive sanctions. The article contributes a mechanism-level account linking reproductive governance and sexual censorship and proposes a rights-centered framework for evaluating policy outcomes.

Keywords: reproductive governance, platform governance, biopolitics, policy implementation, sexuality regulation

1. Introduction

This article investigates how the Chinese state's management of women's reproduction and sexual expression embodies a gendered form of biopolitical control, and to what extent such management infringes upon women's human rights. Grounded in feminist human rights theory and Foucault's biopolitics, it argues that this is not a merely public-health endeavor but a systematized, gendered mode of biopolitical governance: by politicizing the private sphere of reproduction and sexual desire into objects of regulation, surveillance, and punishment, the state displaces women's autonomy, instrumentalizes women's bodies in service of state goals, and suppresses female agency under the banners of “morality,” “public order,” and “national development.”

This governance operates through two interlinked institutional structures: reproductive control and sexual censorship. These regimes constrain not only biological reproduction but also the emotional dimensions, imaginative space, and discursive possibilities of women's sexual conduct. The aim is not to make sex disappear, but to monopolize its meaning, utility, and legitimacy, thereby shaping a compliant reproductive body.

In this article's formulation, “reproduction” is a continuum: it begins with the arousal of sexual desire—potentially originating in cultural contact, affective responses, or erotic imagination—passes through sexual interaction, and extends to potential reproductive outcomes. Framed this way, the analysis shows that the state intervenes not only in final reproductive results but also in the preceding affective, behavioral, and discursive stages.

Globally, reproductive rights have long been contested within broader human-rights debates. In many countries,

disputes over abortion and bodily autonomy revolve around the tension between protecting fetal life and safeguarding women's reproductive freedom (Mullally, 2005; Eriksson, 2000). In China—the world's second most populous country—reproductive control is implemented primarily through administrative policy rather than constitutional guarantees (Jiang, Li, & Feldman, 2013).

Although China ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2001 and endorsed the 2021 United Nations HIV/AIDS prevention framework (United Nations, 1966; United Nations General Assembly, 2021), female sex workers are still subjected to mandatory STI testing and custodial “re-education.” Under the authority granted by the 2009 amendment, public security organs have imposed compulsory detention and labor reform (National People's Congress, 2009), frequently accompanied by public shaming, identity exposure, and moral denigration (Xia, 2007). The application of these punitive measures is asymmetrical: male clients and other actors often do not face equivalent consequences, revealing patriarchal bias within the state's logic.

By tracing the evolution of reproductive policy and analyzing patterns of sexual censorship, this article offers a case study of gendered state power from a non-Western context, exposing the concealed mechanisms through which women's bodily rights are politicized and suppressed, and thereby contributing analytical evidence from China to international human-rights dialogue.

As a roadmap, the paper proceeds as follows: the Introduction frames the research question in the Chinese context and situates debates on reproductive rights and sexual expression within broader human-rights discourse; the Literature Review synthesizes scholarship on fertility governance, sexual censorship, and gendered law to identify the gap this study addresses; the Theoretical Framework integrates feminist human-rights theory with Foucault's biopolitics, alongside accounts of identity regulation and decolonial feminism; the Methodology explains a text-based approach using policy, law, curricula/health guidance, platform rules, and emblematic censorship cases with feminist critical reading and discourse analysis. The analysis then unfolds in two chapters: Chapter 1, “The ‘Nationalization’ of Women's Bodies through Reproductive Policy,” traces the continuity from restriction to encouragement (1.1), shows how the state translates individual “needs” into “rights/obligations” and thereby politicizes reproduction (1.2), examines how policy–media–law co-produce the “ideal woman” of marriage–childbearing–care (1.3), and sets up the isomorphic mechanism that leads into sexual governance (1.4). Chapter 2, “How Sexual Censorship Reshapes the Legitimacy of Women's Bodies,” details boundary-setting through de-sexualized governance (2.1), sub-threshold expression and emotional labor under platforms' soft control (2.2), hard sanctions across legal–administrative–platform tracks and their gendered effects (2.3), and the coupling-and-feedback chain between sexual governance and fertility governance (2.4). The Conclusion refrains from repeating mechanistic details and instead advances a rights-centered reorientation with an outcomes-based evaluation framework.

2. Literature Review

This section pursues three aims: first, to review empirical studies on China's state–reproductive governance and position the relevant theoretical tools; second, to assemble domestic and international evidence on sex/media governance and platformization, clarifying participatory censorship as a meso-level mechanism; third, to introduce feminist legal and decolonial critiques and, on that basis, identify the gaps in existing research and this article's point of intervention.

To begin with the empirical picture of state reproductive governance, White (2018) shows, through historical and grassroots implementation analysis, how the one-child policy relied on economic penalties and cadre pressure, revealing an instrumental, population-engineering approach. Complementing this, Jiang, Li and Feldman (2013) argue from an institutional/policy perspective that China's reproductive governance is highly administrative and weak in legal/rights foundations, and discuss its social consequences. Although their emphases differ—White foregrounds techniques of enforcement while Jiang et al. stress institutional attributes—together they depict a two-sided configuration in which administrative rationality prevails over rights-based rationality. To explain how this penetrates bodies and everyday life, I draw on two complementary theoretical toolkits: Foucault's biopolitics (1978; 2008), which highlights how discipline and normalization fold population, reproduction and bodies into techniques of rule; and Butler's (2004) account of intelligible/recognizable bodies, which shows how gender norms demarcate “qualified subjects” and exclusions. The former answers how rule operates (techniques/institutions); the latter answers who is governed and by which norms (recognition/exclusion). Together they structure the analysis that follows.

Turning to sex and media governance, studies suggest that “sayable sex” is compressed into “procreative sex” via regulatory discourse and educational supply. On the one hand, Dong and Huang (2014) demonstrate how vague legal/administrative rubrics such as “obscenity/vulgarity” are used to suppress sexual expression, especially women-oriented expression. On the other hand, UNFPA and UNESCO (2020) show that sexuality education in China over-privileges reproduction and hygiene while under-addressing pleasure and consent,

constituting a systemic desexualization in knowledge provision. At the platform/peer level, Han (2023) and Lai and Liu (2023) examine the production of women-oriented content (e.g., otome games) and platform governance in China, showing that female gaze and women-oriented intimate narratives are more readily problematized, prompting creators to develop “anticipating the line—rewriting the text—strategic compliance” practices. Beyond academic work, Chinese mainstream media also document regulatory ambiguities around otome games—content edging, “16+” suitability tags, and phone-number-based real-name checks that minors can bypass—underscoring the non-neutrality of the platform–policy nexus (Jiangsu News, 2024). As a cross-context comparator, Davis (2018) analyses Instagram accounts oriented to U.S. college audiences and finds that caption/hashtag re-contextualization routinely channels neutral images into sexualization/objectification while converting women’s UGC into platforms’ visibility capital (i.e., gendered free labour); visibility also skews toward young, white bodies. Rather than contradicting one another, the domestic and overseas literatures here mutually evidence mechanisms: the U.S. case establishes that the platform–peer nexus is not neutral, while the China-based studies show asymmetric tightening that pushes women-oriented expression into threshold-level strategies.

Building on this platform mechanism, in-context China research further identifies the emergence of participatory censorship. In ostensibly non-political fan communities (danmei), Luo and Li (2024) find that uncertainty and black-box rules foster collective imaginaries about procedures/standards/motives of censorship, which then organise self-censorship and peer reporting as collective community labour; the upshot is that authoritarian control is socially reinforced in micro-settings of weak state presence. This resonates with, and bridges to, the earlier chain of educational desexualization → platform re-contextualization → threshold strategies, providing a meso-level link from knowledge/platforms to community execution.

Finally, on normative critique, MacKinnon (1989) argues that purported legal neutrality often operates through a male norm, producing punitive bias against women (e.g., around sex work and sexual expression). Lugones (2010) pushes the lens to the level of the colonial/modern gender system, showing how state and market co-produce “compliant femininity” and “qualified intimacy”, marginalising non-heterosexual and non-reproductive subjects. These critiques furnish the rights language and value yardsticks that tie back to the technical–normative–platform–community mechanisms above, grounding this article’s human-rights perspective on reproductive and sexual rights in the Chinese context.

In sum, existing research converges in three ways: (1) China’s reproductive governance exhibits an administration-strong/rights-weak structure (White, 2018; Jiang et al., 2013); (2) desexualization is jointly produced by regulatory discourse and educational provision (Dong & Huang, 2014; UNFPA & UNESCO, 2020); and (3) platforms are not neutral—women-oriented expression is more constrained by regulatory and peer mechanisms, and under uncertainty evolves into participatory censorship (Han, 2023; Lai & Liu, 2023; Davis, 2018; Luo & Li, 2024). Differences remain: theoretically, emphases range from techniques/institutions (Foucault, 1978; 2008) to norms/recognition (Butler, 2004) and to law/colonial structures (MacKinnon, 1989; Lugones, 2010); contextually, Davis (2018) offers a mechanism-level analogy from U.S. college social media, whereas Luo and Li (2024) provide an in-context mechanism from Chinese fandom. Against this backdrop, this article addresses the disconnect between “sexual censorship” and “reproductive governance” by proposing and substantiating a mechanism chain—desexualized knowledge/censorship → platform threshold strategies and emotional labour → shaming/(quasi-)penalisation → coupling/feedback between sexual censorship and reproductive governance—to explain how women’s bodies and desires are translated into governance tools serving population engineering and social order.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This article asks: How do China’s governance of reproduction and sexual expression constitute a gendered form of biopolitical control, and to what extent do they erode or negate women’s rights and subjectivity?

I draw on three complementary lenses. First, feminist human-rights and legal critique—MacKinnon (1989) exposes how purported legal “neutrality” operates to male norms and yields punitive bias in the regulation of sex work/sexual expression; Cook (1992) and Ignatieff (1985) supply a normative account of the needs → rights conversion valve, explaining why only “needs” that are state-recognized, resourced, and justiciable become claimable rights. Second, biopolitics/governmentality—Foucault (1978; 2008) underpins my claim that the move from the one-child restriction to two-/three-child encouragement is a switch from prohibition-based to promotion-based techniques within the same governing rationality rather than a paradigm break, and helps read how population targets, health/order discourses, and administrative–platform instruments co-operate. Third, politics of recognition and decolonial feminism—Butler (2004; 2016) illuminates how the boundaries of the “intelligible/recognised body” are produced through repetitive policy–law–media practice as the “ideal woman” of marriage–childbearing–care; Lugones (2010) re-situates these boundaries within a colonial/modern gender system, explaining the co-production of compliant femininity/qualified intimacy and the downgrading of

non-reproductive/non-heterosexual desires; Ahmed (2004) shows how shame/guilt function as the affective fuel of governance, propelling de-sexualisation and self-discipline; Siegel (2007) help parse the tension between instrumental “empowerment/women-friendly” claims and women’s autonomy.

This is a conceptual and normative argument. I use feminist critical discourse analysis and textual interpretation to examine publicly accessible, citable institutional and discursive texts, including: law and policy (e.g., Criminal Law provisions; State Council/General Office programmes on fertility and women’s development), education/health texts (curricular standards, textbook framings, official health guidance), and platform/media materials (community rules and enforcement notices; high-traffic narratives around “fertility anxiety” and the “marital-reproductive order”). These sources are not for statistical inference but serve as argumentative anchors to show how concepts migrate across the policy–education–platform layers and mutually reinforce one another.

Together, these theories and tools structure the analysis: with Foucault (1978; 2008) I show that “restriction → encouragement” remains within the same biopolitical logic; with Cook/Ignatief I explain how the state holds the valve that translates needs → rights/duties, thereby politicising reproduction; with Butler/Lugones I demonstrate how the “ideal woman” (marriage–childbearing–care) is produced and bound to welfare/legitimacy, and how this normative script is isomorphically extended to sexual governance; finally, through Ahmed’s affective politics, I trace the chain de-sexualised boundaries → below-threshold expression & emotional labour → shaming/(quasi-)penalty → coupling & feedback, showing how women’s bodies and desires are continuously translated into governance instruments serving population engineering and social order. In sum, this integrated framework offers a testable theoretical account of the research question: why “encouraging fertility” does not necessarily entail rights expansion; how sexual censorship becomes routinised through state–platform–community interactions; and how it ultimately feeds back into fertility governance, consolidating the nationalisation of women’s bodies.

4. Analysis

4.1 Reproductive Policy and the “Nationalization” of Women’s Bodies

This chapter addresses how fertility policy nationalizes women’s bodies and operates in conjunction with the governance of sexuality: it first traces the continuous biopolitical logic from strict one-child control to the encouragement of two-/three-child policies, showing how “prohibitive control” is rebranded as “promotive/enabling control” (4.1.1); it then argues how the state translates individual “needs” into manageable “rights/duties,” thereby systematically politicizing reproduction (4.1.2); next, it analyzes how the repeated practices of policy–media–law produce the “ideal woman” of “marriage–childbearing–care,” binding legitimacy and welfare access to a maternal track (4.1.3); on this basis, it proposes an isomorphic mechanism linking the governance of reproduction to the governance of sexuality as the transition to what follows (4.1.4). The second part proceeds accordingly: how desexualization sets the higher-order boundary of what may be said/seen (4.2.1); sub-threshold expression and emotional labor under platforms’ soft control (4.2.2); hard sanctions across the tripartite tracks of law, administration, and platforms and their gendered effects (4.2.3); and the coupling-and-feedback chain between sexual censorship and fertility governance (4.2.4), which ultimately lays the logical groundwork for the rights re-positioning and evaluation framework in the conclusion.

4.1.1 Policy Evolution: The Same Biopolitical Logic from Restriction to Encouragement

This section argues: from “one-child—strict control” to “two-child/three-child—encouragement” is not a paradigm shift, but the same biopolitical logic of governmentality turning from “prohibition-based control” to “promotion-based control” (General Office of the State Council of the PRC, 2024). Within this logic, the state still acts as the subject of population governance, binding “qualified motherhood” to demographic-structural objectives through fiscal, educational, and publicity apparatuses, thereby embodying what Foucault describes as “a mode of rule that takes life as its object” (Foucault, 1978; 2008).

Key policy junctures indicate an update of instruments rather than a rupture of logic. From the universal two-child policy to the three-child policy, the central government set the goals of “optimizing the population structure and promoting long-term balanced development,” rolling out a policy lexicon and measures that are “supportive” rather than “punitive,” and emphasizing institutional arrangements of “burden reduction—capacity enhancement” across taxation, childcare, education, and employment (The State Council of the PRC, 2021; General Office of the State Council, 2024). Such “encouragement” has not relaxed the state’s organizational and evaluative capacity in the fertility domain; instead, it incorporates the formation, conversion, and implementation of fertility intentions into a denser chain of policy tools.

Meanwhile, the discourse of “empowerment” becomes an important veneer of promotion-based control. Policy texts issued in the name of “enhancing women’s endogenous motivation for development” in practice often position women as key resources of domestic reproduction and population reproduction, re-centering the “marriage–childbearing–care” track (The State Council of the PRC, 2021; All-China Women’s Federation,

2024). This empowerment-packaged return aligns closely with Siegel's classic caution regarding reproductive policy—that any arrangement claiming to “advance women's rights” must be examined to see whether it truly expands women's autonomous choice, or merely rewrites maternal norms in the name of rights (Siegel, 2007).

At the normative level, this turn dovetails with colonial/modern corporeal governance: by constructing standards of the “qualified woman,” the state instrumentalizes women's bodies to serve the nation, economy, and social stability; “encouraging childbearing” is thus scripted as a morally justified and policy-accountable goal rather than a choice centered on individual autonomy (Lugones, 2010). This closes the loop with Foucault's account of biopolitics: not the withdrawal of power, but finer-grained discipline implemented through gentler apparatuses (Foucault, 1978; 2008).

Beneath the appearance of “restriction → encouragement” lies a change in the register and instruments of governmentality: from setting punitive boundaries to shaping preferences and incentives, women's reproduction remains continuously subjected to calculation in light of state objectives. The next section (4.1.2) will further show how the state controls the “valve” that translates “needs into rights (or obligations),” thereby systematically politicizing individuals' reproductive choices.

4.1.2 From “Needs” to “Rights” Via State Translation: The Politicisation of Reproduction

This section argues that individuals' “needs” regarding reproduction do not automatically become claimable “rights”; whether such needs are recognised as rights, and how they are defined and allocated, depends on a translation valve controlled by the state and on policy objectives. When this valve operates with population and development as its pivot, reproduction is systematically politicised and incorporated into the state's governance calculus (Ignatieff, 1985, cited in Cook, 1992; Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 2008). Within this logic, the apparent turn “from restriction to encouragement” does not entail ceding power to individual autonomy; rather, it incorporates the shaping, incentivising, and evaluation of reproductive preferences into the policy toolbox, continuing to organise reproduction around state needs (The State Council of the PRC, 2021).

At the level of concrete mechanisms, moralist and nationalist discourses situate individual reproductive decisions within public responsibility and collective goals: media representations and policy publicity around “fertility anxiety” and the “marital-reproductive order” routinely position women who remain unmarried and childfree or delay childbearing as subjects “departing from the norm”, thereby constituting a regime of public disciplining over their choices (China Youth Daily, 2023; Xinhua News Agency, 2024; Legal Daily, 2024). At the level of identity, this disciplining resonates with performative identity construction: through the repetitive practices of law, policy, and public opinion, a particular “legitimate female identity” is normatively affirmed, while other pathways are excluded as inappropriate or irresponsible (Butler, 2016). The resultant shaming and moral pressure further weaken women's capacity to claim their own reproductive needs as rights (Xu, 2020, p. 142; The State Council of the PRC, 2021).

In comparative perspective, the politicisation of reproduction is not unique to China, but the bases of legitimisation differ: in Ireland, for example, law once restricted the use and dissemination of contraceptives under a religious-moral framework, incorporating individual sexual and reproductive choice into the governance of the “public moral order” (McCormick, 2009). By contrast, China's logic of legitimisation is more oriented to the biopolitical governance and population strategy of the modern state: reproduction is directly tied to population structure and national development goals, so the translation from “needs” to “rights” is more obedient to macro population indicators and policy performance (Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 2008).

In sum, when the state holds the translation power from “needs → rights” and allocates accordingly with population-development as the priority, individual reproductive choices are institutionally politicised, and women's bodies are continually incorporated into governance and evaluation loops oriented to state objectives. The next section turns to the cultural and institutional preconditions of this translation mechanism: how the state produces the “ideal woman” through the disciplinary discourse of “marriage-reproduction-care”, thereby delineating whose reproduction is deemed legitimate and under what conditions it is recognised as a right (Butler, 2016).

4.1.3 The Disciplinary Discourse of the “Ideal Woman” (Marriage-Reproduction-Care)

This section argues that the “ideal woman” is not a natural identity, but a normative position continually produced and affirmed through the repetitive practices of law-policy-media, whose core track is marriage-reproduction-care. This identity is institutionalised via policy texts and routinised through public opinion and workplace practices, such that “what counts as a qualified woman” and “what counts as legitimate reproduction” are defined as objects to be evaluated and rewarded/punished (Butler, 2016; MacKinnon, 1989).

At the level of policy discourse, the rhetoric of “empowerment/family-friendly” is juxtaposed with population goals, driving the re-centring of “qualified motherhood”: in programmatic documents, the state and GONGOs emphasise “enhancing women's endogenous motivation for development”, yet in resource allocation and

institutional arrangements primarily position women as key resources for domestic reproduction and population reproduction (The State Council of the PRC, 2021; All-China Women's Federation, 2024). This disciplining, articulated in the language of "empowerment", sets intra-marital childbearing and care responsibility as the preferred pathway to welfare and social recognition, while placing other pathways in a secondary or even suspect position (Siegel, 2007).

Public opinion and workplace practices further emotionalise/moralise this norm: discourses around "fertility anxiety" and the "marital-reproductive order" mark women who are unmarried and childfree or who delay childbearing as subjects "departing from the norm"; gendered expectations in recruitment, promotion, and labour contracts then establish "married with children/available to reproduce at any time" as an implicit threshold, constituting a regime of public disciplining over individual choices (China Youth Daily, 2023; Xinhua News Agency, 2024; Legal Daily, 2024). The resultant shame and moral pressure become the "emotional fuel" of the norm's operation, with women self-adjusting and conforming to avoid being labelled "selfish/irresponsible" (Ahmed, 2004; Xu, 2020, p.142; Butler, 2016).

In terms of normative boundaries, the identities and reproductive conditions recognised as "legitimate" are exclusionary: being single, childfree, in queer relationships, or engaging in pleasure-oriented sexual/intimate practices is often placed at the margins of legitimacy and becomes the object of correction, persuasion back, or silencing. Such exclusion is not incidental; it resonates with the body governance of modernity/coloniality—"compliant femininity" (chastity, family, reproduction) is legitimised, while non-reproductive or counter-normative desires are pathologised or downgraded (Lugones, 2010; Ahmed, 2004; Mullally, 2005). Law is not neutral here; through seemingly neutral institutional language, it encodes pre-existing gender hierarchies into rules, thereby stabilising the "ideal woman" as a unit of policy and evaluation (MacKinnon, 1989).

Summary and transition. In sum, the production of the "ideal woman" is jointly operated by the institutionalisation of policy texts, the emotionalisation of public opinion, and the neutral veneer of legal rules, continually establishing marriage-reproduction-care as the only legitimised life trajectory for women (The State Council of the PRC, 2021; All-China Women's Federation, 2024; Butler, 2016). The next subsection thus turns to how, once this norm becomes the overarching script, sexual governance replicates the same logic in education, censorship, and platform disciplining, and how "transgressive" female sexual/reproductive practices are problematised and made punishable (Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 2008).

4.1.4 Summary and Transition: The Isomorphic Mechanism from Reproductive Governance to Sexual Governance

The foregoing shows that the shift from "one-child—strict control" to "two/three-child—encouragement" is not a paradigm change but the same biopolitical logic moving from prohibition-based to promotion-based techniques of governance: the state, through policy and discourse, holds the "valve" that translates individual reproductive "needs" into "rights/obligations", and re-centres the normative pathway of "marriage-reproduction-care" in the rhetoric of "empowerment/family-friendly"; law is not neutral, and the emotional-moral layering of media and workplace practices ensures that the "ideal woman" is continually produced and affirmed at both institutional and everyday levels (Foucault, 1978; 2008; Ignatieff, 1985, cited in Cook, 1992; The State Council of the PRC, 2021; All-China Women's Federation, 2024; Siegel, 2007; Butler, 2016; MacKinnon, 1989; China Youth Daily, 2023; Xinhua News Agency, 2024; Legal Daily, 2024).

These techniques do not stop at "reproduction" but, via an isomorphic mechanism, become technologised and routinised in the domain of "sex": first, education and censorship demarcate the boundary of the "sayable/visible"; next, public opinion and the workplace emotionally and morally consolidate the norm; then, through the shaming and punishment of law-enforcement, transgressors are rendered "punishable"; finally, the "legitimate" intimacy-reproduction trajectory is back-fed as the sole legitimised pathway for policy and welfare, while non-reproductive or counter-normative desires and relations are marginalised as objects to be corrected or silenced (Foucault, 1978; 2008; Butler, 2016; Ahmed, 2004; Lugones, 2010; Mullally, 2005; Xu, 2020, p.142). Accordingly, Chapter 2 proceeds in sequence: the boundary-setting of de-sexualised governance (4.2.1)—the punishabilisation mechanism of shaming and penalty (4.2.2)—platform governance and emotional labour as "sub-threshold" compliance (4.2.3)—the coupling and back-feeding of "sex → reproduction" (4.2.4), to reveal how sexual governance serves and shapes the legitimacy production of reproductive governance.

4.2 Expansion of Reproductive Control: How Sexual Censorship Reshapes the Legitimacy of Women's Bodies

4.2.1 De-Sexualised Governance: How Censorship and Education Demarcate the "Sayable/Visible" Boundary

This section focuses on "how the boundary is set." So-called "de-sexualised governance" does not erase sex from public culture; rather, through the threefold apparatus of education—administrative censorship—policy discourse, knowledge and expression related to sex are re-encoded as "risk", "inappropriate", and "manageable

information”, thereby establishing at the institutional level a higher-order framework that determines what may be said and what may be seen (Foucault, 1978; 2008). This framework takes population and order as its axis of justification rather than centring individual well-being and autonomy, and it is routinely juxtaposed with the rhetoric of “empowerment”, “public health”, and “family-friendly”, enabling de-sexualisation to operate in a gentle and normalised manner (The State Council of the PRC, 2021).

First, along the educational pathway, curriculum standards, textbook selection, and teaching assessment naturalise “marriage-reproduction-care” as a growth script, while knowledge about consent, contraception, and the diversity of sex and relationships is marginalised or presented only in the form of “risk reminders”. This presentation confines “acceptable sexual knowledge” to a marriage-based, heterosexual, reproduction-oriented track, placing content outside that track under a regime of revocable visibility: it may occasionally surface, yet can be deleted or replaced at any time on grounds such as “age-inappropriateness/health risks/incorrect guidance” (Foucault, 1978; 2008; The State Council of the PRC, 2021).

Second, administrative review and guidance documents provide operable, elastic rules for the boundary through broad and stretchable normative clauses (e.g., “safeguarding public order and morality/protecting minors/correct value orientation”). This indeterminacy is not a technical defect but a governance resource: on the one hand, it leaves room for selective tightening across scenarios; on the other, it permits strategic alignment between social sentiments and policy goals, thereby continually reproducing the boundary within interactions over “legitimacy” (Luo, 2024; Foucault, 2008).

Third, policy discourse and official communications fold issues of sex/intimacy into the semantic domain of population governance and social order: narratives around “marital-reproductive order” and “fertility anxiety” label practices such as publicly discussing pleasure, gender, and relational diversity as “improper/transgressive”, furnishing emotional and moral support for educational excision and administrative censorship (China Youth Daily, 2023; Xinhua News Agency, 2024; Legal Daily, 2024). At the level of identity, this discourse and a performative mechanism reinforce one another: through repetitive practice they stipulate the sayable/visible range of the “ideal woman”, while other pathways are excluded as objects to be disciplined and corrected (Butler, 2016).

Finally, affective politics plays a key role in de-sexualised governance. Shame and guilt are mobilised as “emotional fuel”, prompting individuals—under the anticipated risk of “being seen—being judged”—to self-lower expression and avoid touching the boundary, thereby further squeezing the language of rights (e.g., bodily autonomy and access to sexual knowledge) out of the space of public legitimacy (Ahmed, 2004). What results is not the “disappearance of sex”, but an institutionalised distribution of whose sex may be seen and in what way: women’s sexuality is allowed to exist, yet must be coded through the rhetoric of “purity/healing/familialisation” and placed under revocable visibility (Butler, 2016; Ahmed, 2004).

Accordingly, this section concludes: the crux of de-sexualised governance lies in the setting of higher-order boundaries—predefining, through the coordination of educational excision, administrative review, and policy discourse, the scope of the “sayable/visible”, and consolidating its everyday efficacy via affective and moral mechanisms (Foucault, 1978; 2008; The State Council of the PRC, 2021; Luo, 2024). How these boundaries are executed and internalised within concrete communication fields (thresholds, soft sanctions, participatory censorship), and the resulting demands on creators for “sub-threshold expression/emotional labour”, will be detailed in 4.2.2.

4.2.2 Platform Governance and Emotional Labour: Sub-Threshold Expression and Strategic Compliance

This section focuses on soft control—emotional labour—sub-threshold expression. Within a state–platform–user co-governance structure, platforms operate with elastic rules such as “protection of minors/brand safety/value orientation”, and manufacture a form of revocable visibility through algorithmic thresholds and operational rules: common practices include traffic throttling, down-weighting, removal from recommendations, search demotion, label masking, and “yellow-tag” limited monetisation—“soft” penalties that, under the banner of “technological neutrality”, push expressions related to women’s sexual experience, sexual knowledge, and bodily practices into a “grey zone” (Foucault, 1978; 2008; Luo, 2024).

In this environment, creators have developed sub-threshold expression strategies to sustain livelihood and visibility: first, semantic folding (euphemisms, spelling substitutions, metaphorical translation) and visual sanitisation (cropping/blurring or pixelation/de-sensualised imagery); second, “science popularisation/health/healing/growth” frames that safely package intimacy and desire; third, maintaining the appearance of “compliant visibility” via disclaimers, persona management, and comment screening/moderation. As a result, expression is de-sexualised through continuous self-adjustment to “stay below the line”, while being translated into platform metrics (dwell time, engagement rate, monetisation coefficient) as emotional and aesthetic labour (Ahmed, 2004; Yang, 2011: 334–336, 342–344, 347–349).

This routinised emotional labour requires creators to monitor their own emotions, modulate the audience's emotions, and maintain a "respectable/safe" persona aesthetic—both avoiding the triggering of thresholds and sustaining durable participation. The offline "beauty economy's" institutional mobilisation of women's appearance and affect is algorithmically and at scale replicated in the platform context: women are expected to present "compliant forms of women's sexuality" through gentle, restrained, family-centred narratives, thereby securing more stable recommendation and revenue (Yang, 2011: 343–347; Butler, 2016). Meanwhile, user reporting and reputational signals provide participatory inputs to the thresholds, raising the bar for "safe expression" within a technical–affective–moral loop (Luo & Li, 2022; Luo, 2024).

It should be emphasised that strategic compliance is not wholly passive. Through sub-threshold tactics, creators preserve the sensoriality of desire and experience within the cracks of rules—understandable as micro-freedoms internal to governmentality (Foucault, 1978; 2008). Yet performative mechanisms also solidify "rewarded expression" into reproducible templates which, in the long run, feed back to govern who counts as "a visible female subject" and normalise the value orientation of "marriage–reproduction–care" as distribution preferences (Butler, 2016; The State Council of the PRC, 2021).

In sum, platform soft control couples technical thresholds with emotional labour: via throttling/yellow tags/de-recommendation, women's sexual knowledge and experience are stabilised in a sub-threshold state of visibility; and sub-threshold expression trades continuous self-censorship for visibility and monetisation. Once these boundaries are triggered, soft control often spills over into chains of public shaming and institutionalised sanction; related mechanisms will be elaborated in 2.3 (Ahmed, 2004; Luo & Li, 2022; Luo, 2024; Yang, 2011).

4.2.3 Shaming and Punishment: Problematising "Non-Compliant" Female Sexual/Reproductive Conduct

This section focuses on hard sanctions: once the "sayable/visible" boundary is triggered, boundary-crossing female sexual/reproductive practices move swiftly from being discursively marked as a "problem" into a sanctioning circuit of legal–administrative–platform rule enforcement, forming a continuous chain from stigmatisation—procedural penalties—deprivation of eligibility (Foucault, 1978; 2008).

4.2.3.1 Legal Codification and Selective Enforcement

China's current criminal-law regulation provides a high-intensity punitive framework for "sexual impropriety". Articles 363–365 of the Criminal Law stipulate heavy penalties under offences such as "producing, reproducing, publishing, selling, disseminating obscene materials" and "organising obscene performances", thereby constituting a penal boundary for sexual expression and the sex industry (PRC, 1997). However, while the provisions are ostensibly "two-sided", enforcement and media practice often subject female sex workers to harsher punishment and shaming, while downgrading male "consumers" to a passive role, evidencing a stable gendered double standard (Wang, 2006; MacKinnon, 1989). Historically, the 1949 anti-prostitution campaign implemented compulsory detention and re-education/"treatment"/"reform", positioning women's bodies as the primary targets of rectification and highlighting a state-anchored moral–reproductive order (SCIO, 1994; Foucault, 1978). Within this logic, "non-compliant" women are defined as moral risks and threats to population order, and can therefore be lawfully excluded and punished (Foucault, 2008).

4.2.3.2 Administrative Regulation and Sectoral Governance

At the administrative level, elastic provisions such as "protection of minors/public order and good customs/correct orientation" provide flexible levers for rectification, prohibition, fines, and revocation of licences; broad "health communication/value orientation" requirements create expandable space for administrative intervention into sex- and reproduction-related content (Foucault, 2008). Such ambiguous–elastic frameworks are not defects but governance resources: they allow selective tightening in line with public sentiment and performance targets, and enable continual reproduction of boundaries through interactions over "descriptive legitimacy" (Luo, 2024).

4.2.3.3 Platform Governance and "Participatory" Punishment

Once boundary-crossing is "problematised", platforms, under community rules/rating standards, rapidly implement hard measures such as takedowns, bans, account termination, and purging of historical content; user reports and reputational signals serve as participatory inputs, translating shaming into procedural sanctions (Luo & Li, 2022). Event-node coordination (moved from 4.2.2): under high-pressure opinion climates, official statements and platform-aligned actions (takedown/bans) often form a closed loop of "public moral panic—official value proclamation—uniform handling", which on the one hand repairs/consolidates the descriptive legitimacy of censorship and punishment, and on the other raises the predictability and deterrent effect of everyday censorship (Luo, 2024).

4.2.3.4 The Politics of Attribution and Responsibility

"Non-compliant" female practices are often individualised as "moral depravity/self-choice", thereby obscuring

state and market failures in economic support, educational provision, and social services; this both intensifies shaming and supplies narrative resources for penal justification (Mardorossian, 2002; Mullally, 2005). Within this narrative, women are required to prove legitimacy through “compliant desire/compliant motherhood”, and any deviation may encounter compounded institutional shaming–punishment (MacKinnon, 1989; Ahmed, 2004).

4.2.3.5 Comparative Perspective and Alternative Pathways

If rights–labour are taken as the baseline, punitive governance is not the only option. Belgium in 2024 passed the Sex Workers’ Employment Contract Act, bringing sex work under employment contracts and social security (including maternity leave, pensions, etc.), substituting stigma/penalty with labour protection/health and safety (Rankin, 2024). Germany, the Netherlands, and others likewise pursue regulation-plus-protection to reduce violence and stigma. By contrast, China’s path aligns more closely with a biopolitical order orientation: managing sex/reproduction in the name of population and morality rather than starting from subject rights and labour protection (Foucault, 1978; 2008). This also corroborates the selectivity of the “demand→rights” translation valve: when “demands” related to sexual health, safety, and choice are not translated into claimable “rights”, women are more readily excluded within frameworks of shaming–penalty (Ignatieff, 1985, cited in Cook, 1992).

4.2.3.6 Summary

This section shows that a triad of criminal law–administration–platform hard sanctions stabilises “non-compliant” female sexual/reproductive practices as punishable objects. The institutional effect is to convert visibility and welfare eligibility into conditional privileges rather than claimable rights; meanwhile, official statements at event nodes—together with platform-aligned actions—further provide legitimacy endurance for this punitive circuit (Luo, 2024; Luo & Li, 2022; MacKinnon, 1989; PRC, 1997). The next section (4.2.4) will show how such punitive governance couples with and feeds back into pronatalist policy tools, thereby reshaping the value base and execution capacity of fertility governance in reverse (Foucault, 2008).

4.2.4 Coupling and Feedback: How Sexual Censorship Serves and Shapes Fertility Governance

In contemporary China, “sexual governance—fertility governance” are not two isolated mechanisms but operate as a four-segment chain—boundary-setting → internalised execution → penalisation → feedback. Sexual censorship selectively produces “visible sexuality” and feeds it back as the value and institutional preference of “preferable birth”; the orientation of fertility governance then, in turn, stabilises stricter sexual boundaries and enforcement logics, forming a self-reinforcing governance loop (Foucault, 1978; 2008; Butler, 2016; Ahmed, 2004).

4.2.4.1 Boundary-Setting (Starting from the “Sayable/Visible”)

Through curricular redactions, moralised presentation in syllabi and textbooks, and de-sexualising technical thresholds for platform content, a default norm of “within-marriage—heterosexual—reproduction-oriented” is established, first screening “who/what expressions” are eligible to appear within public visibility (Foucault, 1978; 2008; Butler, 2016). This step is legitimised via the rhetoric of “public health/family-friendly/empowerment”, while in substance subordinating individual sexuality/intimacy to population and order goals (Ahmed, 2004).

4.2.4.2 Internalised Execution (Turning Boundaries into Everyday Habit)

Within platforms’ “soft-control” mechanisms, creators self-regulate via “threshold-below expression, emotional labour, aesthetic sanitisation” to maintain visibility and livelihood; algorithmic preferences gradually solidify a feminine presentation paradigm of “gentleness/restraint/family-orientation” (Yang, 2011: 334–336, 342–344; Ahmed, 2004). Boundaries shift from external discipline to self-governance in everyday practice and the affective economy, completing the transition from rules to habits (Foucault, 1978; 2008).

4.2.4.3 Penalisation (Institutionalising Boundary-Crossers as “Punishable”)

When boundaries are triggered, boundary-crossing practices move rapidly from stigmatisation into hard sanctions of legal–administrative–platform enforcement: Criminal Law Articles 363–365 provide the punitive framework for “sexual impropriety”; enforcement and public opinion exhibit harsher governance and gendered double standards toward female subjects; on platforms, takedowns/bans and other measures, together with user-report “participatory” inputs, form a closed loop; at event-type nodes, official statements converge with platform-aligned handling, consolidating descriptive legitimacy (PRC, 1997; MacKinnon, 1989; Wang, 2006; SCIO, 1994; Luo & Li, 2022; Luo, 2024).

4.2.4.4 Feedback (Translating “Legitimate Intimacy” into “Preferable Birth”)

Once “compliant sexuality” is stabilised as a visible norm, its value logic extends into fertility governance as “preferable birth”: recognised relationships and contexts enjoy priority in policy and discourse, while

non-normative trajectories are de-righted and de-welfared in practice. Thus emerges the mutual feeding of “sexual governance—fertility governance”: sexual boundaries supply the value base and enforcement tools; pronatalist orientation, in turn, proves the “necessity” of those boundaries and of censorship, continuously tightening the governance chain (Foucault, 2008; Siegel, 2007; The State Council of the PRC, 2021; Yang, 2011).

5. Conclusion

Sexual governance, via the closed loop of “boundary-setting → internalised execution → penalisation → feedback,” and fertility governance mutually feed one another in value and technique, co-producing legitimacy and enforceability (Foucault, 1978; 2008). Accordingly, the conclusion no longer reiterates the mechanistic details but turns to a rights-centred reorientation and proposes an evaluation framework anchored in rights outcomes. The core shift is to recognise complete, age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health information—centred on consent and contraception—as an entitlement rather than “revocable visibility”; to decouple the decisive rights to bear/not bear children and to choose intimate relationship pathways from population performance assessments; to remove, on an anti-discrimination baseline, the implicit thresholds tied to marital/parental status in education, employment, and welfare; to embed minimum procedural guarantees of explainability, appealability, and redressability in platform and administrative actions; and to establish labour and safety baselines for emotion-/aesthetics-intensive sectors so as to prevent uncompensated work and excessive affective depletion under the banner of “innate feminine traits” (Siegel, 2007; Butler, 2016; MacKinnon, 1989; Yang, 2011; Luo & Li, 2022).

A matching evaluation framework should drive processes from outcomes. For “information and accessibility,” observe the share of school and community curricula covering consent, contraception, and relationship diversity, the average time-to-access for contraception counselling, perinatal care, and psychosocial support, and—via independent sampling—compare average display rates and down-ranking rates for content related to women’s sexual knowledge on platforms to test whether “information visibility” genuinely improves (Foucault, 1978; Luo & Li, 2022). For “bodily autonomy and non-coercion,” track self-reported proportions of individuals making fertility decisions free of policy/workplace/familial pressure, and the proportion with “unmet need” (needing contraception or information but not obtaining it), disaggregated by age, marital/parental status, urban–rural location, and income to locate concrete sites of structural constraint (Siegel, 2007). For “equality and anti-discrimination,” measure the “motherhood penalty gap” (wage and promotion differentials between mothers and non-mothers under comparable age and role conditions), the share of job postings with implicit conditions such as “married with children/available to bear children,” and the share of policy items in childcare, tax relief, and housing that are unbundled from marriage/childbearing, to assess whether institutions are genuinely shifting from the “family–motherhood” channel to an individual-rights channel (MacKinnon, 1989; The State Council of the PRC, 2021). For “procedural propriety,” tally the proportion of platform enforcement actions accompanied by explicit rule citations and excerpts of evidence, the success rate of appeals against misjudgements, and the median restoration time, and publish annually the share of cases covered by third-party independent audit, so as to reduce arbitrariness in “visibility/legitimacy” (Luo & Li, 2022). For “de-stigmatisation and affective climate,” on one hand use content analysis to track the density of language in mainstream media, textbooks, and high-traffic platform posts that binds “non-marriage/non-childbearing/non-marital sex/sex work” to “selfish/improper/boundary-crossing”; on the other hand track scale-based changes in shame/guilt among target groups to test whether the narrative of “de-sexualisation–shaming” is substantively easing (Ahmed, 2014). For “labour and safety,” record formal-contract coverage in emotion-/aesthetics-intensive industries, the proportion of contracts containing maternity protection and parenting support provisions, the reporting and case-closure rates for sexual harassment and the median time to closure, ensuring that the “production of visibility” is not purchased at the cost of women’s unpaid labour and bodily/mental safety (Yang, 2011).

Whether this reorientation stands does not depend on how many “empowerment processes” are announced, but on whether these outcome indicators show verifiable improvement: information more accessible; choices less coerced; discrimination markedly reduced; procedures more explainable and remediable; labour more protected. Only when “rights outcomes” become the calibration standard of governance, and comparable, verifiable evidence is obtained through independent auditing and methodological transparency, can one claim a substantive turn from “process present, results absent” to a rights-oriented trajectory (Foucault, 1978; 2008; Siegel, 2007; Luo & Li, 2022; Yang, 2011).

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Cybercrime: A Potential Threat to Global Community

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Abstract

Cybercrime is a criminal activity that takes place through the use of computer and internet as instruments for illegal operations. It is a common phenomenon that can take many shapes, and can occur anytime and anywhere through the use of a number of methods, depending on the skill-set and goal of the criminals. It covers a wide variety of criminal activities, such as computer related offences, integrity and availability of computer data, and acts against the confidentiality, content and copyright related offences that create stress on the society in the form of economical disrupt, psychological disorder, threat to national defense, etc. Most of the cybercrimes are done on different parts of the world, and money is the major motivator for many cyber criminals, and still beyond the reach of the law. The cybercrime is a major threat to cyber security and computer data system in the era of globalization due to the rapid spread of information and communication technology (ICT).

Keywords: cybercrime, cyber-security, hacker, virus

1. Introduction

Vinton Gray Cerf is *an American internet pioneer* and is recognized as one of the founders the internet along with American electrical engineer Robert Kahn (Marin, 2005). Cybercrime is a wide range of criminal activities that are carried out using digital devices, hardware devices, and networks that are performed by the use of internet. It is considered as any illegal, unethical or unauthorized behavior relating to the automatic processing and transmission of data (Viswanathan, 2001). Some common cybercrimes are internet fraud, unauthorized access, forgery, cyber-sex, child pornography, cyber pornography, trafficking in child, stealing communication services, online sale of illegal articles, cyber-stalking, phishing, violation of privacy, unsolicited commercial communications, cyber conspiracy, cyber defamation, digital forgery, email bombing, and email spoofing (Vadza, 2013).

Some dangerous cybercrimes are hacking into bank servers, cyber-terrorism, financial crimes, electronic money laundering and tax evasion, terrorism and extortion, economical disrupt, psychological disorder, online gambling, cyber threats, web defacement, telemarketing frauds and illegal telecommunication, and threat to national defense (Tikk, 2011). Among all these cybercrimes, cyber-terrorism has hit mankind with unbelievable severity (Bansal, 2010). These offenses range from criminal activity against data to content and copyright infringement that is raised from the 1980s due to the development of ICT and electronic media (Yar, 2006).

At present people become more computer and internet based (Mohajan, 2025a). As a result, global cybercriminals are engaged in criminal activities without any risk through the use of computer from sitting any far place of the world (Singer & Friedman, 2014). Cybercrime is an uncontrollable evil having its base in the misuse of growing dependence on computers in modern life. It is done through the network by stealing others important and private data and documents, hacking bank details and accounts, and transferring money to their own (Goni, 2022).

2. Literature Review

A literature review is an overview of previously published works on a particular topic (Phelps, 2018). It is a secondary source and does not report new or original experimental work (Baglione, 2012). *It is the most influential work around any topic* by area, genre, and time. It *demonstrates the ability to do research* that also showcases the expertise on the chosen topic (Galvan, 2015). A good literature review has a proper research question, a proper theoretical framework, and a chosen research methodology (Dellinger, 2005). Osman Goni has described the cybercrime and types of it. He has observed that it is increasing day by day, and it is not only creating human suffering but also puts effects on the economy. The cybercriminals mainly attack the confidential data of organizations, such as hospitals, government offices, police stations, financial institutions, research and development (R&D) organizations, and other telecommunication firms or they target personal information of any person who has valuable assets (Goni, 2022). Sumanjit Das and Tapaswini Nayak have explained a systematic understanding of cybercrimes and their impacts over various areas, such as socio-eco-political, consumer trust, teenager, etc. with the future trends of cybercrimes (Das & Nayak, 2013).

Aurobinda Laha and his coworkers have described that the email bombing is a kind of denial-of-service attack, which is crippling internet. It is a particularly notorious type of the subscription bombing attack, where a victim user's inbox is bombarded with a stream of subscription emails at a particular period (Laha et al., 2022). Priyank Dinesh Gada has shown the arts how credit card hacking works, how smartphones can be hacked, how SIM swapping works, and other techniques with a practical approach. He has warned indicating strategies how to change international mobile equipment identity (IMEI) number and other black hat hacking techniques used by hackers (Gada, 2024). Burak Akdeniz and Aysun Doğan have provided a detailed discussion of cyber bullying with its history, prevalence, effects, risk factors, and protective factors. They have observed that the prevalence of cyber bullying and cyber victimization are quite high among adolescents, and the victims face serious mental health problems (Akdeniz & Doğan, 2024). Udit Agnihotri has mentioned that cyber stalking is the term for when someone is harassed online through various means, such as liking someone's pictures, following their activity, commenting inappropriately, sending unwanted emails and messages that contain obscene content (Agnihotri, 2023).

Amit Kumar Pandey and Rahul R. Kunkulol have shown that cyber pornography has opened up the new environment of save sex. But it has negatively impacted many offline relations, and a new space for sexual predation and exploitation. They have wanted to find out the prevalence, type, and form of risk towards cyber pornography addiction amongst the students (Pandey & Kunkulol, 2017). Naifu Zhang has discussed the definition, type, characteristics, harm of computer virus, anti-virus technology and its application, detection, and removal of computer virus. He has wanted to impart some antivirus knowledge to computer users, and to minimize the possibility of computer users being harmed by computer viruses (Zhang, 2022). Arpit Gajbe and Sir Rahul Chawadha have highlighted the phases of computer virus, history of worst computer attack, type of computer virus with effect on computer, and some examples of virus on their types, working of computer virus, and problem occur due to virus in computers (Gajbe & Chawadha, 2020). Michela Ghelf and his coworkers have wanted to present the current state of knowledge of the risk and protective factors of online gambling. They have investigated greater extent risk factors and variables at the individual level, while protective factors at the relational and contextual level are needed more in-depth study in future research (Ghelf et al., 2024). Muhammad Nadeem and his coauthors have studied a comprehensive review of phishing attacks, their evolution, methodologies, impacts, and countermeasures. Finally, they have provided a valuable reference for academics, cyber security professionals, and policymakers, enabling them to comprehend and address the challenges posed by phishing threats (Nadeem et al., 2023).

3. Research Methodology of the Study

Research is the creation of new knowledge and the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, and understandings using scientific methods (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). It is a creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge that involves the collection, organization, and analysis of evidence to increase understanding of a topic, and is characterized by a particular attentiveness to controlling sources of bias and error (Groh, 2018). *Methodology is the plan of action for research. It is a set of methods and principles used to perform a particular activity* (Creswell, 2014). Research methodology is a systematic framework used to solve the research problem by using the best and most feasible methods to conduct the research (Kara, 2012). It encompasses the way in which the intention to carry out the research. It describes the techniques and procedures used to identify and analyze information regarding a specific research topic (Eyler, 2020).

4. Objective of the Study

At present everything runs through the internet, whether it is Google; YouTube; social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp; and e-commerce websites, such as Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal, etc. These make our life simple, but these also expose people to cybercrimes that encompass identity theft, data theft, cyber

bullying, cyber stalking, harassment, and other related offences (Agnihotri, 2023; Mohajan, 2025b). Cybercrime is a term used to broadly describe criminal activity in which computers and networks are tool, target, and a place of criminal activity including everything from electronic cracking to denial of service attacks (Das & Nayak, 2013). The main objective of this study is to discuss aspects of cybercrimes. Other minor objectives of the study are as follows (Mohajan, 2017, 2018a,b, 2020):

- 1) to provide overview of cybercrime, and
- 2) to discuss the types of cybercrimes.

5. An Overview of Cybercrime

Any crime against the law is committed on computer and internet is known as cybercrime (Kumar, 2001). A wide range of cybercrimes are theft of communication services, electronic money laundering and tax evasion, terrorism and extortion, telemarketing frauds and illegal telecommunication, money laundering, hacking into bank servers, etc. (Krone, 2005). At present internet has provided the opportunities in every field of social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Orkut that give entertainment, business facilities, sports, and educational materials (Heading & Zahidi, 2023). Also, various national and international facilities, such as online shopping, banking, and communication have increased rapidly due to online facilities (Maruf et al., 2010). The criminals destroy the evidence soon after the crime is committed that makes it difficult for the investigating agencies to collect relevant material evidence for prosecuting the offender (Barua & Dayal, 2001).

6. Types of Cybercrimes

There are many types of cybercrimes, such as hacking, email bombing and spamming, cyber terrorism, *cyber bullying*, cyber pornography, virus dissemination, online gambling, web jacking, denial of service attack, cyber stalking, identity theft, credit card fraud, data diddling, phishing, cyber defamation, Salami slicing attack, logic bombs, unauthorized access, sale of illegal articles, computer vandalism, pharming, software piracy, intellectual property crime, etc. (Goni, 2022).

6.1 Hacking

Hacking is the act of finding and exploiting entry points that exist in a computer system or network. It is an unauthorized use of computer and network resources to steal sensitive information or harm the computer system (Goni, 2022; Mohajan, 2025c). It is the most common form of cybercrime that can be used from monetary gain to political interest. It may be in different forms, such as web-spoofing, email bombing, Trojan attacks, phishing, fake websites, spyware, electronic bulletin boards, information brokers, virus attacks, wormhole attack, password cracking, etc. (Fuchs, 2014). The hackers steal files, programs, passwords, and other information from users through the use of internet (Gada, 2024). On the other hand, ethical hacking is permitted by a person or an organization to explore the possibility of vulnerabilities within a system or a network, and the person performing ethical hacking is known as ethical hackers who work with confidentiality, integrity, and availability (Walt, 2017).

Usually the hackers are computer programmers, who have an advanced understanding of computers and commonly misuse their knowledge for devious reasons. There are three types of hackers based on their intent of hacking the system: white hat, black hat, and gray hat hackers (Juneja, 2007). White hat hackers are also known as ethical hackers or IT technicians, and are appointed to check the strength of security, and improve it for the betterment of the company through the making security of the software. They are granted permission by the organization and usually good guys and paid person by the companies with a good thinking (Kumar et al., 2018). They try to find weaknesses, and look for potential security vulnerabilities in the computer system in a legal manner, and can provide solutions in order to re-enforce the computer system and network (Cekerevac et al., 2018). As the growing demands of e-commerce sites, many e-commerce marketing companies like Flipkart, Amazon, and Ebay have demanded more the ethical hackers because of their security concerns (Shimpi & Nagpure, 2015).

The black hat hackers are also known as crackers or malicious hackers within the security industry and modern programmers. They violate the computer system security to gain unauthorized access to the computer system and network in order to destroy, modify, and steal sensitive data (Pal, 2016). They attack banks or other financial organizations with weak security and steal money or credit card information. They break all the security and make network less secure and steal all precious information, compromise the privacy, damage the computer system, and network or block communication (Mallick & Nath, 2024). A grey hat hacker is a mixture of both black hat and white hat hackers, and violate laws but they act without a malicious intent to exploit the security vulnerabilities of the computer system and network. They hack into a computer system for the sole purpose of notifying the administrator that their system has a security defect (Aman & Abhineet, 2017).

6.2 Email Bombing and Spamming

The Email was first sent by American computer scientist Raymond Tomlinson (1941-2016) in 1971, and at present it becomes one of the greatest boons for every modern household, and all sectors of the research and industry. It is used for sending text, documents, and data of tables at home and offices (Laha et al., 2022). Email bombing is a form of net abuse that sends a large volume of emails to a specific recipient for overflowing the mailbox for mail crashing, and most of them are junk or phishing emails but some of them are legitimate regular emails (Schneider et al., 2020). When large amounts of email are directed to a single site, the site may suffer a denial of service through loss of network connectivity, system crashes, and failure of a service due to overloading network connections (Jakobsson & Menczer, 2003). Usually, the email bombing messages are large and constructed from meaningless data in an effort to consume additional system and network resources. Ultimately, the entire mail system will be unusable (Bass et al., 1998). Email phishing is a form of sending messages to determine the recipients of emails to provide information on bank accounts, credit cards, passwords, and other personal details (Şentürk et al., 2017).

Email spamming is a variant of bombing that sends email to hundreds or thousands of users. The purpose of spamming is to attract the email recipients to access some websites and buy more or less legitimate products or services. The spamming can be harmful if the recipients reply to the email, causing all the original addressees to receive the reply (George & Vinod, 2015). It is an intrusive, pervasive, and resource draining distraction that impacts entities at every level. It is almost impossible to prevent, because a user with a valid email address can spam any other valid email address, newsgroup, or bulletin-board service (Xie et al., 2006). The problem of spam has been with us since the 1990s. The email security is the essential tool for business and communication. Unfortunately, there is no way to prevent email bombing and spamming, and it is impossible to predict the origin of the next attack (Chen et al., 2019).

6.3 Cyber Terrorism

At present there is no internationally agreed definition of cyber terrorism. It is the convergence of terrorism and cyberspace. It is an unlawful attack and threat of attacks against computers, networks, and the information stored to intimidate government and its people in furtherance of political, social, and ideological objectives (Nagpal, 2002). It is done by an individual or groups to execute acts of terror. Barry Collin, professor of University of East London, use the word “cyber terrorism” for the first time in the 1980s (Shinde, 2025).

Cyber terrorism is an attack without the use of arms and ammunition but can have the same impact on a nation. It is a new phenomenon that has found expression in the current legal literature on terrorism. It affects adversely the harmony among different religious and racial communities. It is a problem devilling the world and it can take different dimensions (Plotnek & Slay, 2021). The most likely target of cyber terrorists are military installation, power plants, air traffic control, banks, telecommunication networks, fire and rescue system, etc. (Bansal, 2010). Cyber terrorism also poses a serious threat to national security, economic stability, and public safety. It is an unprecedented challenge to global security, national sovereignty, and individual safety (Ottis & Lorents, 2010).

6.4 Cyber Bullying

Cyber bullying is a purposeful and repeated behavior designed to cause physical and emotional distress with a negative effect of online communication between children and teenagers that becomes a great problem in our society, where the victims often experience rumors, and lies spread on online social networks (Lenhart et al., 2010). It is increasing parallel to the rise in internet usage. It involves two people, a bully and a victim. But sometimes it can be carried out by individuals or groups who may be known or unknown persons and consider as the “cancer” of social networks (Akdeniz & Doğan, 2024). It can be discriminative, intentional, repetitive, harmful, and hate crimes, such as sexist bullying, racist and faith targeted bullying, sexual orientation bullying, gender identity bullying, and disabilities bullying (Bayraktar et al., 2015). The digital revolution makes it possible for bullies to harass, threaten, hurt, embarrass, intimidate, humiliate, manipulate, stalk, impersonate, and lie about individual any time from far using an electronic device, such as computer, tablet, and cell phone (Abreu & Kenny, 2018). The bullies may post inappropriate and embarrassing pictures, text messages, etc. of their victims as harassment in email, chat rooms, websites, online games, social networking sites, etc. In some extreme cases, the victims have taken their own lives as a result of cyber bullying (Chisholm, 2014).

6.5 Cyber Stalking

There is no generally accepted definition of cyber stalking as the phenomenon is very recent and relatively lacks detailed knowledge. Cyber stalking is the use of the internet to stalk, harass, control, intimidate, and influence an individual, a group, and an organization through the false accusations, computer monitoring, defamation, slander, libel, threats, identity theft, vandalism, solicitation for sex, doxing, sexual harassment, and blackmail that negatively impact a victim’s mental and emotional well-being (Reyns et al., 2011). The stalker may be an online stranger or a known person. S/he pursues the victim through the verbal and written communication, unsolicited single sided romantic involvement, surveillance, harassment and loitering to an extent that the victim

suffers from psychological distress and fear (Boon & Sheridan, 2001). Cyber stalking is a new concern in information and communications technology (ICT) for online harassment that is facilitated by low cost, ease of use, and anonymous nature technologies email, texting or instant messages, and social media posts (Chang, 2020).

There are various psychological reasons behind cyber stalking, such as severe narcissism, hatred, rage, retribution, envy, obsession, psychiatric dysfunction, power and control, sadomasochistic fantasies, sexual deviance, internet addiction, and religious fanaticism (Keswani, 2017). For example, a male stalker can manipulate the victim's photos, extorting her to have sex, and if she refuses, threatening to have it leaked online; for one-sided love, the man finds it intolerable that the perpetrator is rejecting him and starts cyber stalking (Agnihotri, 2023). The victim can suffer from anxiety, depression, paranoia, nausea, appetite loss, and insomnia due to constant torture, disruption, blackmail, restlessness, and lack of peace (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). In many countries, cyber stalking is a criminal offense under various state anti-stalking, slander, and harassment laws. It is also a criminal offence motivated by interpersonal hostility and aggressive behaviors stemming from power and control issues (King-Ries, 2011).

6.6 *Cyber Pornography*

Cyber pornography is an act of using cyberspace to create, display, distribute, impart or publish pornography or obscene materials, child exploitation, and unauthorized distribution through the use of digital platforms, such as websites, social media, emails, and mobile applications (Pandey & Kunkulol, 2017). It refers to all internet usage sexual activities, such as sexual content for recreation, entertainment, exploration, education, trade, and seeking sexual or romantic partners (Agastya et al., 2020). It has a negative impact on lives, beliefs, and relationships of young people; and creates physical, mental, social, and financial problems that lead them to addiction, desensitization unhealthy relationship and sex-violence (Enson, 2017). It plays an accessory role in negative social issues, such as child abuse, violence against women, rape, inequality, relationship and family breakdown, sex-trafficking, youth crime, portraying sex, promiscuity and sexually transmitted diseases (Schneider, 2017). Many factors affect sexual activity, such as gender, knowledge and attitudes, community, and religion (Praveera et al., 2021).

Cyber pornography is a major ethical, legal, and social issue that requires strong laws, public awareness, and preventive measures (Mamun et al., 2019). It has been estimated that about 90% of boys and 60% of girls under the age of 18 have been exposed to pornography (Vinnakota et al., 2021). About 88% porn scenes include acts of physical aggression, 48% contain verbal aggression, and 94% of the target group is women (Bridges et al., 2010). It is found that the majority of boys come under the vulnerable category whereas the girls belong to the low risk group that is affecting their daily life by disconnecting them from the reality (Hald & Mulya, 2013). Child pornography, revenge pornography, and deepfake pornography are serious crimes; and governments, law enforcement, and individuals must work together to prevent these (Chowdhury et al., 2018).

6.7 *Virus Dissemination*

A computer virus is a type of malicious software programs (malware) that replicates itself by modifying other computer programs and inserting its own code into these programs and negatively affect the functionality of the computer (Piqueira et al., 2008). It is a small program that can be spread from one computer to another and can even affect a computer operation (Parikka, 2007). It can write its own code into the host program, and can infect a computer without permission of a user. If once it gets control, it multiplies itself to form newer generations. When the program of the computer runs, the virus causes infection and damages it (Yeo, 2012). About 50,000 computer viruses provide a variety of effects ranging from the merely unpleasant to the catastrophic (Gole, 2024).

To escape generic scanning, a virus can modify its code and alters its appearance on each infection. Like biological virus, computer virus is contagious, stealthy, infectious, latent, excitable, expressive, and destructive (Zhang, 2022). It results in the loss or damage of hardware, software, data, information, or processing capability of a computer or mobile device. For example, in 1999, the infamous Melissa virus infected thousands of computers and caused damage close to \$80 million; while the Code Red worm outbreak in 2001 affected systems running Windows NT and Windows 2000 server and caused damage in excess of \$2 billion (Mark, 2006). In May 2000, the ILOVEYOU virus spread worldwide within hours by disguising itself as a romantic email attachment, exploiting vulnerabilities in computers, and infects millions of Windows computers and causing significant disruption and economic damage (Gole, 2024).

In 1949, Hungarian and American mathematician, physicist, computer scientist and engineer John von Neumann (1903-1957) has designed a self-reproducing computer program that is considered first computer virus of the world, and he is considered to be the father of computer virology (von Neumann, 1966). There are many computer viruses, such as boot sector viruses, file viruses, resident virus, non-resident virus, macro virus,

polymorphic virus, hoax viruses, Trojan horses, spyware, backdoors, worms, hoax, key loggers, adware, jokers, partition sector viruses, test viruses, logic/time bombs, multipartite viruses (Ludwig, 1996). A virus can be spread in computers if the virus author sends it over the internet or a network, or if it is carried on an infected removable medium, such as a pen drive, CD, flash disk, hard disk, etc. by opening an infected file, running an infected program, through emails, visiting web pages, etc. (Aycock, 2006). It can spread in various ways but the most common ways are fake games, legitimate software updates, pirated software, contaminated systems, and freeware and shareware (Kumar, 2024).

Disasters caused by virus are damaging of programs and software, deleting of files and data on storage devices, corruption of files, slows down of the speed of the computer, formatting of the hard disk, booting failure, taking up of computer memory, and causing of the system crashes (Kephart & White, 1993). Any evidence of infection of a computer by a virus are unusual error messages occurring more frequently, programs taking longer than usual to load, disk accesses seeming excessive for simple tasks, less memory available than usual, access lights turning on for non-referred devices, programs and files disappearing mysteriously, and computer indicating that the storage devices are full (Szor, 2005).

Anti-virus software is a computer program that detects, prevents, and takes action to disarm or remove malicious software, such as viruses and worms. Up-to-date anti-virus software helps users against the latest virus threats (Polk et al., 1995). Some common computer virus scanning software are Norton antivirus software, Backdoor antivirus, McAfee virus scan, AVG antivirus, Avast antivirus, Panda antivirus, Dr. Solomon antivirus toolkit, Web scan antivirus, Kaspersky antivirus, Trend Micro antivirus, Avira antivirus, Logic Bomb antivirus, Rabbit antivirus, Bitdefender antivirus, Smadav antivirus, Symantec antivirus, ESET, HTTP (Hyper Text Transfer Protocol), Thunder byte antivirus, Comodo antivirus, Sophos antivirus, Firewall antivirus, F-secure antivirus, USB disk security, Microsoft Security Essentials, etc. (Filiol, 2007).

6.8 Online Gambling

Gambling is a form of entertainment centered on the wagering of any kind of valuable object or possession on a game or event, whose outcome is predominantly random (Bolen & Boyd, 1968). Online gambling (iGambling) is any kind of gambling, such as virtual poker, casinos, bingo, horse racing betting, private sports betting, betting on billiards or pool, dice game, card games, and sports betting that are conducted on the internet through the electronic devices, such as computers, mobile and smart phones, tablets, and digital television, and its global market is about \$40 billion per year (Williams & Wood, 2007). It is global, easily accessible and available 24 hour a day. At present it becomes increasingly popular with children, adolescents, and young adults. Many countries have banned iGambling and increase tax revenues for iGambling in some countries (Griffiths, 2001).

In 1994, small Caribbean nation of Antigua and Barbuda passed the Free Trade & Processing Act, allowing licenses to be granted to organizations applying to open online casinos that effectively allowed US bookmakers to accept bets by phone on horse racing and sports. It has become one of the most popular and lucrative businesses on the internet (Christensen et al., 2015). The money can be transferred with the use of credit card, debit card, electronic check, certified check, money order, wire transfer, etc. (Kumar, 2020). Online gambling has many negative effects on the individual, family, and society. Addicted persons are involved in fraud, theft, extortion, and money laundering in the gambling sites. They face serious side effects, such as social isolation, financial hardships, and scholastic challenges (Benedetti et al., 2025). They can be a cause for smoking, alcohol, and drug addiction, and the individual may even attempt suicide due to depression and emotional breakdown (Vayisoğlu et al., 2019).

6.9 Identity Theft

Identity theft occurs when someone uses an another person's identifying information, such as name, address and telephone number, date of birth, social security number, identifying number, credit card number, driving license number, bank account numbers, bank cards, telephone calling cards, personal identification number (PIN), electronic signatures, fingerprints, passwords, driver's license numbers, etc. without permission of the person to perform various crimes for gaining financial advantages (Hoofnagle, 2007). It is an illicit activity with multiple facets, and is generally included in a larger chain of crimes, such as various frauds, forgery, terrorism, illegal immigration, and money laundering. It is a serious crime against the State or local law that can cause substantial harm to a consumer (Piquero et al., 2021). It is associated with fraud and causes losses for victims of millions of dollars in the world every year. It is a rapidly growing global crime that continues to claim thousands of victims each year with serious consequences (Prosch, 2009). Actually, the identity criminals do not steal identities; instead they use identity as a tool to steal money and doing other crimes. They may run up debts or even commit crimes in victim's name (Dean et al., 2014). They can use identity theft information for purchase goods, property, or services without the consent of victim; create fake financial accounts in the name of victim; obtain cash with bank cards; impersonate victim for financial gain; can rent a luxurious apartment with victim's money; file fraudulent tax returns under victim's name; can file bankruptcy; can give another person's name during an

arrest; and can commit other crimes that can damage personal credit and reputation of victim. Millions of people every year are affected both directly and indirectly from identity theft (Albrecht et al., 2011).

Since thieves are able to steal personal information through the internet, fax, regular mail, and telephone, and individuals should not disclose personal information in these media (Collins, 2003). It is wise that anybody should not carry entire identity documents and do not give to swipe the credit and debit cards to anybody. The ATM PIN should be memorized and do not share to anybody. The written documents of personal information should not throw into the garbage and trash bins (Arterberry, 2005). It is imperative that the individuals must create strong passwords with a combination of letters, numbers, punctuation, and special characters that hold a meaning to only the person who created the password (Fordham, 2008).

The term “identity theft” was coined in 1964 that was a time exclusive to physical theft of documents, such as social security cards, credit cards, and driver’s licenses. The prevention of it does not lie with only one entity but rather requires the responsibility, cooperation, and actions of three major groups: individuals, businesses, and government (Gilbert & Archer, 2012). The risk of becoming a victim of the identity criminals can be reduced protecting social security number, avoiding phishing, destroying any document contain unprotected personal information, using an identity theft protection service such as LifeLock (Diller-Haas, 2004).

6.10 Phishing

Phishing is a luring type cyber-attack that thieves use to “fish for” unsuspecting internet users’ personal identifying information through emails and mirror-websites that the messages appear to come from well-known and trustworthy websites, and pressure has to act quickly, without thinking (Wright, 2016). These email messages often provide links to fraudulent websites where the victims are asked to disclose name, parents name, place of birth, credit card numbers, social security numbers, account numbers, passwords, and other private information (Jansson & von Solms, 2011). Sometimes fake emails come from a reputable and recognizable company that offers business proposal. The provided link appears to be the official website of the company, although it is fraudulent (Olivo et al., 2011).

The phishers usually offer their potential victims to share with them a large amount of money that they want to transfer out of their country. Victims are then asked to pay fees, charges to help release or transfer the money. Phishing attackers primarily target individual users and later banking, e-commerce, and social media become prime targets (Ramzan, 2010). The term “phishing” was coined in 1996 by Khan C. Smith, a well-known spammer and hacker. The first phishing is done back to the 1990s by the US black hat hackers and the warez community who were stealing America Online (AOL) accounts by scamming passwords from AOL users (Langberg, 1995). The first known phishing attack against a retail bank was reported in September 2003 (Sangani, 2003).

Spear phishing is an email-spoofing attack that targets a specific organization or an individual, seeking unauthorized access to sensitive information. On the other hand, the whaling phishing is a type of fraud that targets high-profile end users, such as C-level corporate executives, politicians, and celebrities (Lin et al., 2019). An individual can avoid phishing through the ignore of emails which requests to send personal information, contains an offer that is too good to be true, language is urgent, alarming, and threatening, poorly-crafted writing with misspellings, and bad grammar, strange or abrupt business requests, greetings that is ambiguous or very generic, urgency to click on an unfamiliar hyperlinks or attachment (Nadeem et al., 2023).

6.11 Distributed Denial of Service

Denial of service (DoS) attack is one of the major threats and is considered as one of the hardest problem in the internet today. It is an attack in which one or more machines target a victim that attempts to partially or completely prevent the victim from doing useful work, and to stop from viewing portions of the internet (Prakash et al., 2016). It clogs up so much memory on the target system that it cannot serve its users, or it causes the target system to crash, reboot, or otherwise deny services to legitimate users. As a result, a legitimate user or organization is deprived of certain services, such as web, email, or network connectivity that the user would normally expect to have. It poses significant threats to network security, disrupting critical services by overwhelming targeted systems with malicious traffic (Jain & Singh, 2012).

There are different types of DoS attacks, such as i) flood attack, that is flooding the target machine with external communications requests, so that it cannot respond to legitimate traffic, or responds so slowly as to be made unavailable; ii) logic and software attacks, that is internet packets are sent that should use bugs in the software; and iii) distributed DoS (DDoS) attack, that is either flood attack or logic attack, but it uses many people, different computers, and bots under the attacker’s control, and usually attacks target sites, such as banks, credit card payment gateways, etc. (Dzaferovic et al., 2020). The first DDoS attack shutdown the entire internet access on the city for a couple of hours happened in 1997 during a hacker’s conference event in Las Vegas by the attacker Khan C. Smith (Lohachab & Karambir, 2018).

The DoS attacks cannot be stopped or prevented, but some precautionary measures are taken into consideration to make the attacker very hard to attack (Nagesh & Sekaran, 2006). The network architecture should be built in a stronger way to secure the resources against various attacks. The host computers must be updated with the latest security patches and techniques (Bhardwaj et al., 2016).

7. Conclusions

Modern world makes our life easy and comfortable. But the varieties of crimes have increased worldwide, and cybercrime is one of them. The cybercrime is a crime that is performed with the help of computer or internet. It is increasing day by day, and normal users are suffering from it, and it is not a national concern anymore rather a matter of global security. The widespread growth of cybercrimes has become a matter of global concern and a challenge for the law enforcement agencies in the new millennium. A comprehensive framework of cyber-security is developing that will provide possible security and privacy threats along with the ways of attacks and countermeasures. Urgent prevention and mitigation of cybercrime is necessary applying combined effort by individuals, organizations, and governments to make cyber security in the society as a priority basis.

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Analysis of Public Policy Responses in China's Urbanization Process from a Sustainable Development Perspective — Taking the Renovation of "Urban Villages" as an Example

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the public policy response to the renovation of urban villages from the perspective of sustainable development, facing the environmental, economic, social problems brought by the implementation of the renovation of urban villages, and put forward the strategy of optimizing the public policy through institutional innovation, financial tools and digital technology to promote more sustainable and integrated urban renewal.

Keywords: urban villages, sustainable development, policy response collaborative governance, urban renewal

1. Introduction

In the past decades, China's rapid urbanization has reshaped the face of the country in an unprecedented way, presaging an historic transition from life in the countryside to life in the city. The speed of this transition has brought enormous economic growth and improved living standards, while giving rise to serious social and spatial social problems that are rich in contention, e.g., urban villages. These places are usually seen as a breakdown of social equality, environment damage, poor land use and old infrastructures. They reveal the underlying tension between the growth of urban growth and sustainable development. Since urbanization is now entering a new stage characterized by renewal instead of expansion, addressing urban villages has become an issue of growing importance in the pursuit of sustainable urban design (Encyclopedia of China, 2023; China Daily, 2024).

In this paper, we will analyze the question of the response of the public authorities to the renovation of the urban village through the problem of study in terms of sustainable development, emphasizing the linkages of the different components of environmental, social, and economic sustainability as part of the same nexus.

2. Theoretical Framework: Dimensions of Policy Analysis from the View of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a big concept, and it emphasizes the connections between the following factors: environment, economy, and society. Sustainable development has the function to promote the long-term and healthy growth of cities. During the process of renovating China's urban villages, it shows the significance to balance the above aspects. This approach helps guide policies to transform areas that are currently informal, inefficient, and marked by social disparities into more and more livable and sustainable urban spaces. To solve the challenges of urbanization, we need strategies which consider the interrelationships between all three dimensions.

Environmental sustainability is the first and most crucial aspect of effective and sustainable urban renewal. Shanghai's "full-cycle renewal model" shows how resource efficiency can be achieved through "mixed use" development and incentives, such as increasing floor area ratios so that reducing urban expanding and making

the ecological footprint become less. (Shanghai Municipal Government, 2024; Shanghai Urban Renewal Action Plan, 2023) The incorporation of green spaces, optimization of infrastructures, and the application of sustainable design principles show the development can proceed in a way that promote the environment in the long term. At the same time, Nanchang's no "large-scale demolition" policy focuses on preserving the current buildings and making small-scale updates through repeated iterations. (Nanchang Municipal Government, 2024; PLOS ONE, 2023). This way is not only adapted to the sponge city concept, which incorporating water management, green infrastructure, and flood mitigation, but also shows that ecological restoration is possible without disrupting urban functions.

Securing funding and promoting local development are essential in economic sustainability. Through the use of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and special government bonds, private investment can be encouraged, and public funding remains stable. This decreases the financial burden on the local government and authorities. (CSRC & NDRC, 2020; China Daily, 2022)

In addition to funding, industrial empowerment is also an important aspect of urban village renovation. When Guangzhou incorporated affordable housing into urban village renovation projects, it not only solved housing shortage issues, but also gained income through the rental of these houses. This furthered projects, and social welfare was linked with economic growth.

The Shiliu New Village in Nanjing demonstrates how social sustainability can be achieved through public participation and fairness. Broad communication with the residents was conducted and 69 meetings were held in order to reach a cognition on the renovation plan. This engagement increased trust between the government and citizens, also strengthened the cohesion of community.

When combining environmental protection, economic opportunity, and social cohesion, China's urban village renovation policy shows a holistic approach to sustainable urban development. It is not only promotes ecological sustainability and economic growth but also strengthens social cohesion. It provides an example of how China is striving to achieve social equity in the long term, a goal that can also be linked to national and global sustainability goals.

3. The Development and Current Situation of Policies on Urban Village Renovation in China in the Past 10 Years

In the past ten years, China's policy on urban village renovation has developed rapidly. The original focus on "demolition" is gradually shifting to a more sustainable and comprehensive model.

In the first decade of the 2010s, the "Three Old Renovation strategy" focused on the renovation of old urban areas, old factories, and urban villages by demolition and reconstruction. This model solved the immediate problems of land use and urban construction. However, it also caused some serious problems such as social displacement and pollution of environment. As these problems became more evident, the government began to reform its policy.

By 2025, the new regulation on "Coordinated Land Development" was introduced. This model is no longer limited to the demolition of old buildings, but also includes protection and renovation. This model focuses on long-term sustainability. In 2025 "Continuing Urban Renewal Action Plan", the task of promoting urban renewal was also proposed. In addition to governance tasks, there are tasks of diversification of funding and participation of the public.

In Shanghai, the "Two Olds and One Village" model is still widely used. This model focuses on large-scale demolition and reconstruction. This model is financially supported by a large amount of money. For example, Qingpu District received a special bond of 40 billion RMB. However, this model raises concerns about social displacement and environmental pollution. In contrast, some cities, such as Jiangxi, are using more community-based models. For example, the model of "15-Minute Convenience Circle" focuses on community development. The model of "Organic Renewal" in Xiamen, Fujian province also protects cultural heritage. The policy of "conditional land transfer" is used to achieve protection while promoting city development.

These ongoing approaches reflect the Chinese government's increasing concern for social inclusion in urban renewal. With time, we expect the policies to be further developed by combining large-scale development and local needs as well as environment.

4. The Policy Response Dilemmas from the Perspective of Sustainable Development Abstract

Urban village renovation is a complex challenge in China. Because it faces the interwoven obstacles of environmental, economic and social factors.

From the aspect of environmental, the dilemma exists between large-scale demolition and its ecological cost. In earlier renovation projects, the "tear down and build" model resulted in high environmental costs. Specifically, carbon emissions and other environmental costs cannot be ignored in large-scale demolition. For example,

large-scale demolition that occurred in early “shantytown renovation” projects led to a high ecological cost although it helped solve housing problems. The lack of disaster resistance capacity of infrastructure has further worsened the dilemma of environmental governance. Take Nanchang as an example, the old underground pipe network system in this city needs to be updated, but the reality is it costs a lot of money. This puts local governments in a dilemma: they need to add funds for the renovation project and achieve the goal of reducing the ecological footprint. The environmental dilemmas are aggravated by the rapid pace of urbanization. Urban renewal should not come at the expense of the environment, and this challenge is exacerbated by the rapid pace of urbanization.

The economic dilemma exists between a lack of market-based incentives to attract private investment. In China, there is a lack of incentives to attract social capital, especially when social capital is involved in projects using financial tools such as REITs. In the Shanghai pilot REITs, these projects have not been successful due to legal and financial environments that do not attract private investors. The dilemma on social capital further aggravates the reliance on land finance to fund urban renewal. For example, in Guangzhou, where the “clean land transfer” model is used to finance urban renewal, local governments face a dilemma in terms of their reliance on using land as a financial instrument. When real estate markets are volatile, the financial vulnerability of local governments increases, and their credit is also at risk.

Socially, the challenges of urban village renovation are manifested in the problem of fragmented property rights. For example, in the process of urban village renovation in Xiamen, numerous small land plots (even 526 micro plots) made it very difficult to develop plans for holistic renovation and carry out them efficiently. Fragmented property rights made it challenging to negotiate with multiple people whose interests were often conflicting, leading to delays even inefficiencies in urban renewal process.

Furthermore, the problem of preserving cultural identity has also become a giant challenge for urban village renovation in cities, where old buildings may be buried under the shadow of new development. Although urban renewal is important for economic growth, we should also balance it with protecting cultural heritage so that we can better form the identity of a city.

However, the above problems (environment, economic, social) have twisted the dilemmas of urban village renovation in such a way that they cannot be separated. The environmental cost of demolition is related to the economic cost of land finance, which in turn affects the social environment through the fragmentation of property rights. For example, the environmental dilemma caused by the large-scale demolition project also stems from the fact that local residents are also facing the dilemma of the environmental impact of demolition and the fragmentation of property rights. In addition, the dilemma of the economic environment caused by dependence on land finance also leads to the dilemma of social equity, because those who are displaced by the development of urban villages do not necessarily have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of new developments.

5. Policy Optimization Routes Pathways

In order to solve the above challenges, we need to explore innovative policy solutions which are effective and sustainable. These policies can be roughly classified into three categories: institutional innovation, tool innovation, and governance innovation.

Institutional innovation: One of the institutional innovations is the setting up of an “Urban Renewal Bureau”. We can learn from the successful experience in Hubei. Urban Renewal Bureau can help speed up decision making and increase the efficiency of urban renewal. By centralizing the planning and implementation of urban projects, the Urban Renewal Authority can effectively reduce the fragmentation of administrative responsibilities, and achieve coherence in policy execution. The agency can also promote joint work between governments at all levels, developers and local residents. Moreover, Guangzhou’s Urban Village Renovation Ordinance also provides legal protection for urban renewal policies. Through legal means, the government has set out clear guidelines for land expropriation and compensation, and insured that renewal policies do not only cater for the short-term interests of policymakers but also the long-term and sustainable development of the city.

Tool-based innovation: Digital technology such as Building Information Modeling (BIM) can help improve the management of urban renewal projects and increase the overall efficiency of urban projects. In Shanghai, the experience of using BIM technology for “digital space rights” shows how digital tools can optimize the life cycle of urban projects from planning, design to construction and maintenance. By making use of data and real-time updates, BIM helps planners to make more practical estimates and reduce avoidable mistakes and wasted resources during construction.

Financial innovation: Using Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) to fund urban renewal projects. In Pingxi Village, instead of using the land as security to attract loans, the government decided to turn the 522 resettlement houses into a REITs model to generate capital for urban renewal projects. Such a financial innovation not only provides investors with a stable return but also cuts down on the over-reliance on government-funded land sales

to finance urban renewal projects in other urban areas.

Governance innovation is also critical for the success of urban village renovation. Collaborative governance with multiple stakeholders is necessary to balance the interests of urban village renovation, which are usually conflicting. Sichuan Urban Renewal Group's "Six-Stage Coverage Model" is a collaborative governance model including not only government and developers, but also residents, environmental and urban planners. Their involvement makes the whole process more transparent and open. Only by involving all interested parties in the decision-making process can the urban renewal process meet the needs of residents and developers in urban village renovation and realize the sustainable development.

Xiamen's collaborative governance model "off-site combined land supply" also makes a significant contribution to the cultural sustainability of urban renewal. The model rationally supplies land so that the historical sites could be protected and modern cities developed. By providing feasible solutions to land use, Xiamen's collaborative governance model makes another great stride in achieving the cultural sustainability of urban renewal, which prevents the cultural erosion of cities and values the rich history of cities while developing modern cities.

6. Conclusions and Future Directions

In recent years, China's urban village renovation has gradually developed towards the collaborative governance model, which incorporates environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability into the policy context. The collaborative governance model proposed in this paper provides a feasible road map for the related policies of urban renewal projects. These policies not only can meet the needs of urban development in the short term, but also provide a solid foundation for the urban development in the future.

With the continuous development of urbanization, it is necessary that the policy framework should adapt to the changes in urbanization process and values related to urbanization. (ScienceDirect, 2018; PLOS ONE, 2023) The collaborative governance model proposed in this paper can provide some references for the related policies of urban renewal projects.

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Research on the Innovation and Transformation of Aesthetic Style of Yangjiabu New Year Posters

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Abstract

This study takes the traditional folk art of China — Yangjiabu New Year posters as its research subject, systematically examining the evolution of formalist aesthetic styles in five historical periods: the Ming Dynasty, Qing Dynasty, Republican Era, New China, and contemporary times. The research employs case analysis, documentary research methods, and field investigations, delving into the five formal elements mentioned in Roger Fry's formalism theory—line, color, space, volume, and light—to reveal how Yangjiabu New Year posters have developed unique artistic expressions and aesthetic characteristics under different cultural environments and social demands. The findings indicate that the aesthetic style of traditional Yangjiabu New Year posters can no longer meet contemporary societal aesthetic needs, making innovation and transformation imperative. The conclusion emphasizes that formalism theory not only helps reveal the formal beauty and emotional depth of Yangjiabu New Year posters but also provides theoretical support for their contemporary expression in the digital age. Limitations of this study include insufficient sample concentration, inadequate exploration of digital applications, and the need for enhanced interdisciplinary integration. Future research should delve deeper into the pathways of interactive art manifestations in digital media for New Year posters and strengthen comparative studies with other folk art categories to expand understanding of the contemporary transformation of intangible cultural heritage. This paper offers new perspectives and methodological support for art history, design studies, and intangible cultural heritage protection research.

Keywords: Yangjiabu New Year posters, formalism, aesthetic style, innovative transformation

1. Introduction

Yangjiabu New Year posters, with a history of over 600 years, represent the aesthetic crystallization formed by local people in their production and daily life. Their development has spanned multiple periods including the Ming, Qing, Republican era, and post-1949 China, each characterized by distinct aesthetic pursuits. This study primarily explores the reasons why the aesthetics of that era could no longer meet modern aesthetic demands. As an important component of China's intangible cultural heritage, examining the innovation and transformation of Yangjiabu New Year posters from the perspective of aesthetic style evolution not only holds theoretical value but also carries practical significance.

The creation of Yangjiabu New Year posters aims to fulfill the secular society's need for idealization and beautification of life. As such, the content and form of these artworks achieve a high degree of unity during their production process. As a folk art form, Yangjiabu New Year posters retain their rustic yet substantial characteristics. Throughout historical evolution, their artistic forms have gradually become "standardized," with

elements like lines, volumes, spatial composition, light and shadow, and color all adhering to unique formal norms in terms of visual structure and order.

The artistic style of Yangjiabu New Year posters was deeply shaped by the local residents 'living environment and customs (Zhang Jie, 2013). These artworks feature meticulously categorized motifs and diverse themes, including door gods, kang-head posters, window decorations, window-side designs, central hall scrolls, and hanging screens (Zhang Dianying & Zhang Yunxiang, 1984). The artworks maintain strict alignment with residential environments and display orientations. Yangjiabu's New Year poster products come in various specifications that generally meet the display requirements of different households, satisfying diverse public demands.

The New Year posters of Yangjiabu are characterized by meticulously outlined imagery. Their lines—delicate, rounded, continuous, and fluid—demonstrate a refined precision reminiscent of traditional Chinese white-line techniques (Zhou Lijiao, 2023). These minimalist strokes transform complex forms into simplified compositions. The lines in Yangjiabu prints form self-contained structures that vividly depict the vanishing planes of original forms, interweaving with geometric blocks to create powerful artistic impact. Carved with precision, each line embodies both rustic simplicity and subtle dynamism. Notably, the line thickness varies across details, creating dynamic visual effects through adaptive detailing that enhances the artwork's vitality.

Due to insufficient natural light in rural dwellings, artists in Yangjiabu used bold hues to ensure clear visibility in their New Year posters (Che Guizhi, 2019). These artworks, rooted in folk traditions and reflecting local aesthetic sensibilities, extensively employ vibrant colors to create a lively and unrestrained atmosphere (Zhou Lijiao, 2023).

Yangjiabu New Year posters predominantly employ solid colors such as red, green, yellow, and purple. The compositions typically feature three contrasting color schemes: red-green, yellow-purple, and black-white, creating striking visual contrasts. Purple and green are often used in small accents or combinations, which not only maintain the festive and vibrant visual impact of the New Year posters but also enrich the composition through varied color arrangements while maintaining harmonious color coordination. The posters predominantly use flat coating techniques with minimal layering variations, and the application of chromatic blending or intermediate colors is exceptionally rare, showcasing a clean and straightforward color palette.

The spatial relationships in Yangjiabu New Year posters fundamentally shape visual elements including lines, volumes, colors, and light and shadow (Cui Xuedong, 2014). This artistic approach finds unique expression through the creators' skillful manipulation of formal language. By varying the emphasis on lines, volumes, colors, and lighting, the posters create dynamic interplay of spatial perception—determining the balance between solidity and void, scale proportions, and visual intensity within the composition (Cui Xuedong, 2014).

Yangjiabu New Year posters seldom employ Western scientific geometric perspective methods, yet subtly incorporate foreshortening in certain scenes. When constructing spatial depth, these artworks frequently utilize an overlapping technique—where interlocking visual elements replace traditional perspective-based distance representation. This results in a visually intricate yet harmonious spatial relationship within the two-dimensional plane.

Yangjiabu New Year posters consistently emphasize complex and delicate masses and structures between objects in their compositions. The representation of masses and object shapes is closely interconnected, with each object depicted through clearly defined contours that initially summarize the volume of different elements in the picture. Additionally, the use of varying hues, brightness levels, saturation, and color areas in the New Year posters also influences the expression of object volumes. The interplay of different color blocks unconsciously constructs the picture's structure, thereby forming spatial relationships. Since Yangjiabu New Year posters were created before China introduced perspective theory, they utilize the interweaving of lines within two-dimensional planes to manifest object structures, thereby expressing spatial volume. It is precisely this meticulous depiction of fragmented masses and intricate structures that endows Yangjiabu New Year posters with a visual richness and depth.

Yangjiabu New Year posters employ minimal light and shadow techniques, primarily utilizing color gradients to depict spatial relationships. This artistic approach stems from their unique production process—which employs limited color palettes (typically six colors) through multi-block printing. The resulting designs require both minimalist chromatic simplicity and powerful visual impact. Furthermore, the predominant flat-coating technique further diminishes the emphasis on chiaroscuro effects.

2. Background

2.1 New Ideas and New Culture Blend Together

In the mid-19th century, China's New Year posters were significantly influenced by Western industrialization.

The rise of the new style originated from thematic transformations, interventions in focal perspectives, and shifts in public aesthetic tastes. Under the dual influence of Western technology and culture, traditional culture gradually deviated from its original developmental trajectory. Influenced by autonomous development and the “Western wind,” Chinese New Year posters gave birth to entirely new themes and patterns. (Li Qiushi, 2021; Deborah Dar, 2021)

2.2 New Elements of Aesthetic Sense Are Integrated into Contemporary People

Research on Yangjiabu New Year posters in China primarily focuses on multiple dimensions including schematic analysis, artistic design, inheritance, and preservation. Scholars emphasize the need for organic integration between Yangjiabu New Year posters and contemporary graphic design (Qiu Xiaosong, 2020). To revitalize these artworks, Yangjiabu New Year posters should reconnect with modern life. While preserving their original artistic forms, they should actively engage in contemporary design practices through visual communication methods that resonate with people’s cultural sentiments and aesthetic preferences, thereby reintegrating them into public life and enhancing the popularity of contemporary design among modern audiences (Han Manchen & Lu Qiqi, 2020; Claire Johnson, 2022).

2.3 Emerging Digital Technology Development

The current showcase of popular projects like digital experience halls and virtual reality experience halls has opened new pathways for the inheritance and development of traditional culture. With advanced digital technologies, the public can now touch history, experience culture, and immerse themselves in these interactions, making digital communication of traditional culture a highly sought-after focus (Jay Baer, 2019; Anthony Skodler, 2019). Moreover, the application of digital tools is undoubtedly becoming a significant trend in the preservation of traditional handicrafts and intangible cultural heritage (Barton and Goldberg, 2019; Muni and Zhao Xigang, 2021).

3. Problem Statement

3.1 Traditional Aesthetics Collide with the Current Mainstream Aesthetics

Yangjiabu New Year posters, with a history spanning over 600 years, represent an aesthetic achievement nurtured by the local community through daily life and production activities. Having evolved through multiple historical periods including the Ming, Qing, Republican, and post-1949 eras, these artworks have undergone significant stylistic transformations reflecting changing aesthetic preferences across different dynasties. As China’s political, economic, and cultural development progressed, new policies exerted profound influences on the aesthetics of Yangjiabu’s traditional folk art forms. Consequently, the traditional artistic expressions of Yangjiabu New Year posters now struggle to meet contemporary mainstream aesthetic demands.

3.2 The Innovation and Transformation of Aesthetic Style Is Imperative

The state’s political and economic policies, along with the design techniques and dissemination channels of Yangjiabu New Year posters, have directly shaped the innovation and evolution of their aesthetic style. Moreover, in this era of artistic symbolism, the continuous inheritance and innovation of Yangjiabu New Year posters are profoundly influenced by new media. In an age dominated by mechanical, electronic, and intelligent technologies, innovating and transforming the aesthetic style of this traditional intangible cultural heritage — Yangjiabu New Year posters has become an urgent task that cannot be delayed.

3.3 The Transformation Strategy Needs to Be Analyzed from a Variety of Perspectives

Digital technology is increasingly and profoundly reshaping our lives. Yangjiabu New Year posters, as a traditional folk art form, currently face challenges in dissemination and promotion due to limited presentation formats and relatively homogeneous public aesthetic preferences. This necessitates a strategic repositioning of their design management framework. Meanwhile, extracting symbolic elements from these artworks and reconstructing them through innovative communication methods will provide practical transformation strategies for their revitalization.

4. Research Methods

This study primarily employs qualitative research methodologies, including literature review, interviews, fieldwork, and in-depth observation to collect data for qualitative analysis. These approaches are particularly well-suited for investigating individual or group phenomena involving emotions, motivations, and empathy — aspects that often cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurements (Chua Yan Piaw, 2020).

4.1 Methodology of Literature Survey

The research is grounded in extensive literature review and scientific classification methodologies. This study will compile and reference a substantial body of materials on the aesthetic style of Yangjiabu New Year posters. Upon completion, it will focus on analyzing the current status, existing challenges, and innovative

transformation strategies for this distinctive artistic tradition.

4.2 Interviewing Method

The interview method is a research approach that involves dialogues with artists, inheritors, and practitioners of Weifang Yangjiabu New Year posters to gather relevant information. This methodology effectively identifies factors contributing to the marginalization of these traditional artworks while documenting data related to their innovative transformations.

4.3 Case Study Method

Using the case study method, the form analysis of five classic works of Yangjiabu New Year posters in five different periods is carried out, the data of the formal characteristics of Yangjiabu New Year posters are systematically collected, and then the most unique aesthetic features of Yangjiabu New Year posters are extracted.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Next, we will delve into the outcomes of employing various methodologies. Within the framework of this research, the formal analysis phase systematically divides the elements into five distinct categories for in-depth examination. This exploration commences with the aesthetic response's reliance on five emotional factors attributed to the artist. We will then individually investigate the specific influencing elements of line, volume, space, light and shadow, and color. Building upon this analysis, we will elucidate why form constitutes the most fundamental nature of art and why the relationship between form and the emotions it conveys is inherently inseparable.

5.1 A formalistic Analysis of *Shen Tu and Yu Lei*, a New Year Poster in the Ming Dynasty



Figure 1. A *Shen Tu and Yu Lei* door god Yangjiabu New Year poster from the Ming Dynasty

Source: *An Appreciation of The Selected Works of Yangjiabu New Year Pictures*, Weifang, Shandong.

5.1.1 Line Analysis

Lines serve as the fundamental compositional elements in the visual structure of *Shen Tu and Yu Lei*, demonstrating unique expressiveness through the woodcut printmaking medium. The artwork features concise yet fluid lines that combine boldness with elegance, embodying the artist's pursuit of the "harmony between heaven and humanity" philosophy while achieving dual expressions of form and spirit. Under a solemn theme, the lines maintain meticulous precision and natural fluidity, blending rigorous craftsmanship with timeless simplicity. The facial features of the left and right door gods are outlined with black lines—thick brows, mustache, and pupils in deep ink tones, while the chin area retains blank space. The right figure's beard is entirely black. The characters' forms are vividly exaggerated with distinct expressions, their heads enlarged and full-bodied to achieve symmetrical proportions. The outer contour lines of both door gods occupy the largest and most prominent areas, maintaining consistent patterns while showing subtle variations in details. These outline lines effectively separate the background, transforming the flat surface into shifting vignettes of small planes,

while balancing decorative motifs between formal unity and spatial depth.

5.1.2 Color Analysis

Color plays a pivotal role in the visual storytelling of *Shen Tu and Yu Lei*, showcasing remarkable expressive power. The composition features evenly distributed hues arranged according to geometric forms, creating vibrant, strikingly contrasting, and highly decorative effects. Through strategic use of color blocks, primary colors like red, yellow, and blue create intense contrasts. Large-scale red and blue fields interweave while complementary hues of yellow and purple are skillfully employed in smaller areas, resulting in diverse and rich chromatic variations. The door gods' costumes feature a blue base with red, yellow, and purple accents. The deliberate use of color blocks skillfully delineates the overall composition from individual sections and between different elements. Large color masses create striking contrasts while smaller ones harmonize the design, with color areas arranged in balanced coordination. For instance: the hammer in the door god's hand has a yellow base framed with red edges adorned with purple dragon patterns; the brush's primary hue is red, complemented by blue, white, yellow, and purple accents; the shoes maintain a white paper base on the front while their sides are filled with white, blue, and purple hues through spatial arrangement.

The use of color emphasizes emotional expression, highlighting the festive and joyful atmosphere. The door gods' faces are adorned with red patterns, symbolizing "loyalty and righteousness," which creates a sense of solemnity. The overall color scheme presents a "rich" and "solemn" style. Through meticulous refinement of colors and object forms, the creator achieves perfect harmony between visual elements and emotional expression.

5.1.3 Volume Analysis

In the print work *Shen Tu and Yu Lei*, exaggerated forms and vibrant colors easily make viewers overlook the logical structure of objects. However, upon closer inspection, one discovers the ingenious details in composition and figure arrangement. The poster subtly conveys an unstable yet peculiar tension that sparks imagination about volume. The size variations of elements directly manifest this spatial perception: door god figures, decorations, and props demonstrate different volume scales through their proportions. Color distribution creates visual weight—large areas of red and blue emphasize the massive proportions of faces and bodies, while smaller patches of yellow, purple, and black highlight compact accessories, shoes, and props. The small flags on the door gods' backs and the soft, dynamic silhouettes of their robes contrast with the rigid armor, generating a sense of visual inertia and dynamic tension. In terms of composition, rich details fill the solid structure, creating contrast between dense imagery and background blank spaces. The meticulous depiction of costumes and simplified props forms a balance of density, further stimulating imagination about the door gods' volumetric form.

5.1.4 Space Analysis

Yangjiabu New Year posters typically prioritize planar composition over three-dimensional depth. The artistic imagery unfolds in flat arrangements where elements occupy distinct positions without overlapping. The work *Shen Tu and Yu Lei* features a full composition with solemn-faced door gods radiating dignified authority, their spatial arrangement embodying inner spirituality. On a 120x69 cm sheet of paper, two independent yet four-head-long guardian deities are depicted in symmetrical composition without any overlap. Through varied brushstrokes and line arrangements, the flat figures gain structural depth. For instance, meticulous detailing of facial features—such as the nasolabial folds, double eyelid lines, inter-eyebrow creases, and lips—creates new structural dimensions that complete the facial spatial composition.

The artwork employs the scattered-point perspective composition technique from traditional Chinese poster, where depicted figures and blank spaces create a responsive relationship of depth or horizontal spatial positioning. For instance, door god figures are carved on a blank background to establish visual front-back spatial relationships. Two door gods stand facing each other with symmetrical positioning, directly conveying left-right spatial awareness. The layered depiction of partial features—such as the hammer, brush, gold ingot, and ruyi scepter held in their chests—guides viewers in interpreting the figure's structure and spatial composition. Shoes are divided into three planes (front, side, and front) on a flat surface, allowing viewers to imagine and deduce the depth and breadth of the door gods' presence in real-life spaces.

5.1.5 Light and Shadow Analysis

Light serves as a fundamental requirement for human survival, yet people exhibit remarkable sensitivity to variations in its intensity. However, the visual presentation of light and shadow in this artwork remains understated. Yangjiabu New Year posters typically employ color to convey spatial relationships, rarely explicitly depicting light effects. The work's interplay of light and shadow is primarily conveyed through variations in color brightness and hue. Even identical objects can evoke vastly different perceptions when illuminated by strong light against dark backgrounds. For instance, the decorative ornaments on the door gods' hands and the embellishments along the edges of their garments feature high-brightness yellow paired with low-brightness

purple and blue, skillfully demonstrating the artful use of light within the composition.

5.1.6 Formal Analysis and Summary of the Work *Shen Tu and Yu Lei*

Through an in-depth exploration of the form and structural language in the two door gods depicted in *Shen Tu and Yu Lei*, we find that under a relatively solemn theme, the variations in pictorial forms are not only orderly but also richly diverse. The work skillfully integrates order and diversity through the ingenious arrangement of lines, colors, volumes, space, and light and shadow, forming “meaningful forms” and “expressive forms” rather than mere daily life “recording” or reliance on ideological forms like text. The door god images, meticulously crafted by artists, possess symbolic functions. With rigorous and meticulous lines, they predominantly use red as the main color, complemented by yellow, purple, and blue. The volume rendering creates an unstable yet peculiar tension. The clever division of planar space not only highlights the majestic momentum but also fosters a festive atmosphere, allowing viewers to profoundly perceive the poster’s primal essence and the artist’s underlying emotions, thereby evoking strong aesthetic resonance.

5.2 Formalism analysis of New Year Poster Money Tree in Qing Dynasty



Figure 2. A *Money Tree* Yangjiabu New Year posters from the Qing Dynasty

Source: *An Appreciation of The Selected Works of Yangjiabu New Year Pictures*, Weifang, Shandong.

5.2.1 Line Analysis

The Qing Dynasty Yangjiabu New Year poster *Money Tree* showcases exquisite line work. When depicting figures, the artist employs fluid and varied lines to precisely capture their postures and expressions. For instance, the innocent demeanor of children is vividly portrayed through simple yet dynamic lines, while the fabric folds naturally follow body movements, vividly demonstrating material texture. In portraying the money tree and decorative items, meticulous lines are applied—copper coins and ornaments on the tree are rendered with precise strokes, highlighting craftsmanship excellence. The contrasting styles of different objects complement each other: the lively figure lines blend with the orderly decorative lines, creating a composition that remains both vibrant and harmonious. This fully leverages lines’ roles in shaping forms and atmosphere, endowing the artwork with rich rhythm and cadence. The piece masterfully demonstrates the mature techniques and unique aesthetics of Yangjiabu New Year posters from the Qing Dynasty in line application.

5.2.2 Color Analysis

The vibrant colors of *Money Tree* vividly showcase the distinctive style of Qing Dynasty Yangjiabu New Year posters. Dominated by high-purity hues like red, yellow, blue, and green, the overall palette creates a striking visual impact that evokes a festive and joyful atmosphere, perfectly reflecting people’s aspirations for a better life during that era. Red appears frequently in the composition, appearing in characters’ clothing and flames, symbolizing auspiciousness and warmth. Yellow is used to depict the fruits of the Money Tree and ingots, representing wealth. The color combinations demonstrate exquisite craftsmanship, with complementary colors like red and green, or yellow and blue enhancing contrast and depth. Moreover, the color distribution shows remarkable artistry—surrounding the central motif of the Money Tree, hues radiate outward in an orderly

manner. This approach not only emphasizes the theme but also ensures overall harmony, fully demonstrating Qing Dynasty New Year posters' profound emphasis on emotional expression and visual impact through color application.

5.2.3 Volume Analysis

In terms of volumetric representation, the *Money Tree* employs ingenious techniques to create a rich sense of three-dimensionality. While the character designs retain certain flat characteristics, meticulous adjustments in proportions and postures imbue them with substantial depth. For instance, the clever contrast in size between adults and children within the composition subtly conveys spatial hierarchy and varying scales. The depiction of the Money Tree particularly emphasizes volume: branches extend outward, adorned with coins and ornaments that create layered arrangements. Through overlapping elements, the tree's lushness and three-dimensional form are vividly portrayed. Items like the fire basin beneath enhance visual weight through contour lines and color contrasts. Although lacking Western-style perspective and chiaroscuro techniques, the composition's unique design and layout allow viewers to perceive tangible three-dimensionality. This fully demonstrates the distinctive volumetric expression characteristic of Qing Dynasty Yangjiabu New Year posters.

5.2.4 Space Analysis

The spatial composition of *Money Tree* demonstrates unique artistic approach. Employing scattered perspective without fixed vanishing points, the artwork achieves dynamic distribution of elements that creates a vibrant and richly textured atmosphere. At its core stands the Money Tree as the visual focal point, with surrounding figures and objects radiating outward in concentric circles. Clear spatial relationships between characters and scenery are established through layered compositions featuring foreground-obscuring backgrounds and size contrasts. For instance, children in the foreground appear larger and more detailed, while distant figures are smaller and simplified—a clever hint at spatial depth. The blank areas within the composition also serve an essential purpose, contrasting sharply with abundant patterns and colors to create airy spatial perception. This design effectively avoids visual congestion, showcasing the Qing Dynasty Yangjiabu New Year posters' innovative integration of traditional poster principles with contemporary spatial techniques.

5.2.5 Light and Shadow Analysis

Due to the limitations of printing techniques, the *Money Tree* exhibits a restrained approach to light and shadow representation. However, through variations in color brightness and line density, it skillfully hints at luminous effects. For instance, while flames are depicted in vibrant red, surrounding figures and objects are rendered in more subdued hues. This chromatic contrast vividly conveys the flames' intensity and heat, sparking viewers' associations with light and shadow. The edges of garments and objects are sometimes accentuated with bold lines or intensified colors to create shadow effects, enhancing three-dimensional depth. Although less intricate than Western realistic posters, this lighting technique seamlessly integrates into the overall compositional language. By harmonizing with lines and colors, it collectively shapes artistic imagery, showcasing the unique exploration of light and shadow techniques in Yangjiabu New Year posters from the Qing Dynasty—reflecting both their craftsmanship and aesthetic sensibilities.

5.2.6 The Formalist Analysis and Summary of the Work *Money Tree*

As a quintessential example of Yangjiabu New Year posters from the Qing Dynasty, the *Money Tree* masterfully embodies the era's artistic sensibilities through its dynamic interplay of lines, colors, spatial composition, and chiaroscuro. The artistically refined lines achieve fluid elegance while maintaining strict geometric precision, while the vibrant hues demonstrate masterful color coordination. The work employs distinctive modeling techniques for volumetric representation, combines scattered perspective with meticulously crafted spatial arrangements, and features subtle yet evocative lighting effects. These elements collectively form a richly expressive visual language. This masterpiece not only showcases the technical sophistication of Yangjiabu New Year posters during this period but also reflects the people's profound yearning for and relentless pursuit of a better life. Bearing profound cultural heritage and folkloric significance, it vividly interprets the wisdom and aesthetic sensibilities of Qing-era folk art. Its enduring relevance makes it an invaluable resource for tracing the evolutionary journey of New Year poster traditions.

5.3 A Formalist Analysis of the New Year Poster *Lion Rolling a Ball in the Republican Era*



Figure 3. A *Lion Rolling a Ball* Yangjiabu New Year poster from the Republic of China era

Source: *An Appreciation of The Selected Works of Yangjiabu New Year Pictures*, Weifang, Shandong.

5.3.1 Line Analysis

The Republican-era print *Lion Rolling a Ball* masterfully blends traditional aesthetics with modern artistic sensibilities. The lion's contours flow with dynamic energy, preserving the rustic charm of classical New Year posters while accentuating its power through varied brushwork. The meticulously detailed mane layers vividly capture the fur's voluminous texture. In contrast, peony motifs feature delicate petals with smooth edges and crisp veins, their refined lines contrasting sharply with the lion's bold strokes to emphasize floral delicacy. The flowing ribbons and embroidered tassels showcase graceful curves that convey lightness in motion. This diverse visual language not only preserves the essence of traditional design but also meets the Republican-era audience's growing appreciation for vibrant imagery and decorative artistry.

5.3.2 Color Analysis

The vibrant color palette of *Lion Rolling a Ball* masterfully embodies the dual characteristics of New Republic-era New Year posters: preserving traditional aesthetics while embracing innovation. The lion's body is predominantly adorned with crimson and golden hues—red symbolizing auspiciousness, yellow conveying opulence. The high saturation makes the lion's form strikingly prominent, creating a powerful visual impact. Peonies in rich pink contrast with emerald leaves, producing a vivid chromatic juxtaposition that highlights their delicate beauty while infusing the composition with vitality. The embroidered ball and flowing ribbons blend red, green, and yellow hues, harmonizing with the lion and peonies to form a cohesive yet layered color scheme. The flat-ink technique preserves the craftsmanship essence of traditional New Year posters, while the color coordination aligns with the public's aesthetic preferences for festive atmospheres during the Republican era—capturing both classical charm and contemporary spirit.

5.3.3 Volume Analysis

This artwork achieves remarkable three-dimensionality through masterful integration of form and color. The lion's design employs bold exaggeration, with meticulously detailed proportions between head and body and refined muscle contours that radiate masculine power. The limbs, rendered through precise line work and color gradations, further accentuate the sense of strength and depth. Peony petals are artistically layered through alternating hues and overlapping designs, vividly capturing their layered texture and three-dimensional form. The hydrangea's depiction emphasizes volumetric expression through rounded shapes and concentrated color application, creating a full-bodied spatial presence. While primarily employing flat composition techniques, these meticulous details imbue key elements with tangible massing, significantly enhancing visual impact. This approach perfectly aligns with the Republican-era New Year poster tradition of pursuing dynamic realism in artistic representation.

5.3.4 Space Analysis

The spatial composition of *Lion Rolling a Ball* employs traditional planar techniques while skillfully integrating a well-balanced arrangement of dense and sparse elements. The lion, peony, and embroidered ball are evenly distributed without obvious depth perspective, creating a flat visual effect that clearly inherits the spatial representation methods of traditional New Year prints. However, the work emphasizes contrast between dense and sparse arrangements in its element placement. For instance, the interplay between two lions and peonies with embroidered balls enriches the composition without creating overcrowding. The lion, as the central motif, occupies a prominent position, while peonies and ribbons serve as decorative accents. The overall layout remains simple yet clear, highlighting the theme while aligning with the decorative and symbolic purposes of New Year prints during the Republican era, ensuring effective communication of content.

5.3.5 Light and Shadow Analysis

Influenced by the New Year poster techniques and traditional aesthetic sensibilities, *Lion Rolling a Ball* demonstrates restrained light and shadow expression. The artwork primarily employs color contrast to suggest luminous effects. For instance, the lion's face achieves three-dimensional depth through subtle color variations, creating an illusion of sunlight. Peony petals showcase light and shadow effects via nuanced color gradations, enhancing their lifelike appearance. However, instead of adopting Western poster's stark chiaroscuro techniques, the composition skillfully integrates light and shadow into color and line expressions, maintaining a flat decorative quality. This approach not only embodies traditional New Year poster's artistic characteristics but also reflects the Republican-era New Year posters' artistic evolution—neither fully replicating Western lighting techniques nor abandoning tradition, but rather making moderate adjustments and innovations within established frameworks.

5.3.6 A Formalist Analysis of the Work *Lion Rolling a Ball*

The Republican-era New Year poster *Lion Rolling a Ball* vividly demonstrates the unique blend of tradition and innovation in Yangjiabu's prints. Its line work masterfully fuses classical aesthetics with modern sensibilities, creating compositions that radiate rustic charm while maintaining dynamic expressiveness. The vibrant color palette not only preserves traditional festive harmony but also aligns with contemporary aesthetic trends. Through organic integration of form and hue, the artwork achieves striking three-dimensionality. Though rendered in flat composition, its balanced density highlights the central motif while adding decorative flair. Subtle light-and-shadow techniques, enhanced by chromatic hints, preserve the essence of traditional flatness. This masterpiece not only inherits the core artistic features of traditional prints but also innovates moderately to meet the aesthetic demands of the Republican era. As a vivid snapshot of Yangjiabu's art development during this period, it provides an exemplary case study for understanding the evolution of New Year poster traditions.

5.4 A Formalist Analysis of the New China New Year Poster *One Child Is the Best Choice After Its Establishment*



Figure 4. A 1978 Lunar New Year Round Yangjiabu New Year poster from the after the founding of new China

Source: *Lunar New Year Pictures of Yangjiabu Village Weifang, China*.

5.4.1 Line Analysis

In the new work *One Child Is the Best Choice* created after the establishment of New China, the use of lines is simple and brisk, combining practicality with a certain decorative quality. When depicting children's figures, the lines flow smoothly and rounded, accurately outlining their contours and postures. For instance, the facial features of children are depicted with soft lines that vividly convey their innocence and tenderness; while the clothing lines are simplified, they clearly show the style and folds of garments through basic curves and intersecting lines, highlighting texture without appearing overly intricate. The lines for floral elements like peonies and longevity peaches are more regular, with the petals of peonies, leaves, and the contours of longevity peaches all presented through crisp lines that emphasize the morphological characteristics of these auspicious motifs. The overall line style is simple and elegant, aligning with the needs of New China's post-establishment era for annual posters to be accessible, easy to understand, and widely disseminated. At the same time, it retains some fundamental features of traditional New Year poster line modeling, making the artwork both contemporary in its simplicity and imbued with the charm of traditional art.

5.4.2 Color Analysis

The color scheme of this work is vibrant and rich in symbolic meaning, fully reflecting the emphasis on positive atmosphere and thematic expression in New Year posters after the establishment of New China. The children's skin is rendered in a soft pink hue, appearing particularly lively and adorable; their clothing predominantly features red, which symbolizes auspiciousness and joy in Chinese culture. This not only aligns with the traditional symbolism of New Year posters but also highlights the vivid vitality of the child figures. Peonies are depicted in a bold red and pink palette paired with emerald green leaves, creating striking color contrasts that showcase both the peony's delicate beauty and vigorous vitality while adding festive charm to the composition. Longevity peaches are presented in bright yellow tones, symbolizing longevity and prosperity. The overall color application boasts high saturation and strong visual impact, creating a warm and cheerful atmosphere that accurately conveys the beautiful aspirations associated with the "One-Child Policy". This design not only meets the aesthetic and emotional needs of the public at the time but also preserves the distinctive characteristics of traditional New Year posters—vivid colors and auspicious symbolism.

5.4.3 Volume Analysis

The artwork masterfully creates a pronounced three-dimensional effect through the harmonious integration of form and color. While depicting children's figures in flat compositions, the rounded contours and richly colored fills imbue them with substantial volume. Particularly, the faces and limbs of the children vividly capture their endearing roundness and charm through this technique. The peony petals achieve lifelike depth through layered designs and gradient color variations, creating a three-dimensional texture that makes the blossoms appear full-bodied. The longevity peach similarly demonstrates volumetric richness through its rounded silhouette and seamless color transitions. Although the work avoids complex perspective techniques to emphasize three-dimensionality, these simple yet effective methods imbue all key elements with tangible mass, significantly enhancing visual vitality and expressive power. This approach perfectly aligns with the traditional New Year poster's artistic pursuit of intuitive, vivid imagery characteristic of its era.

5.4.4 Space Analysis

The spatial composition of the poster employs traditional planar treatment techniques, with elements distributed in a balanced and orderly manner. The child occupies the center of the composition as the visual focal point, surrounded by auspicious motifs such as peonies and longevity peaches, forming a centripetal spatial structure. The lack of clear foreground-background perspective between elements creates a flat, laid-out effect, inheriting the spatial representation techniques of traditional New Year posters. Meanwhile, the arrangement of elements demonstrates a harmonious balance between density and openness. The interplay between the child and floral arrangements, longevity peaches, and other motifs not only enriches the composition but also avoids visual congestion. This concise and clear spatial layout effectively highlights the central theme, allowing viewers to immediately grasp the core content of the artwork. This aligns with the requirement for New Year posters to directly and clearly convey messages as promotional and decorative media following the establishment of New China.

5.4.5 Light and Shadow Analysis

Influenced by the New Year poster techniques and artistic styles of the era, the artwork demonstrates subtle handling of light and shadow. It primarily employs nuanced color variations to subtly reveal luminous effects. For instance, children's faces are rendered with gradations of color depth that create a sense of three-dimensionality, as if softly illuminated by gentle rays. Peony petals showcase contrasting light and dark tones, producing distinct textures between illuminated and shaded areas that enhance floral realism. However, the composition avoids harsh chiaroscuro contrasts, skillfully integrating light and shadow into color expression to maintain flat decorative qualities. This approach not only highlights traditional New Year poster's artistic characteristics but also reflects contemporary artistry in preserving heritage. Through concise and intuitive visual presentation, it effectively serves thematic expression while catering to public aesthetic preferences.

5.4.6 A Formalist Analysis and Summary of the Work *One Child Is the Best Choice*

As a representative work of Yangjiabu New Year posters after the establishment of New China, *One Child Is the Best Choice* fully demonstrates the unique style of New Year posters during this period, characterized by "serving the era and being close to the masses." Its lines are simple and fluid, accurately outlining images of children and flowers that are both practical and imbued with traditional charm. The vibrant colors predominantly feature red, complemented by pink, green, and yellow hues, which not only continue the festive style of New Year posters but also convey the beautiful wish of "the benefits of having an only child" through the symbolic meaning of colors. In terms of spatial representation, the rounded shapes and delicate color transitions create a three-dimensional effect for images of children, peonies, and longevity peaches. The layout employs traditional planar techniques centered on children, with auspicious elements surrounding them in a clear and focused manner. The subtle handling of light and shadow relies on nuanced color variations to suggest depth, retaining

the decorative characteristics of flat art while aligning with public aesthetics and propaganda needs. Overall, this work skillfully integrates traditional craftsmanship with contemporary themes, becoming a precious specimen for studying folk art and social interactions during that period.

5.5 Formalism an Analysis of Modern New Year Poster Sweet Fruit



Figure 5. A *Less Drink and More Dish* Yangjiabu New Year posters from the after the founding of new China
Source: *An Appreciation of The Selected Works of Yangjiabu New Year Pictures*, Weifang, Shandong.

5.5.1 Line Analysis

In the modern artwork *Sweet Fruit*, the use of lines masterfully blends the rustic charm of traditional New Year posters with the dynamic rhythm of contemporary design. When depicting figures, the fluid and varied lines precisely outline different postures, expressions, and fabric textures. For instance, the intricate patterns on garments are rendered through delicate lines that showcase unparalleled refinement while retaining the distinctive rustic texture characteristic of carving. For decorative elements like flowers and fruits, the lines demonstrate meticulous precision—flower contours and leaf veins are presented through orderly lines, highlighting both technical mastery and decorative appeal. The harmonious interplay between line styles across different areas, where the fluidity of figure lines perfectly combines with the regularity of decorative lines, creates a composition that remains lively yet orderly. This fully demonstrates how modern Yangjiabu New Year posters inherit and innovate traditional techniques in line application, perfectly aligning with modern aesthetics' dual pursuit of refined detail and dynamic vitality.

5.5.2 Color Analysis

The vibrant and striking colors in *Sweet Fruit* create a modern visual impact through their clever combination. Dominated by high-purity hues like red, yellow, blue, and green, the composition evokes a festive atmosphere that resonates with people's aspirations for a better life. Red frequently appears in costumes and decorative patterns, symbolizing auspiciousness and sweetness, while yellow represents fruits and ornamental motifs, signifying abundance and prosperity. The stark contrasts between different colors and complementary color pairings (such as red and green, yellow and blue) enhance the layered depth and visual appeal. The color distribution revolves around the core theme of "sweet fruits," highlighting the subject while maintaining overall harmony. This demonstrates modern New Year posters' dual emphasis on emotional expression and visual impact through color application—continuing the festive color heritage of traditional New Year posters while aligning with contemporary aesthetic preferences.

5.5.3 Volume Analysis

The artwork achieves remarkable three-dimensionality through masterful integration of form and color. While the figures maintain flat characteristics, their proportions, postures, and subtle color variations create a tangible sense of depth. Every detail—limb movements and fabric folds—conveys dimensional presence to viewers. Floral elements like layered blossoms and plump fruits demonstrate this technique through overlapping layers and natural color transitions, forming vivid three-dimensional forms. Though lacking complex perspective, the composition's unique design and color treatment deliver striking three-dimensional impact. This showcases the distinctive charm of modern Yangjiabu New Year posters: preserving traditional techniques while infusing

contemporary aesthetic sensibilities into volumetric representation.

5.5.4 Space Analysis

The spatial composition of *Sweet Fruit* masterfully blends traditional and contemporary design elements. Centered around the diamond-shaped “sweet fruits” text block, the artwork features concentric scenes of diverse figures, creating a harmonious radial structure that preserves the layout tradition of traditional New Year posters. Each vignette employs strategic positioning—both between characters and their surroundings, as well as through deliberate contrasts in scale and density—to build layered spatial relationships. For instance, foreground figures maintain crisp proportions while background decorations feature minimalist elements, subtly suggesting depth through contrast. This layout not only retains the decorative essence of traditional New Year posters but also incorporates modern design’s pursuit of spatial hierarchy, resulting in a composition that is both visually rich and orderly, perfectly aligning with contemporary aesthetic preferences.

5.5.5 Light and Shadow Analysis

Influenced by traditional New Year poster techniques and contemporary aesthetic sensibilities, *Sweet Fruit* demonstrates subtle yet decorative lighting effects. The artwork skillfully employs color contrasts and line variations to suggest light and shadow. For instance, darker hues accentuate the folds of garments to enhance three-dimensionality, while delicate color gradations in petals vividly depict illuminated and shaded areas, making them appear more lifelike. Although the composition lacks stark contrasts, this restrained lighting treatment complements lines and colors, preserving the flat decorative beauty of New Year posters while enhancing spatial depth. This approach fully showcases how modern Yangjiabu New Year posters inherit traditional craftsmanship in light treatment while innovatively adapting to contemporary aesthetic demands.

5.5.6 A Formalist Analysis of the Work *Sweet Fruit*

Sweet Fruit, a quintessential example of modern Yangjiabu New Year posters, masterfully blends traditional craftsmanship with contemporary aesthetics through its dynamic interplay of lines, colors, volumes, spatial composition, and lighting. The artwork preserves the textured essence of classical woodcut techniques while infusing modern vibrancy into its design. Its vibrant hues maintain the tradition’s festive saturation while delivering striking visual impact, while innovative color treatments and spatial arrangements reinterpret traditional concentric layouts with modern layering. Subtle yet decorative lighting effects harmonize with other elements to create a distinctive artistic atmosphere. This masterpiece not only retains the craft’s core values and auspicious symbolism but also resonates with modern sensibilities. It vividly demonstrates how traditional folk art evolves and thrives in contemporary society, serving as a valuable model for Yangjiabu New Year posters’ modern adaptation. The work ultimately reflects the enduring vitality of folk art, which continuously adapts to and innovates with the times.

5.6 Analysis and Summary of Works in Different Periods

The Ming Dynasty print *Shen Tu and Yu Lei* features meticulous lines and highly saturated colors with strong contrasts. Through symmetrical planar compositions and subtle light-and-shadow treatments, it creates an atmosphere of solemnity and festivity, fully embodying the philosophy of “harmony between heaven and humanity”. The Qing Dynasty work *Money Tree* combines dynamic yet orderly lines with vibrant colors that closely follow the theme. Employing scattered perspective and ingenious modeling techniques, it constructs a three-dimensional spatial sense, showcasing mature craftsmanship and rich folk cultural connotations. The Republican-era piece *Lion Rolling a Ball* integrates the rustic simplicity of traditional lines with the dynamism of modern art. Its bold and innovative colors, balanced layout emphasizing density and sparsity, and subtle light-and-shadow treatment highlight the collision and fusion of Chinese and Western aesthetics. After the establishment of New China, the print *One Child Is the Best Choice* demonstrates concise practical lines and colors symbolizing contemporary themes. Its spatial layout emphasizes propagandistic intent and closely aligns with public needs. The modern work *Sweet Fruit* harmoniously blends traditional simplicity with modern vitality. Its visually striking colors and layered spatial design achieve a dynamic inheritance of tradition and innovation. Overall, Yangjiabu New Year posters have consistently preserved exquisite craftsmanship and auspicious symbolism through historical transformations while continuously adapting to evolving aesthetic and functional demands, demonstrating a clear developmental trajectory.

6. Research Limitations

This study focuses exclusively on the traditional folk art of Yangjiabu New Year images within the scope of Chinese intangible cultural heritage. Yangjiabu New Year images are found solely in Weifang city, Shandong Province, China, which limits the scope of regional research.

The application of cutting-edge technology, along with its integration with other new technologies, in innovating and transforming the aesthetic style of Yangjiabu New Year images has not been fully developed. There remain

technical challenges in constructing the new immersive digital life scene for Yangjiabu New Year images.

7. Summary and Recommendations

Roger Fry advocated for focusing on poster language—the expression of visual elements such as lines, colors, volumes, spaces, and light and shadow. He believed that viewers should perceive the artwork's original state and the hidden emotions behind it through artistic appreciation, thereby stimulating their aesthetic sensibilities (Yang Yusi, 2021). Fry's formalist theory provides significant theoretical insights and practical guidance for analyzing formal elements and innovatively transforming stylistic forms in Yangjiabu New Year posters.

Drawing from Roger Fry's formalist theory of five aesthetic elements—line, color, volume, space, and light and shadow—we conduct a detailed comparative analysis of the unique artistic forms in Yangjiabu New Year posters. This study thoroughly demonstrates that form constitutes the most fundamental attribute of art. The formal achievements in Yangjiabu New Year posters constitute their artistic value, while the distinctive aesthetic characteristics of these forms vividly prove the inseparable relationship between emotional expression and formal composition in these artworks.

Yangjiabu New Year posters have undergone six centuries of evolution. In the process of continuously catering to people's aesthetic demands, the New Year poster artisans have accumulated numerous principles of beauty, particularly those emphasizing formal aesthetics. In traditional Chinese beliefs, people firmly believe that auspicious patterns printed on paper can bring good fortune, and the aspiration for a better life has been shared across generations. Folk beliefs exert a profound influence on traditional New Year posters. The patterns of these artworks visually manifest folk beliefs and values, while the expression of formal language serves as an essential means of visual aesthetics. In terms of formal expression, Yangjiabu New Year posters break free from the constraints of natural phenomena, skillfully employing rich imagination along with romantic symbolism and allegorical techniques to comprehensively present pictorial elements (Li Shuzhi, 2023).

As traditional New Year customs gradually fade from public memory, the once-blessed and festive New Year posters have quietly faded from this cultural landscape. In the context of rapid modernization, confronted with ever-changing lifestyles and evolving aesthetic preferences, how Yangjiabu New Year posters can redefine their identity, adapt to contemporary development, regain public attention, and explore innovative expressions has become the core focus of this study. As a representative of China's outstanding traditional culture, Yangjiabu New Year posters urgently require preservation and inheritance efforts. By successfully transforming into contemporary aesthetic styles, they should continue to shine on Chinese soil and emerge as a brilliant pearl on the global cultural stage. Based on the research findings, the following management recommendations are proposed:

7.1 From Static Display to Dynamic Communication — Dynamic Interpretation of Form Language

Building on the dynamic characteristics of light and shadow within Frei's formalism framework, this study proposes transforming traditional static New Year posters into dynamic visual narratives. By employing animation, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) technologies, we achieve fluid light transitions and spatial transformations that infuse the originally two-dimensional art form with temporal dimensions. Through simulated dynamic lighting effects and visual reconstructions of spatial relationships, viewers' perception of emotional resonance and symbolic meanings in New Year posters becomes significantly enhanced, elevating their visual presentation with modern sophistication and immersive quality. This evolving visual language-driven approach to dynamic communication effectively stimulates deeper aesthetic emotional resonance among audiences.

7.2 Aesthetic Reinterpretation and Form Reconstruction — Contemporary Expression of the Five Visual Elements

In the process of form beauty reconstruction, we should take "line, color, volume, space and light and shadow" proposed by Roger Fry as the core basis of form structure theory, extract the most recognizable and symbolic traditional symbol elements in Yangjiabu New Year posters, and carry out innovative redesign. For example:

The innovative transformation of aesthetic forms in Yangjiabu New Year posters focuses on creativity. To better achieve the "transcoding" of traditional Yangjiabu New Year posters, it is essential to continuously enhance the creative level of reconstructing their formal elements and infuse them with vitality. In the process of reconstructing the formal beauty of Yangjiabu New Year posters, this paper takes Roger Fry's five major formal elements — "line, color, volume, space, and light and shadow" — as theoretical foundations. It optimizes and extracts the most distinctive and symbolic traditional symbolic elements from Yangjiabu New Year posters for redesign. The specific optimization suggestions are as follows:

- **Line Optimization:** Employ digital illustration techniques to reinterpret traditional sketching methods, thereby enhancing rhythm and visual impact. Embrace emotional expression through variations in line —

adjust textures to match themes: use fluid curves for lively scenes and crisp straight lines for serene subjects to deepen emotional resonance. Apply subtle thickness gradients in specific areas, while emphasizing volume with thicker strokes at crucial points to prevent monotonous lines.

- **Color Optimization:** Building upon high-purity, vivid primary colors and incorporating modern color theory concepts, we create a color system that aligns with contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. While preserving the vibrant hues characteristic of traditional festivals, we skillfully integrate warm and cool tonal adjustments and gradient transitions to effectively alleviate visual pressure.
- **Volume Optimization:** Embracing the core principle of “symbolic exaggeration,” we make measured adjustments to proportions and elements, simplifying forms to enhance visual harmony and modern aesthetic appeal. This approach avoids visual imbalance caused by excessive distortion, ensuring that exaggerated techniques serve artistic beauty rather than mere symbolic expression. By applying visual perspective and layered composition techniques, we amplify three-dimensional effects in two-dimensional images, further strengthening the depth and visual impact of the artwork’s structure.
- **Space Optimization:** Yangjiabu New Year posters predominantly feature symmetrical and centered compositions. While this creates a solemn atmosphere, it lacks visual variation. We recommend incorporating non-symmetrical layouts, diagonal arrangements, and negative space techniques to align with modern aesthetic trends while preserving the ceremonial essence of traditional decorations. Additionally, breaking away from conventional “scattered perspective” and “flat arrangement” patterns can enhance spatial perception through skillful contrast between solid and void elements in composition design.
- **Light and shadow optimization:** Develop the “light and shadow symbolization” technology, which converts the light and shadow effect into decorative symbols. For example, use radial gold lines to represent sunlight, and use uniform dark patterns to represent shadows, so that light and shadow become unique decorative elements, thus enhancing the spatial reality and volume expression of the picture.

On the basis of optimizing the above five forms, we can also re-express and reconstruct the form of Yangjiabu New Year posters from multiple dimensions. Taking traditional folk customs as the core starting point, we are committed to realizing the re-creation of its contemporary aesthetic forms.

7.3 Digital Activation Achieves “Living” Inheritance — Modern Regeneration of Form Language

The essence of “living heritage” lies in breathing new life into traditional forms, a concept deeply rooted in the “expressive nature” of art emphasized by Fry. By leveraging dynamic imagery and interactive media technologies, we integrate five key visual elements—fluidity of lines, emotional chromaticity, structural volume, spatial depth, and temporal light-shadow dynamics—into a digital framework that creates a “new formal system”. Through modern reinterpretations of these elements, traditional aesthetics evolve from mere “material presentation” to “sensory transmission”, ultimately revitalizing Yangjiabu New Year posters in the new media landscape. The specific implementation methods include:

- a) Multimedia exhibition converts static images into dynamic pictures, vividly showing the undulation of lines and the change of light and shadow.
- b) Mobile interaction design enables viewers to deeply understand the mystery of spatial composition in the process of sliding and touching.
- c) Digital installation art effectively stimulates the visual association and emotional experience of viewers by simulating the transition, fusion and conflict of colors.

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Research on Innovative Application Path of Sustainable Materials in Contemporary Jewelry Design

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Abstract

Taking sustainable development as the constraint and motivation, this paper mainly discusses the performance characteristics, advantages and limitations of recycled metal, natural materials and waste materials in jewelry design, and takes international brands (Cartier and Chopin) and domestic practices (bamboo and wood, broken porcelain and comprehensive recycling) as samples to sort out the systematic strategy of material-technology-design-market. The research shows that sustainable materials not only significantly reduce the environmental load, expand the aesthetic vocabulary of contemporary jewelry, but also enhance brand value and social recognition through supply chain governance and narrative construction; However, its large-scale promotion is still limited by processing technology, consumer mentality and industry standards. Some strategies are put forward, such as process integration of new materials and old technologies/old materials and new technologies, green design language and traceability logo system, and closed-loop mechanism of brand education and recycling for Z generation, which provide executable reference for the green transformation of the jewelry industry.

Keywords: sustainable materials, jewelry design, recycled metal, natural materials, waste materials, path

1. Introduction

Contemporary jewelry design is deeply influenced by the idea of sustainable development. For a long time, jewelry industry has been accompanied by resource development and ecological destruction. From the threat of precious metals and precious stones mining to soil, water and biodiversity, to the ethical disputes caused by conflict minerals, the industry is forced to reflect on materials and production methods. Sustainable design requires reducing environmental burden in material selection, manufacturing process and life cycle management, and pursuing the unity of social responsibility and cultural value. In recent years, jewelry brands and independent designers are actively seeking for changes in the material dimension: recycling precious metals instead of new mining, using fast-regenerated bamboo and biodegradable organisms as the structure or surface language, and then manufacturing waste glass and plastics to obtain new textures, which have become three main paths of green substitution. Academic research also puts circular economy, material regeneration and local process revitalization into the same context, emphasizing the value conversion and aesthetic renewal of waste to regeneration, but it is different from plane fashion and furniture products. The systematic review of sustainable materials in this field is not enough, especially in the linkage mechanism of performance, technology and market. Based on this, this paper puts forward the analysis framework of material type-typical case-application path, hoping to provide an executable reference for teaching, creation and brand transformation.

2. Types and Design Features of Sustainable Materials

2.1 Recycled Metals

After refining, the physical and chemical properties of recovered gold, silver and platinum are equivalent to those of primary metals, and they can be recycled many times without degradation. Whether it is high-end texture or environmental protection, it is a priority. Its design advantages are: firstly, the energy consumption and carbon emissions in mining and smelting are significantly reduced (Chen, C., Zhang, W., Song, J., et al., 2025); Secondly, it is highly compatible with traditional metal processing technology, and the process of casting, forging, welding and inlaying do not need major changes; Thirdly, it is easy to build a business narrative of closed-loop recycling, and introduce new products by recycling old ornaments and electronic waste. (Chen, Y., 2025) From the limitations, the stable supply of recycled metals depends on a perfect recycling network and certification system, and there is still a psychological prejudice of recycling = low value at the consumer end, which needs to be solved step by step through quality inspection, source disclosure and brand education.

2.2 Natural Materials (Bamboo, Shells, Horns, etc.)

Bamboo and wood have a short growth period, low density and visible texture, and are natural carriers of light ecological image. Shell and mother-of-pearl have unique iridescence and cultural symbols, and it is easy to establish the advantages of touch and light perception in a small range (Gong, M., 2024). Its design value is embodied in three points: the source of low carbon and its ability to renew, natural vocabulary that conforms to the oriental aesthetics, and timeliness narrative that can be constructed through imperfect texture. The limitations are mainly the lack of durability and stability (fear of moisture, easy to crack, low hardness), large batch differences, difficult to standardize, and insufficient reliability of structures connected with metals (Jiang, A., 2023). Common technical strategies include: surface painting (varnish/bio-resin) to improve weather resistance; metal skeleton + wrapping/inlaying force transmission; Resin infiltration and the combination of micro tenon or rivet improves the connection strength; And 3D printing and CNC micromachining are used to compensate for the accuracy and consistency.

2.3 Waste Materials (Re-Manufactured Glass/Ceramic Fragments, Recycled Plastics, Electronic Waste Parts, etc.)

This path is centered on the reverse quality of degradable materials, and it is endowed with new forms and values through cleaning, sorting, harmless treatment and reprocessing. The advantages of the design lie in minimizing waste, low cost and unique random texture forming visual recognition; At the same time, the material narrative of past life-present life can strengthen the expression of the wearer's value. The challenge lie in the scattered material sources and different specifications, potential safety risks (sharp edges, volatility), and the complexity of processing and standards. The corresponding technical strategies include chamfering and polishing ceramic/glass fragments, and using cold inlay/coating to ensure stress safety (Lei, L., 2024). Encapsulation (transparent resin, micro-cavity) between the circuit board and metal chips to achieve skin isolation; Hot-pressing lamination or in-mold coloring is used for recycled plastics to obtain stable color and strength.

3. The Typical Case: From International Brand to Local Practice

3.1 Cartier (Cartier)

Cartier takes the lead in responding to the Responsibility Jewelry Committee (RJC) certification system in the international jewelry market to ensure that gold and diamond are purchased in compliance with ethical and environmental standards. In recent years, Cartier has increased the proportion of recyclable materials in its product line, which has promoted the transparency of the supply chain and reduced the environmental burden through a strict supplier audit mechanism. At the same time, Cartier actively participated in the global sustainable fashion and luxury summit, promoted the concept of sustainable development to brand strategy, and emphasized the value orientation of responsible luxury goods.

3.2 Chopard

In 2018, Chopard announced the full use of fair mining gold and became a pioneer in the field of high-end jewelry. On the international stage, such as the Cannes Film Festival, Chopard's Green Carpet Series jewelry focuses on responsible mining of metals and sustainable gems, which has strengthened the public's awareness of sustainable luxury goods. This dual orientation of high-end + environmental protection not only enhances the brand influence, but also provides a demonstration role for the industry's sustainable development.

3.3 China Designer's Re-Invention of Local Materials

First of all, light jewelry is woven from bamboo. Through the process of cooking and pest control-drying and setting-worsted-metal wrapping, the structure of bamboo jewelry is stable; At the same time, with the help of material languages such as knot, pattern and toughness, visual images with oriental aesthetic implications are presented. This kind of jewelry not only highlights the technological advantages of natural materials, but also

conveys the tenacity and poetry of oriental traditions at a cultural level (Nie, R., & Ceng, J., 2023).



Figure 1. Bamboo brooch

Contemporary expression of broken porcelain mosaic. The historical fragments such as Song porcelain are chamfered and polished, and then designed with metal brackets to highlight the aesthetic concept and cultural continuity of incomplete beauty. In this way, the fragments originally in the archaeological or collection context are put back into the daily wearing scene, and the dialogue between traditional remains and modern life is realized.



Figure 2. Broken porcelain ring

The idea of comprehensive recycling of ornaments. Using recycled materials such as waste circuit boards, aluminum tabs, and ocean drifting plastics as media, through packaging or geometric cutting, ornaments with strong identification and environmental protection declaration are created. Some works have entered the niche consumption channel, which shows the effective transformation path of concept-product and further demonstrates the experimental and practical value of sustainable design in the jewelry field (Qiu, C., 2024).



Figure 3. Composite material ornaments

4. Application Path of Innovation: Three-Dimensional Coupling of Technology, Design and Market

4.1 Process Path: *New Materials and Old Technologies and Old Materials and New Technologies*

Compatibility and substitution. For recycled metals, the traditional metalworking process can be directly used to realize smooth transition. In the application of natural and waste materials, a new process combination needs to be formed in each link of surface treatment-structural construction-connection mode-protection measures to ensure function and beauty.

Cross-domain empowerment can effectively solve the problems of micro-scale precision and assembly consistency by juxtaposing emerging technologies such as micro-CNC, laser cutting, ultrasonic welding, and 3D printing (FDM/ photo-curing) with traditional metal processing. At the same time, the durability and tactile safety of the product are improved with the help of bio-based resin and degradable coating.

Standards and testing: For ornaments that are in direct contact with skin, standards for material safety and durability (such as migration, volatile organic compounds, sweat corrosion, coating adhesion, etc.) should be established, and a standardized operating procedure (SOP) suitable for studios and small brands should be formed to reduce the risks caused by hand-made differences.

4.2 Design Path: *Green Language and Narrative Strategy*

The materialization of the natural color of materials emphasizes the ring texture of bamboo and wood, the iridescent luster of shells, and the layering of recycled plastics. Let the material itself become the visual focus, avoiding the continuation of the old paradigm of covering up new materials with precious metals (You, M., & Zhang, X., 2020).

Imperfect aesthetics accepts cracks, impurities and flaws, and highlights them by means of wrapping, ventilation and contrast, showing timeliness and circulation; In the narration of series design, the complete chain of source-treatment-regeneration is clearly displayed.

Heterogeneous coexistence produces tension through the opposition between soft and hard, bright and dumb and regular and random, such as mirror silver and ground glass, flexible fiber and rigid metal. It constitutes the dialectical structure of physical attributes of contemporary jewelry (Yuan, T., 2023).

Maintainable and replaceable, the spare parts are reserved in the positions of connectors, fasteners and inserts, which makes it easier to maintain and upgrade the parts, thus prolonging the product life and forming a closed loop with the trade-in and core recycling plan.

4.3 Market Path: *From Cognition to Brand Equity*

Credible endorsement, establishment of material source description and third-party certification (such as recycled content, forest and metal liability standards), and recording material-process-batch-recycling channel through QR code or NFC system, enhancing transparency and trust.

Visual-ethical double-line communication shows the precursor, the recycling process and the finished product wearing video images side by side, which not only conveys aesthetic value, but also provides empirical support, reducing consumers' doubts about green washing.

Subdivide people and price band, and adopt the three-level structure of light experimental mode-main series-limited narrative mode to meet different consumption needs from curiosity to identity expression; At the

same time, the core series is guaranteed to have advantages in cost and reproducibility.

Channels and education, through art exhibitions, design weeks and college courses to build an experience platform, let young people experience the whole process of watching-touching-making; On-line short video is used to record the regeneration journey of a piece of jewelry, and offline through recyclable packaging and setting up recycling points, the closed-loop connection between consumption and circulation is realized.

5. Key Points of Implementation and Risk Control

5.1 Material Selection Matrix

This study takes environmental performance (carbon emissions, water footprint, toxic effects), safety (skin contact friendliness), processing feasibility (hardness, toughness, thermal sensitivity), brand narrative potential (cultural significance and uniqueness) as the evaluation dimension, and constructs a material selection matrix. Recycled metal and recycled glass are divided into stable production areas, which are suitable for mass production; Bamboo and mother-of-pearl are located in the characteristic expression area because of their strong cultural and visual features; E-waste and mixed plastics are classified as conceptual pioneer area, emphasizing experimental and critical expression. Different types of materials should have different configurations in terms of output, pricing and communication strategies (Zou, Y., Zhang, Z., Yu, Z., & Ren, K., 2020).

5.2 Structure and Connection Details

In terms of structural design, for natural materials and broken materials, the embedding technology of surface support point constraint should be adopted to avoid brittle materials from bearing concentrated loads. Inert metals (such as stainless steel, titanium or silver) or medical-grade coating materials are preferably in direct contact with the skin, so as to ensure wearing safety. For the components encapsulated by resin, the thickness and demoulding stress should be controlled reasonably to reduce the risk of cracking in long-term use.

5.3 Durability and Maintenance

In the product description, the temperature and humidity conditions and the daily cleaning methods need to be clear. At the same time, establish regular update and local replacement mechanism; For replaceable components, a separate sales catalog is provided to encourage consumers to maintain and re-create, thus extending the life cycle of products.

5.4 Regulations and Compliance

In compliance with laws and regulations, we should pay attention to safety limits of nickel release, lead and cadmium content, phthalate esters, volatile organic compounds (VOC) and establish a batch sampling system. For the use of historical fragments (such as ancient porcelain pieces), it is necessary to ensure that they are obtained in accordance with the regulations and attached with legal circulation documents to avoid disputes involving the attributes of cultural relics.

6. Conclusion

Sustainable materials provide contemporary jewelry with double opportunities: on the one hand, the aesthetic and narrative space of materials has been significantly expanded through the non-inductive substitution of recycled metals, the natural vocabulary of bamboo and shells and the unique texture presented by waste re-manufacturing; On the other hand, in the brand dimension, the practice centered on traceable supply chain and public education is pushing sustainable development from moral added value to competitive core. To make it truly move from concept to normality, we need to grasp three keys: First, through the process integration of new materials and old technologies and old materials and new technologies, the threshold for transformation is lowered, supplemented by standardized processes and inspection systems; Secondly, in terms of design language, it highlights the true color and imperfect aesthetics of materials, and embeds maintainability and replaceable mechanism in the front-end link; Thirdly, with the help of data and video to present the past life-present life of the material, combined with authentication and recycling mechanism, the transformation from cognition to practice is completed. Looking forward to the future, with the maturity of cultivating gems, bio-based composites and low-energy manufacturing, as well as the application of block-chain and Internet of Things in material traceability, sustainable jewelry will gradually move from small-scale experiment to large-scale practice. By then, the value of materials will not only be determined by scarcity and appearance, but also by ecological responsibility, cultural narrative and scientific and technological wisdom; As a close-fitting micro-architecture, jewelry will continue to participate in the daily dialogue between beauty and ethics with a lighter environmental footprint and a longer service life.

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Project Management for Sustainable Development: Strategies for Achieving SDG 11 in Urban Planning Projects in Cameroon

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Abstract

This study explores how project management practices contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) which aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable within the context of urban development projects in Cameroon. Focusing on the cities of Yaoundé and Douala, the research employs a qualitative design supported by structured questionnaires to assess stakeholder knowledge, perceptions, and barriers to SDG 11 implementation. Data were collected from 30 key informants, three urban development case study projects, and 120 survey respondents from municipal councils and private engineering firms. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies) and presented in tabular form. Demographic findings reveal that 75.7% of respondents were male, and 50% had between 5–10 years of professional experience reflecting a relatively experienced but male-dominated urban planning workforce. Results show that while practices such as stakeholder engagement and sustainability integration are increasingly applied, major barriers including funding constraints, weak policy enforcement, and technical capacity gaps persist. The study concludes that despite growing awareness of sustainability principles, institutional weaknesses continue to hinder effective implementation. It recommends enhanced capacity-building, improved governance, and stronger stakeholder collaboration to align urban development efforts with SDG 11 targets.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goal 11, project management, urban development, Cameroon

1. Introduction

Cameroon is undergoing a profound urban transformation, driven by rapid population growth, internal migration, and the increasing concentration of economic activities in cities such as Yaoundé, Douala, and Bafoussam (World Bank, 2020; Beckline et al., 2018). As of 2018, over 55% of Cameroon’s population resided in urban areas a proportion projected to reach 65% by 2035 due to sustained rural-to-urban migration and natural growth (UN DESA, 2019; Beckline et al., 2018). This rapid urbanization presents both opportunities and challenges. While it can catalyse economic development, innovation, and improved service delivery (Tacoli, 2017; Angel et al., 2016), Cameroon’s urban growth is largely unregulated and uneven, posing significant risks to sustainable

development (UN-Habitat, 2020).

Urban expansion in Cameroon has far outpaced infrastructure development, exacerbating critical issues such as housing shortages, traffic congestion, environmental degradation, and widening socio-economic inequalities (Grant, 2015; Haou et al., 2025; UNDP, 2018). For example, informal settlements constitute over 60% of urban housing in cities like Douala and Yaoundé, characterized by inadequate access to clean water, sanitation, and formal employment (Ndonko et al., 2021; UN-Habitat, 2019). The fragmentation of urban planning systems, weak institutional coordination, and limited stakeholder participation further undermine the efficacy of development interventions (Cameroon Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, 2019; Haou et al., 2025). Consequently, many urban areas struggle with inefficient public services, environmental pollution, and vulnerability to climate risks, undermining the quality of urban life (Ndam et al., 2023; World Bank, 2022).

In response to such global urban challenges, the United Nations established Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable” by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). However, translating these global ambitions into effective local action remains a major hurdle, particularly in developing countries like Cameroon where urban governance structures are often under-resourced, reactive, and poorly integrated (UN-Habitat, 2020; Ombwayo et al., 2025). The governance deficits manifest in weak enforcement of urban policies and low community engagement, limiting the achievement of SDG 11 targets (Grant, 2015; Ombwayo et al., 2025).

Existing urban development projects across Sub-Saharan Africa frequently underperform due to inadequate project design, governance weaknesses, and a lack of alignment with sustainability principles (Ombwayo et al., 2025; Mbah Enjei & Chi Valery, 2025). Despite growing acknowledgment of project management’s potential to improve development outcomes (Silvius & Schipper, 2014; Opoku et al., 2024), limited research examines its role in operationalizing SDG 11 within the Cameroonian urban context. This study addresses this gap by exploring how project management for sustainable development (PM4SD) can function as a strategic mechanism for embedding sustainability into urban planning and project delivery.

Specifically, the research investigates the competencies, governance frameworks, and tools project managers require to become agents of sustainable urban transformation. It also critically examines institutional and socio-political barriers hindering the adoption of PM4SD and identifies enabling factors that facilitate effective implementation.

This inquiry is guided by three key research questions. First, it seeks to identify which project management practices effectively promote the achievement of SDG 11 in Cameroon. Second, it explores how these practices can be integrated into urban planning and implementation processes to enhance sustainability outcomes. Third, the study investigates the major barriers and enabling conditions that influence the adoption of sustainable project management approaches within Cameroon’s urban development landscape. By drawing on case studies, policy analysis, and expert interviews, this study provides empirical insights and actionable recommendations for urban development actors in Cameroon. It aims to bridge the persistent gap between ambitious planning frameworks and implementation realities, contributing to a more strategic, inclusive, and sustainable approach to urban development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Theoretical Review: Sustainable Development Theory

Sustainable Development Theory, rooted in the seminal Brundtland Report (1987), has profoundly shaped the discourse on development by framing it as a process that meets present needs without compromising future generations’ ability to meet theirs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This theory’s core strength lies in its holistic integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions, offering a balanced framework essential for urban planning and sustainability (Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien, 2005; Lele, 1991). In the context of SDG 11, Sustainable Development Theory provides an indispensable normative foundation emphasizing inclusivity, resilience, and environmental stewardship (United Nations, 2015; Pelling, 2011).

However, critiques of the theory highlight its broad, sometimes ambiguous scope, which can challenge operationalization, especially in complex, resource-constrained contexts such as Cameroon (Robinson, 2004; Gibson, 2006). Its aspirational nature often lacks clear mechanisms for practical implementation or conflict resolution between competing development priorities—such as rapid urban growth versus environmental protection (Sachs, 2015; Redclift, 2005). This gap underscores the need for complementary frameworks that address governance structures and stakeholder dynamics to translate sustainability goals into actionable project management practices (Kates et al., 2005).

Comparatively, Sustainable Development Theory establishes the “what” and “why” of urban sustainability but less often addresses the “how,” leaving a critical space for theories like Project Governance and Stakeholder Theory to fill (Silvius & Schipper, 2014; Freeman, 1984). The interdependence of these theories is evident:

while Sustainable Development Theory defines the objectives, Project Governance Theory guides organizational processes and accountability (Müller, 2009), and Stakeholder Theory emphasizes inclusive engagement necessary for legitimacy and effectiveness (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997).

In Cameroon's urban planning landscape, Sustainable Development Theory's multi-dimensional focus is particularly relevant given the intersecting challenges of informal settlements, environmental degradation, and socio-economic disparities (Beckline et al., 2018; Haou et al., 2025). Its emphasis on long-term, integrated solutions advocates moving beyond short-term infrastructure projects toward systemic change that embeds equity and sustainability at all stages (Ofori, 2023; Valencia et al., 2019).

In summary, Sustainable Development Theory provides a vital but broad conceptual lens that requires critical augmentation with governance and stakeholder perspectives to effectively inform project management approaches aimed at achieving SDG 11 in Cameroon. This layered theoretical approach enables a comprehensive understanding of both the goals and the practical pathways to sustainable urban development (Opoku et al., 2024; Ombwayo et al., 2025).

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate how project management practices contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) in urban development projects in Cameroon. The qualitative approach was chosen to enable a deeper understanding of the context-specific experiences, practices, and institutional dynamics that shape the planning and implementation of sustainable urban initiatives. The research focused on two major urban centers Yaoundé and Douala which represent critical sites for examining sustainable urban transformation due to their rapid population growth, infrastructure demands, and governance challenges.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who possess direct experience and technical knowledge in urban planning, project execution, and sustainability. The sample included 30 key informants comprising urban planners, municipal officers, and project managers from both the public and private sectors. To ground the study in practical realities, three urban development projects were selected as case studies. These included the Yaoundé City Sanitation Project (*Projet de Construction des Aménagements de Yaoundé - PCAY Phase II*), which focuses on flood control and drainage infrastructure; the Douala Urban Mobility Project (*Projet de Mobilité Urbaine de Douala - PMUD*), aimed at improving urban transportation and road safety; and the Low-Cost Housing Development Project at Mbanga-Bakoko, which addresses affordable housing and spatial planning in Douala.

In addition to the interviews and case studies, a structured questionnaire was administered to 120 respondents drawn from municipal councils and private engineering or consulting firms such as Groupe BETRA, HYDROCONSEIL Cameroon, and B.E.T. INGÉNIEURS CONSEILS. The questionnaire was designed to quantitatively assess stakeholders' knowledge, perceptions, and the perceived barriers to SDG 11 implementation. It served to complement the qualitative data by identifying patterns and trends across a broader sample.

Data from interviews and case studies were analysed thematically, using frameworks such as the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) and the Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) to guide coding and interpretation. These frameworks helped to categorize data into key themes related to project planning, execution, sustainability integration, and stakeholder coordination. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to measure levels of awareness, attitudes, and constraints. This analytical approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both the qualitative nuances and quantifiable patterns in project management practices relevant to SDG 11.

3.1 Evaluation Framework

A comparative evaluation technique was applied to triangulate findings across the three methods, enhancing the reliability and validity of results. The integration of the PMBOK framework and SDG 11 indicators provided a systematic lens for evaluating whether sustainability principles were embedded at each stage of the project lifecycle from initiation to closure. PMBOK Process Groups provide a structured approach to managing projects across five key stages: Initiating, Planning, Executing, Monitoring and Controlling, and Closing. SDG 11 Indicators focus on sustainable urban development aspects such as affordable housing, transport, resilience, and green infrastructure. Sustainability Practices evaluate how project management practices integrate SDG 11 principles during each project phase. Application in Project Lifecycle highlights how the integration of sustainability practices at each stage of the project helps ensure alignment with SDG 11 goals.

Table 1. Integration of PMBOK Framework and SDG 11 Indicators

PMBOK Process Group	SDG 11 Indicators	Sustainability Evaluated	Practices Application in Project Lifecycle
Initiating	Affordable Housing, Stakeholder Participatory Planning	SDG 11	engagement, Ensuring stakeholder inclusivity and project goals alignment with alignment of project goals with SDG 11 targets during project initiation.
Planning	Sustainable Transport, Housing, planning, Resilience	Risk management, resource Planning for risk mitigation, sustainable environmental infrastructure, and disaster resilience sustainability	
Executing	Green Infrastructure, Disaster Resilience	Implementation of Ensuring sustainable infrastructure, minimization through green infrastructure climate adaptation measures and climate-responsive designs.	
Monitoring and Controlling	Climate Action, Resilient Cities	Monitoring of sustainability indicators, performance measuring sustainability through key tracking, corrective actions	Tracking project alignment with SDG 11, performance indicators (KPIs).
Closing	Affordable Housing, Disaster Resilience	Closing out projects with Final assessment of project sustainability, sustainability considerations, with feedback for future projects and long-term impact evaluation	post-implementation evaluation.

Source: Author construct, 2025.

4. Results and Discussion

The results are presented in two tables. Table 2 provides demographic information about the respondents, revealing a predominantly male and experienced workforce drawn from both public and private sectors in major urban centres. Table 3 builds on this by illustrating respondents' knowledge, perceptions, and barriers related to the implementation of SDG 11. While most participants demonstrate a solid understanding of the goal and recognize its importance, they also highlight key challenges, including funding shortages, limited technical capacity, and weak policy enforcement. Together, these tables offer a clear picture of the professional background and views that influence sustainable urban development initiatives in Cameroon.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	75.6
	Female	38	24.4
Professional Role	Urban Planners	40	25.6
	Municipal Officers	50	32.1
	Project Managers	66	42.3
Experience (years)	< 5 years	26	16.7
	5-10 years	78	50.0
	11-20 years	31	19.9
	> 20 years	21	13.5
Organization Type	Municipal Council	73	46.8
	Private Engineering/Consulting Firms	83	53.2
Location	Yaoundé	67	43.0
	Douala	89	57.0

Primary data: Author, Field Survey, 2025.

The demographic profile of the study sample, as detailed in Table 1, offers valuable insights into the composition of stakeholders involved in urban development and project management related to SDG 11 in Cameroon. The sample is predominantly male (75.6%), reflecting the traditionally male-dominated nature of urban planning and project management professions in the region. Although female representation is lower (24.4%), their presence signals some progress toward gender inclusivity, underscoring the need to further promote diverse perspectives for equitable participation in sustainable urban development. Respondents are distributed across key professional roles—project managers (42.3%), municipal officers (32.1%), and urban planners (25.6%)—capturing a comprehensive range of expertise essential for holistic project implementation. The strong presence of project managers highlights their critical role in driving project execution and decision-making in urban sustainability initiatives. Experience levels show a concentration (50%) of professionals with 5 to 10 years of experience, indicating a workforce with considerable practical exposure while remaining open to learning and adaptation. The mix of early-career (<5 years) and senior professionals (>20 years) enriches project outcomes by combining fresh ideas with seasoned insights. Organizationally, the sample is almost evenly split between municipal councils (46.8%) and private engineering or consulting firms (53.2%), reflecting vital collaboration between the public and private sectors needed to integrate technical expertise with governance frameworks. Geographically, a greater proportion of respondents are based in Douala (57%) compared to Yaoundé (43%), aligning with Douala's role as Cameroon's economic hub experiencing intense urbanization pressures. The inclusion of perspectives from both cities allows for comparative analysis of urban sustainability challenges and opportunities. Overall, the demographic characteristics suggest a knowledgeable, experienced, and diverse group of stakeholders whose insights provide a solid foundation for analysing project management practices and challenges in achieving SDG 11 in Cameroon.

Table 3. Project Management Practices, Integration, and Barriers

Category	Item/Aspect	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Project Management Practices Promoting SDG 11	Structured planning and scheduling	110	70.5
	Stakeholder engagement	120	77.0
	Risk management	95	61.0
	Performance monitoring and evaluation	100	64.0
Integration into Urban Planning and Implementation	Cross-sector collaboration	105	67.0
	Adaptive project management frameworks	90	58.0
	Capacity-building programs	95	61.0
	Inclusion of sustainability criteria in planning	115	74.0
Barriers and Enabling Conditions	Funding constraints	102	65.0
	Inadequate technical capacity	80	51.0
	Weak policy enforcement	70	45.0
	Positive stakeholder attitudes	115	74.0

Primary data: Author, Field Survey, 2025.

4.2 Project Management Practices Promoting SDG 11

The results indicate that several core project management practices are actively employed to promote the achievement of SDG 11 within Cameroon's urban development projects. Stakeholder engagement stands out as the most frequently adopted practice (77%), reflecting an increasing recognition of the importance of inclusive participation in project success. Engaging diverse stakeholders not only fosters transparency and accountability but also enhances project relevance and acceptance, which are crucial in complex urban contexts. Additionally, the high prevalence of structured planning and scheduling (70.5%) and performance monitoring and evaluation (64%) suggests that practitioners appreciate the need for systematic project control mechanisms to ensure timely delivery and quality outcomes aligned with sustainability goals. However, the somewhat lower adoption of risk

management (61%) signals a potential gap in proactive identification and mitigation of uncertainties that could threaten project success. Given the volatile urban environment, strengthening risk management frameworks could improve resilience and adaptability in urban projects, thereby better supporting SDG 11.

4.3 Integration into Urban Planning and Implementation

The integration of project management practices into broader urban planning and implementation frameworks shows encouraging but uneven trends. The substantial uptake of cross-sector collaboration (67%) highlights a growing awareness of the need for inter-agency and multi-sector partnerships to address urban sustainability challenges, which are inherently cross-cutting and multidimensional. Similarly, the reported use of capacity-building programs (61%) reflects ongoing efforts to enhance technical competencies necessary for sustainable project execution. The relatively high inclusion of sustainability criteria in planning (74%) demonstrates that environmental and social considerations are increasingly being embedded in project frameworks, aligning with the objectives of SDG 11. Conversely, the moderate application of adaptive project management frameworks (58%) indicates room for improvement in institutional flexibility and responsiveness. Adaptive approaches are critical in dynamic urban environments characterized by rapid change and uncertainty, suggesting a need for reforms that encourage more iterative and responsive project management processes.

4.4 Barriers and Enabling Conditions

Despite positive trends, the findings reveal persistent barriers that constrain the effective adoption of sustainable project management practices. Funding constraints (65%) emerge as the most significant hurdle, underscoring the chronic resource limitations faced by urban projects in Cameroon. Without adequate financial support, even well-designed projects struggle to deliver intended sustainability outcomes. Furthermore, inadequate technical capacity (51%) signals critical gaps in skills and expertise that undermine project quality and innovation. This points to the necessity of targeted capacity-building interventions that equip project teams with the competencies to implement sustainability-driven methodologies effectively. The reported weak policy enforcement (45%) reflects institutional weaknesses and governance challenges that diminish the impact of urban development initiatives. Such enforcement deficits often result in fragmented implementation and diminished accountability. Encouragingly, positive stakeholder attitudes (74%) toward sustainability indicate a conducive social environment for reform, suggesting that overcoming structural and resource-related barriers could unleash greater commitment and performance in SDG 11-aligned projects. To harness this potential, coordinated efforts are required to strengthen governance, improve financing mechanisms, and invest in human capital development.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights that the urban development sector in Cameroon is composed of a predominantly male and experienced workforce, with key roles distributed among project managers, municipal officers, and urban planners. The mix of public and private sector actors, primarily based in Douala and Yaoundé, provides a diverse and knowledgeable foundation for advancing sustainable urban development. The findings further reveal that essential project management practices—such as stakeholder engagement, structured planning, and incorporation of sustainability criteria—are widely recognized and applied, supporting the achievement of SDG 11 objectives. However, despite this encouraging base of knowledge and positive perceptions, significant barriers persist. Funding constraints, inadequate technical capacity, and weak policy enforcement remain critical challenges that limit the effective integration of sustainable project management approaches into urban planning and implementation processes. The disparity in optimism and capacity between public and private actors underscores the need for enhanced collaboration and resource mobilization. Overall, while Cameroon's urban development stakeholders demonstrate readiness and commitment to sustainable practices, overcoming institutional and financial obstacles is vital. Strengthening capacity-building initiatives, improving governance frameworks, and fostering stronger public-private partnerships will be essential to fully realize the vision of sustainable, resilient cities embodied in SDG 11.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, its geographic scope is limited to selected urban areas in Cameroon, which may not fully represent the diverse urban planning challenges encountered across the entire country. Second, the inability to access all relevant stakeholders may have constrained the diversity of perspectives captured in the findings. Finally, the study presumes a relatively direct relationship between project management practices and the achievement of SDG 11, without fully accounting for the complex political, institutional, and implementation dynamics that can affect policy effectiveness in real-world settings.

Disclaimer (Artificial Intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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Subjectivity and Pragmatic Strategies in Elderly Rights-Protection Discourse

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Abstract

Taking elderly rights-protection discourse on online platforms, this study examines its subjectivity and pragmatic strategies from the perspectives of pragmatics and discourse analysis. The findings reveal that the connotations of the subjectivity in elderly rights-protection discourse are mainly manifested in emotional appeals, attitude expressions and cognitive judgments. These are presented and encoded through pragmatic strategies at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels, including lexical strategies such as negative vocabulary, concrete vocabulary, and vague vocabulary, syntactic strategies such as mood and discourse markers, and textual strategies like hardship narratives. The research uncovers the underlying subjective tendency and pragmatic patterns in elderly rights discourse, providing valuable references for the studies of aging discourse and discourse analysis and contributing to a deeper pragmatic understanding of the subjectivity embedded in elderly rights protection discourse.

Keywords: elderly rights-protection discourse, subjectivity, discourse subjectivity, pragmatic strategies, rights defending, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the accelerating aging process in Chinese society, the protection of the rights and interests of the elderly has become an important issue. Academia has also begun to pay attention to the discourse through which the elderly express their demands and safeguard their rights, i.e., elderly rights-protection discourse, including its linguistic features and pragmatic functions. Huang and Jiao (2022) conducted a macro-analysis of the discourse characteristics and social rights defense behaviors of the elderly and suggested directions for future research (Huang & Jiao, 2022). However, systematic exploration of the encoding of subjectivity within rights-protection discourse and its pragmatic mechanisms remains relatively scarce.

In elderly rights-protection discourse, the emotional appeals, value judgments, and interactive strategies employed by the elderly when their rights are infringed upon carry a distinct subjective coloring, i.e., subjectivity. Discourse subjectivity is the self-orientation conveyed by language users in discourse, encompassing their stance, attitude, and emotions (Shen, 2001). The subjectivity in elderly rights-protection discourse not only reflects the subjective intentions of the rights defenders but is also closely related to social pragmatics. Peng and Zhang (2023) pointed out that strategies such as public condemnation and face maintenance can realize the functions of elderly rights-defense constructions (Peng & Zhang, 2023). However, existing research on the subjectivity in elderly rights-protection discourse is insufficient, and a systematic analysis of its pragmatic strategies is lacking.

This paper selects elderly rights-protection discourse as the research object, integrates relevant theoretical frameworks such as subjectivity and discourse analysis, and focuses on two core questions: (1) What are the

main manifestations of subjectivity in elderly rights-protection discourse? (2) What pragmatic strategies are employed in expressing this subjectivity?

2. Theoretical Foundation

Discourse subjectivity refers to the speaker's/writer's subjective attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints expressed in discourse, which can be presented through means such as lexical choice, syntactic structures, and textual organization. Discourse subjectivity is one of the important drivers of language evolution (Traugott, 1989); subjectivity involves the speaker's cognition and evaluation of reality (Langacker, 1990); discourse subjectivity is realized through the adaptive mechanisms of language, reflecting the speaker's choices and adjustments in specific contexts (Verschueren, 1999); Zhao (2022) established a hierarchical system model for discourse subjectivity, containing four levels: positioning, stance, attitude, and emotion (Zhao, 2022). However, existing research mostly focuses on theoretical discussions, lacking studies on the subjectivity in the discourse of specific social groups such as the elderly. Research on elderly rights-protection discourse presents an interdisciplinary trend. The field of sociology often focuses on the structural motivations of rights-defense actions (Liu 2010); legal studies emphasize the interaction between rights-protection discourse and legal procedures (Chang & Yu, 2018); while linguistic perspectives mostly analyze the rhetorical features and pragmatic functions of discourse.

In summary, existing research on discourse subjectivity provides an important theoretical framework for this study, and research on elderly rights-protection discourse offers perspectives for analyzing its discourse practices. However, existing studies seldom focus on the subjectivity behind elderly rights-protection discourse, and research on discourse subjectivity is mostly from a cognitive perspective, lacking related studies from a pragmatic viewpoint. Given that elderly rights-protection discourse on online platforms is more public and accessible, this paper takes online elderly rights-protection discourse as its research object to examine its subjectivity and pragmatic strategies. It aims to reveal the subjective intentions—such as appeals, emotions, attitudes, and viewpoints—encoded by the elderly in rights-defense events, and their pragmatic realization strategies at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels, thereby providing a research perspective for the analysis of elderly rights-protection discourse and offering some linguistic references for social governance and the protection of elderly rights.

3. Corpus Definition and Sources

Elderly rights-protection discourse refers to the discourse used by natural persons aged 60 and above through channels such as offline and online platforms in the process of safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests. Accordingly, we searched on online platforms like Douyin (TikTok), Tencent Video, and Bilibili using keywords such as “老” (old), “老人” (old person), “老伯” (old uncle), “老汉” (old man), and “阿婆” (grandma). We manually extracted videos related to elderly rights protection and transcribed them into text to serve as the research corpus.

4. The Connotations of Subjectivity in Elderly Rights-Protection Discourse

We found that the connotations of subjectivity in elderly rights-protection discourse are mainly manifested in three dimensions: emotional appeals, attitude expression, and cognitive judgment. Their core function is to strengthen the legitimacy and urgency of rights-protection appeals through linguistic expression, thereby influencing the emotional identification and value judgment of the audience/listeners and better seeking external help, etc. The elderly use specific linguistic forms to transform personal subjective experiences into the social mobilizing force of rights-defense actions, forming rights-protection discourse with characteristics of elderly discourse. Below, we will explore these three types of subjective connotations separately.

4.1 Emotional Appeals

Emotional appeal is one of the most prominent connotations of subjectivity in elderly rights-protection discourse. Since the elderly are often in a socially vulnerable position, their rights-protection discourse commonly employs expressions such as grievance, complaint, and lamentation, aiming to arouse sympathy and empathy from the audience/listeners to enhance the discourse's impact. For example:

(1) 有罪人黑保护逍遥法外，无罪人被判刑 15 年，家破人亡，告状无门，无奈在抖音上求助公平正义。(The guilty are at large under black protection, the innocent are sentenced to 15 years, with family ruined and lives lost, no avenue for appeal, helplessly seeking fairness and justice on Douyin.) (Douyin 2023-07-03)

(2) 希望广大网友和有关部门帮助我除恶务尽，深挖彻查，还我公道，我们全家跪谢！(I hope the broad netizens and relevant departments can help me eradicate the evil completely, investigate thoroughly, restore my justice, our whole family kneels in thanks!) (Bilibili 2022-06-12)

The emotional expressions in the above examples of elderly rights-protection discourse not only strengthen the identity of the elderly as victims but also, through impactful language, stimulate the audience's/listeners' sympathy and moral support, constructing a “moving through emotion” rights-defense strategy with a significant

tendency towards pathos. In these discourses, emotional appeal is not merely a natural outpouring of emotion, but a discursive act subjectively selected and organized by the rights defender, possessing clear subjective intentions and strategic purposes, such as garnering attention through tragic narratives and seeking public support.

4.2 Attitude Expression

Attitude expression is an important way for the elderly to reinforce their stance and value judgments in rights-protection discourse. Through direct or indirect attitudinal discourse, the elderly convey evaluations of events, establish moral boundaries between right and wrong, and construct a discursive schema opposing “legitimate demands” and “illegal actions.” For example:

(3) 看见这些东西我就想哭，睁开眼我都不想活着了……从开始到最后一共花了 96 万多。(Seeing these things makes me want to cry, I don't even want to live when I open my eyes... from start to finish, it cost over 960,000 yuan in total.) (Douyin 2021-12-09)

(4) 开发商指使多人持钢管狂殴将我四肢全部打断，隔日凌晨又烧毁我家汽车……我们全家跪谢！(The developer instructed multiple people to violently beat me with steel pipes, breaking all my limbs, and burned my family's car in the early morning of the next day... our whole family kneels in thanks!) (Kuaishou 2022-06-13)

The above examples exhibit obvious evaluative subjectivity, strengthening value judgments and moral positioning of events through emotionally charged language expressions. In Example (3), “想哭” (want to cry) and “不想活” (don't even want to live) are typical emotional attitude markers, conveying the rights defender's strong negative attitude towards the fraudulent behavior. The juxtaposition of emotional expression with economic data (“96 万多” over 960,000 yuan) creates a mutual reinforcement of facts and attitude. Example (4) vividly depicts the violent acts of the perpetrators through negative and violent verbs like “狂殴” (violently beat) and “烧毁” (burned), establishing the certainty of “evil.” Meanwhile, “跪谢” (kneel in thanks) presents the rights defender's helplessness and distress in a humble posture, further stimulating the audience's/listeners' emotional identification and narrowing the psychological distance between them.

4.3 Cognitive Judgment

Beyond emotion and attitude, the elderly also express their cognitive judgments about events through discourse, i.e., subjective judgments regarding the development of situations, behavioral motives, causal relationships, etc. Cognitive judgments are often realized through modal words, speculative sentences, logical connectors, etc., reflecting a degree of rational thinking and subjective judgment, possessing distinct subjective characteristics.

(5) 我叫 XXX, 今日实名举报 XX 区 XX 局退休职工 XXX, 举报事实为对本人进行合同诈骗, 时间之长、数额之大、手段之恶劣。(My name is XXX, today I am reporting in my real name XXX, a retired employee of the XX District XX Bureau, for contract fraud against me, with its long duration, large amount, and despicable methods.) (Anonymized here and below) (Douyin 2023-02-09)

(6) 我叫 XXX, 家住 XX 市 XX 区。我实名举报 XXX 医院谋财害命, 有组织有预谋的针对老年患者实施了惨无人道、灭绝人性的犯罪。(My name is XXX, living in XX District, XX City. I am reporting in my real name XXX Hospital for murder for profit, committing cruel, inhuman, and genocidal crimes against elderly patients in an organized and premeditated manner.) (Douyin 2023-4-7)

The above examples of elderly rights-protection discourse clearly demonstrate how rights defenders construct subjective cognitive judgments through language. In terms of sentence structure, the rights defenders use constructions like “我叫……” (My name is...) and “我叫…… (我) 实名举报……” (My name is... I am reporting in my real name...), establishing a clear first-person narrative perspective that reinforces their judgmental stance. In content organization, the rights defenders not only directly identify the perpetrators and their actions (e.g., “合同诈骗” contract fraud, “谋财害命” murder for profit) but also, through listing facts—such as “对本人进行合同诈骗……手段之恶劣” (contract fraud against me... with... despicable methods) in Example (5) and “谋财害命……灭绝人性的犯罪” (murder for profit... genocidal crimes) in Example (6)—transform event narration into a reasoning chain with subjective judgment coloring, thereby enhancing the persuasiveness and legitimacy of their rights-protection discourse.

5. Pragmatic Strategies of Subjectivity in Elderly Rights-Protection Discourse

The pragmatic strategies of subjectivity in elderly rights-protection discourse encompass lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. Rights defenders employ these strategies to express their dissatisfaction and accusations, transforming personal injustices into public issues to seek public understanding, support, identification, and legal attention.

5.1 Lexical Strategies

We found that the elderly in their rights-protection discourse tend to use negative vocabulary, concrete

vocabulary, vague vocabulary, etc., to present their specific subjective tendencies. Among these, negative vocabulary serves not only as a means of emotional expression but also as a crucial pragmatic strategy for conveying subjectivity and expressing stance in elderly rights-protection discourse.

(7) 办的手续都是中介和房管局工作人员办的, 杨某是买方, 办完手续以后, 张某得了 279911 元, 那这钱以后蹿了, 远走高飞不见了。(All the procedures were handled by the intermediary and housing authority staff. Yang was the buyer. After the procedures were completed, Zhang received 279,911 yuan. Then this money later scurried away, fled far and high, disappeared.) (Tencent Video 2018-08-15)

In Example (7), “蹿了” (scurried away) and “远走高飞” (fled far and high) carry clear negative connotations, implying the other party’s evasion of responsibility and malicious appropriation. This not only expresses the rights defender’s anger over the financial loss but also constructs an image of an ‘other’ who evades the law and betrays morality, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the rights defender.

The elderly also tend to use concrete vocabulary during the rights-defense process to vividly recount unjust events or experiences, express their appeals, and reinforce the pain caused by physical harm. For example:

(8) 2007 年, 响应政府号召, 我们村迎来了拆迁, 在交房过程中, 因商铺建筑未按拆迁协议履行产生分歧。直到现在, 商铺未能交房。(In 2007, responding to the government’s call, our village underwent demolition. During the handover process, disagreements arose because the commercial building construction did not comply with the demolition agreement. Until now, the commercial building has not been handed over.) (Bilibili 2022-06-12)

In Example (8), the rights defender uses concrete vocabulary like “拆迁” (demolition), “交房” (handover), and “商铺” (commercial building) to clearly describe the specific context of the event, enhancing the credibility of their discourse and making it easier for the audience/listeners to understand and sympathize with their plight.

Furthermore, a significant amount of vague vocabulary exists in elderly rights-protection discourse. Through vague expressions, rights defenders can not only showcase the complexity, contradictoriness, and multidimensionality of their emotions but also create flexible coping space and exoneration space for themselves. This serves as an important pragmatic strategy for expressing uncertainty, helplessness, and the expectation of receiving help. For example:

(9) 我实名举报 XX 市 XX 法院不作为乱作为, 导致我保全的 2000 多万元工程款被非法转移, 目前我们民工工资和材料款无法支付。(I am reporting in my real name the XX Court of XX City for nonfeasance and malfeasance, resulting in the illegal transfer of over 20 million yuan of project funds under my preservation. Currently, our migrant workers’ wages and material costs cannot be paid.) (Douyin 2023-7-8)

In Example (9), “不作为” (nonfeasance) and “乱作为” (malfeasance) lack precise action definitions, and their meaning and scope are uncertain, belonging to vague verbs. Using such vague expressions to accuse behavior allows the rights defender, on one hand, to avoid precise legal accusations and, on the other hand, to effectively convey negative emotions towards unjust actions. Through this indirect approach, the rights defender subtly expresses the possible existence of wrongdoing, hoping to gain attention from the outside or relevant departments. Additionally, the vague quantifier “2000 多万元” (over 20 million yuan), while seemingly lacking precision and not specifying an exact figure, actually amplifies the severity of the rights defender’s ordeal. To some extent, these vague words exaggerate the extent of victimization, aligning with the expression pattern of subjective large quantities (Chu, 2011).

5.2 Syntactic Strategies

Syntactic strategies such as mood and discourse markers in elderly rights-protection discourse not only convey rights-defense information but also present the rights defender’s subjective tendencies—emotions, stance, cognition, and judgment—regarding the rights-defense event. As important markers of subjectivity, these syntactic strategies help rights defenders highlight the legitimacy of their own situation and appeals, stimulate emotional identification from the audience/listeners, and thereby prompt judicial institutions, government departments, and the public to pay more attention and respond to their demands. In rights-protection discourse, besides declarative mood, the elderly frequently use exclamatory and interrogative moods to express strong emotions.

(10) 我强烈呼吁上级主管部门派督导组进驻 XX 司法系统, 以我们这个案为突破口, 彻查 XX 市、区两级黑保护伞, 还 XX 人民一个公平正义朗朗的法制环境, 谢谢! (I strongly urge the superior authorities to send an inspection team into the XX judicial system, using our case as a breakthrough point, thoroughly investigating the black protective umbrellas at the municipal and district levels in XX, and restoring a fair, just, and bright legal environment for the people of XX. Thank you!) (Bilibili 2022-06-15)

In rights-defense expressions, the use of specific mood types often carries deep-seated appeals beyond literal meaning. The exclamatory mood “强烈呼吁” (strongly urge) in Example (10) actually highlights the rights

defender's urgent expectation for problem resolution while also conveying their dissatisfaction and concern about unfair conditions in society.

Furthermore, in the discourse expressions of the elderly defending their rights, discourse markers such as “我觉得” (I feel/think), “我认为” (I believe), “你看” (you see), “您发现了吗” (have you noticed), “其实” (actually), and “实际上” (in fact) play important roles. These expressions serve multiple functions: they can effectively focus the audience's/listeners' attention and clearly convey the rights defender's personal views, attitudes, stance, emotions, and other subjective tendencies. For example:

(11) 他说让这个原老板房东和皇领会的官司打完, 等到皇领会的老板拿到钱以后, 胜诉了再退回给我们钱, 我觉得这个做法很荒唐的。(He said to let the lawsuit between the original boss landlord and Huang Ling Hui finish, wait until Huang Ling Hui's boss gets the money, and after winning the lawsuit, then return the money to us. I feel this approach is very absurd.) (Bilibili 2021-08-19)

In elderly rights-protection discourse, specific discourse markers also serve as markers of subjectivity, carrying different subjective intentions of the rights defender. The discourse marker “我觉得” (I feel) in Example (11) indicates that the rights defender's evaluation of the event is based on their own perception and judgment, carrying a strong subjective coloring.

5.3 Textual Strategies

Elderly rights-protection discourse primarily presents its subjectivity through the textual strategy of hardship narratives. Hardship narrative unfolds the victim's experience along a timeline, combined with detailed descriptions, to enhance the authenticity of the discourse and empathy with the audience/listeners. This narrative typically follows the chronological order of events, focusing on the entire process from the occurrence of the conflict to its outcome. Through specific details, it intensifies the harm caused to the rights defender by the event and the various difficulties encountered during the rights-defense process, allowing the audience/listeners to perceive the injustice faced, arouse their sympathy, and seek help. For example:

(12)睡到大概5点左右, 我就要爬起来了, 早上大概6点电梯就比较频繁了。突然发现这个电梯噪音以后, 我马上自己再换了一扇门, 隔音门, 隔音门换了以后, 我感觉还不太行, 我马上又买了隔音棉贴好, 也没效果。我马上又买了一扇门, 还是解决不了问题.....你们也要为我想想, 我一把年纪了, 我住在这里, 这个环境能好好生活吗?..... (... Around 5 a.m., I have to get up. By about 6 in the morning, the elevator is already running quite frequently. After suddenly becoming aware of this elevator noise, I immediately replaced my own door with a soundproof one. But even after changing to a soundproof door, I still didn't feel it was sufficient. Right away, I bought soundproofing foam and applied it, but that didn't work either. I then immediately bought another door, and yet the problem still couldn't be resolved... You have to consider my situation too—at my age, living here in these conditions, how can I possibly live a decent life...) (Bilibili 2021-12-28)

In Example (12), the rights defender specifically describes the disturbance caused by the elevator noise. The series of attempts and failures in the text reveals not only the effort the rights defender expended trying to solve the problem and the long-term nature of the noise issue but also conveys their sense of helplessness and frustration. The phrase “我一把年纪了” (at my age) further highlights the rights defender's vulnerability, distress, and helplessness. These details deepen the audience's/listeners' emotional identification, making them more understanding and supportive of the rights defender's appeal.

It is evident that through hardship narratives, rights defenders can clearly present the difficult situations and painful experiences they face. Descriptions following a timeline and with concrete details create an emotional atmosphere, making it easier for the audience/listeners to resonate, thereby arousing their sympathy and support.

6. Conclusion

The discourse used by the elderly in the process of safeguarding their own rights and interests is both discourse practice with subjective tendencies and pragmatic functions. Its subjectivity is primarily manifested as emotional appeals, attitude expression, and cognitive judgments regarding rights-defense events. This study not only contributes to a deeper pragmatic understanding of the subjectivity behind elderly rights-protection discourse but can also provide theoretical support for promoting social fairness and justice from a linguistic perspective and practical insights for optimizing public communication. Future research could further expand corpus sources, explore multimodal expressions of elderly rights-protection discourse and their subjectivity in different cultural contexts, enriching research in areas such as discourse subjectivity and discourse analysis.

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Understanding Teachers' Experiences Supporting Students with ADHD-Related Behaviors: A Social and Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the perspectives and experiences of five Filipino teachers in supporting students who exhibit characteristics of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) within general education classrooms. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and findings were synthesized through cross-case thematic analysis. Results reveal that teachers navigate social, relational, and cultural challenges by employing strategies such as structured discussions, collaboration with families, positive reinforcement, support staff involvement, and cooperative learning. These practices highlight the broader social and cultural role of teachers in mediating inclusion, fostering community, and addressing social-emotional needs within classrooms. The study underscores the importance of teacher initiative, empathy, and culturally informed decision-making in supporting diverse learners, illustrating how classroom practices intersect with broader societal norms and expectations.

Keywords: ADHD, inclusive education, classroom community, social-emotional support, cultural context, teacher perspectives

1. Introduction

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that affect functioning across multiple social and institutional contexts (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Symptoms often become particularly visible in classroom interactions, where expectations for attention, self-regulation, and peer collaboration are heightened. While many students receive diagnoses before adolescence, a significant proportion remain unrecognized due to limited access to clinical assessments, cultural perceptions of behavior, or lack of awareness among families and educators (Polanczyk et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2015). In the Philippine context, cultural norms frequently interpret hyperactivity or inattentiveness as misbehavior or lack of discipline, creating social stigma that can delay recognition and support (DepEd, 2019).

Globally, ADHD affects approximately 5–7% of school-aged children (Polanczyk et al., 2014). Students with ADHD may experience challenges with attention, organization, behavioral regulation, and task completion, which can impact social relationships, academic participation, and broader psychosocial development (DuPaul & Stoner, 2020; Barkley, 2022). In local classrooms, these challenges manifest as frequent movement between activities, impulsive speech, or difficulty following group norms—behaviors that can affect peer interactions and classroom cohesion. Teachers in public schools, often managing large classes with limited resources, navigate these challenges by balancing individual and group needs. For example, a Grade 10 teacher in a provincial Philippine school may mediate peer conflicts arising from a student's impulsive behavior while also maintaining classroom order.

Inclusive education emphasizes equity, belonging, and active participation for all learners. International policy

frameworks highlight the need to dismantle structural and social barriers to participation (UNESCO, 2020). Within the Philippine system, initiatives such as the Department of Education's "Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs" encourage culturally sensitive approaches, differentiated instruction, and collaboration with families and support personnel (DepEd, 2019). Students with ADHD are particularly vulnerable to peer exclusion, misinterpretation of behavior, and labeling as "troublesome," making teacher awareness and deliberate social strategies critical (Mikami & Normand, 2015).

In practice, Filipino teachers enact locally adapted strategies that address both educational and social dimensions of ADHD. These include assigning patient or focused peer partners to model appropriate classroom behavior, using visual schedules and movement breaks, integrating cooperative learning activities, and coordinating with families via mobile communication platforms. Such approaches highlight how teachers function as cultural mediators, negotiating societal norms, classroom expectations, and individual student needs.

This study investigates how five teachers in the Philippines perceive and respond to ADHD-related behaviors, exploring the social, relational, and cultural practices that foster inclusion, peer engagement, and academic participation. By examining locally situated strategies within an international framework of inclusive education, the research contributes to understanding ADHD as a sociocultural as well as educational phenomenon.

2. Review of Relate Literature

2.1 Teacher-Student Relationships

Strong relational ties between teachers and students are foundational for supporting students with ADHD, influencing engagement, behavioral regulation, and emotional well-being (Ewe, 2019; Longobardi et al., 2020). Beyond academic support, teacher-student relationships mediate social norms and classroom expectations, providing a framework for students to navigate both learning and social challenges.

In Philippine classrooms, where class sizes often exceed 40 students, these relationships are crucial. Teachers frequently rely on informal conversations, daily check-ins, and culturally meaningful gestures—such as praise in the local language or small tokens of recognition—to build rapport. For instance, a Grade 10 teacher in a public high school may use nicknames or culturally resonant anecdotes to connect with students exhibiting ADHD-related behaviors, thereby reinforcing classroom norms and establishing trust. These relational strategies are not only emotional supports but also mechanisms for managing behavior, encouraging participation, and reducing peer stigma.

Understanding teacher-student relationships allows the study to examine how relational practices underpin strategies for engagement and inclusion (Maslang et al., 2021). Insights into these dynamics highlight the social and cultural dimensions of ADHD support in local classrooms.

2.2 Classroom Management Strategies

Evidence-based strategies such as structured routines, visual cues, chunked tasks, clear behavioral expectations, and strategic seating facilitate attention, reduce disruptions, and shape social interactions (DuPaul et al., 2018; Anastopoulos & Shelton, 2020; Meza et al., 2020). In crowded Philippine classrooms, these strategies are especially critical for balancing the needs of individual students while maintaining overall classroom cohesion.

For example, teachers may post visual schedules in Tagalog or English to guide transitions between activities, or use color-coded task boards to help students prioritize assignments. During lessons, movement breaks or short group discussions may be integrated to manage hyperactivity while keeping students engaged. A Filipino teacher might also pair students with ADHD with highly focused peers during seatwork to scaffold attention and reduce task-related anxiety. These context-specific adaptations demonstrate how evidence-based strategies can be tailored to local conditions, including resource constraints and cultural expectations around authority, discipline, and classroom order.

Examining classroom management strategies illuminates how teachers operationalize inclusive practices and address the cognitive, behavioral, and social needs of students with ADHD. It links instructional design to the study's goal of identifying practical, culturally relevant interventions.

2.3 Parent-Teacher Collaboration

Family engagement is essential for reinforcing consistent expectations and behavioral norms across school and home environments (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Sheridan et al., 2019). In the Philippines, teachers frequently communicate with parents through text messaging, mobile apps, and social media platforms such as Messenger or Viber, reflecting culturally embedded communication practices.

For example, a teacher may send daily updates about a student's task completion or social interactions, providing guidance on home-based reinforcement strategies. Filipino parents, who often value relational and reciprocal approaches, may offer feedback or cultural insights that influence classroom interventions. Teachers may also

organize informal “coffee sessions” or parent meetings during school events to foster collaboration, illustrating how local social norms shape engagement strategies.

Understanding parent-teacher collaboration reveals how teachers integrate family and community resources to support inclusion. This aligns with the study’s objective of exploring relational and contextual strategies that enhance student participation and socio-emotional development.

2.4 Peer-Mediated and Collaborative Learning

Structured peer interactions, cooperative learning, and group tasks support inclusion and model adaptive behaviors for students with ADHD (Mikami et al., 2020). Positive peer role models reduce stigma and encourage social competence, complementing teacher-led strategies.

In Filipino classrooms, peer-mediated strategies are often adapted to local values of *pakikisama* (social harmony) and *bayanihan* (community cooperation). Teachers may intentionally assign group partners who can scaffold attention or promote patience during tasks. For instance, a student prone to impulsivity may be paired with a calm peer to model self-regulation during reading or science experiments. Teachers may also design cooperative projects where diverse abilities are valued, reinforcing inclusive norms while enhancing academic engagement. These culturally grounded peer interactions highlight the social dimensions of classroom management, extending the teacher’s role as both facilitator and mediator (Ognase & Maslang, 2024).

Peer-mediated practices help explain how teachers operationalize inclusion through social structures, complementing the study’s focus on relational and instructional strategies.

2.5 School-Wide Inclusion and Multidisciplinary Support

Inclusive classrooms require coordinated support from teachers, administrators, counselors, and other personnel (Ahsan & Sharma, 2020; Florian, 2021). In the Philippine setting, the Department of Education promotes initiatives such as the “Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs” program, which encourages collaboration across classrooms and grades. Teachers may work alongside guidance counselors to monitor students’ social-emotional needs, or with educational assistants to provide individualized support during high-stakes activities like examinations.

Cultural factors, such as respect for hierarchy and collective decision-making, often shape multidisciplinary interactions. Filipino teachers may seek advice from senior colleagues or participate in collaborative planning sessions to ensure strategies align with school-wide norms, illustrating how broader community structures influence classroom practice.

Examining school-wide collaboration highlights the structural and social supports that enable teachers to implement inclusive strategies (Serafica et al., 2023). It connects micro-level classroom interventions to broader institutional and policy frameworks.

2.6 Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Despite available resources, many teachers report feeling underprepared to support students with ADHD (Meza et al., 2020). Professional development focused on neurodiversity, inclusive pedagogy, and culturally responsive strategies equips teachers with practical and relational skills necessary for effective classroom management.

In practice, Filipino teachers may attend workshops on differentiated instruction, behavioral interventions, or the use of educational technology to support learners with ADHD. These trainings improve teachers’ confidence, encourage reflection on culturally sensitive strategies, and enhance classroom climate. For example, a teacher trained in inclusive pedagogy might design activities that simultaneously accommodate attention difficulties, respect Filipino learning preferences, and foster collaboration.

Teacher preparedness directly informs the study’s exploration of classroom practices. Understanding the interplay between training, cultural knowledge, and strategy implementation provides insights into how effective support for ADHD students is achieved in locally and socially grounded ways.

2.7 Synthesis

Across relational, instructional, social, and institutional domains, these literature themes illustrate how teachers support students with ADHD in ways that are both evidence-informed and culturally situated. Strong teacher-student relationships, structured classroom management, parent engagement, peer-mediated learning, school-wide collaboration, and professional development collectively provide a comprehensive framework for inclusive practices. Integrating these insights into the study’s objectives allows for an in-depth exploration of how Filipino teachers operationalize inclusion, navigate local constraints, and foster socially and academically supportive classrooms for students with ADHD-related behaviors.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative study examined how teachers construct inclusive classroom communities that support students exhibiting ADHD-related behaviors, focusing on instructional, social, and relational strategies.

3.2 Participants

Five senior high school teachers were selected via purposive sampling with criteria:

- 1) Minimum three years of teaching experience
- 2) Direct experience supporting students with ADHD-related behaviors

3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews lasting 30–45 minutes were conducted, addressing instructional strategies, classroom management, collaborative practices, and perceptions of student needs. Informed consent ensured voluntary participation and confidentiality.

3.4 Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic coding. Recurrent patterns were grouped into themes representing strategies, social practices, and cultural considerations in supporting students with ADHD-related behaviors.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Category 1: Strategies for Building an Inclusive Classroom Community

Teachers emphasized early, consistent, and structured community-building:

- Weekly classroom meetings
- Daily routines promoting respect
- Collaborative activities strengthening peer relationships
- Reflective conversations defining behavioral norms

These strategies reflect both relational and cultural mediation, helping students understand social expectations while fostering belonging (Mikami & Normand, 2015).

4.2 Category 2: Supporting Students With ADHD-Related Behaviors

Theme 1: Parent–Teacher Collaboration

Frequent communication via conferences, texts, or coordinated strategies strengthened consistency between home and school, supporting social-emotional regulation (Sheridan et al., 2019; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

Theme 2: Support From Classroom Personnel

Teachers relied on educational assistants and counselors for one-on-one guidance, emotional support, and assistance with challenging tasks, highlighting social scaffolding and community support in practice.

Theme 3: Instructional Scaffolds

Visual schedules, chunked tasks, guided instructions, strategic seating, and flexible grouping reduced cognitive load and supported social participation (DuPaul et al., 2018; Anastopoulos & Shelton, 2020).

4.3 Category 3: Structuring the Learning Environment

Collaborative learning strategies—peer modeling, partner work, and small-group tasks—were paired with individualized support for focused tasks, balancing attention regulation and social engagement (Carbone, 2001; Hoza, 2007).

5. Discussion

The findings underscore the multifaceted roles teachers play in supporting students with ADHD-related behaviors, emphasizing their function as social mediators, cultural interpreters, and agents of inclusion. Teachers not only implement instructional strategies but also shape the social and emotional climate of the classroom, integrating cultural awareness and relational practices to foster equitable participation.

5.1 Community-Building as a Foundation

Teachers consistently prioritized structured classroom norms, routines, and reflective practices to cultivate predictability and emotional safety, which are crucial for students with ADHD (Mikami & Normand, 2015). In the Philippine context, this involves culturally resonant practices such as morning circle discussions, group reflection sessions, or collaborative “problem-solving corners” that reinforce *pakikisama* (harmonious relationships) and collective accountability. For example, teachers might encourage students to set shared

classroom agreements on respect, turn-taking, or noise levels, promoting both behavioral regulation and peer inclusion. These practices position teachers as social mediators, translating broader societal values into daily classroom routines, thereby helping students with ADHD navigate both academic and social expectations.

Beyond routines and norms, community-building also involves modeling emotional regulation and conflict resolution. Teachers actively demonstrate patience, use empathetic language, and guide peer interactions during disagreements, creating a classroom culture in which mistakes or impulsive behaviors are treated as learning opportunities rather than punishable offenses. This relational approach reduces social stigma and encourages students with ADHD to participate without fear of judgment, reinforcing both self-esteem and social cohesion within the classroom.

5.2 Collaboration as Essential to Inclusion

The study highlights the importance of collaboration with families and multidisciplinary school personnel to sustain inclusive practices. Teachers actively communicate with parents using text messaging, social media, and scheduled conferences, ensuring continuity between home and school expectations (Ahsan & Sharma, 2020; Sheridan et al., 2019). They also coordinate with guidance counselors, educational assistants, and fellow teachers to implement consistent strategies, such as individualized seating arrangements, behavioral checklists, or joint monitoring of homework completion. In doing so, teachers function as cultural interpreters, bridging institutional guidelines, family expectations, and student needs. This collaborative role is particularly significant in Filipino schools, where community and relational networks are central to educational practices, and where social cohesion is valued as much as academic achievement.

Collaboration also extends to negotiating classroom norms and adapting pedagogical approaches to suit cultural and contextual realities. For instance, teachers may hold meetings with parents to discuss culturally influenced behavioral expectations—such as respect for authority or social conformity—and adjust strategies to align with family values while maintaining educational objectives. This role positions teachers as facilitators of social understanding, ensuring that inclusive practices resonate with both the community and the student's individual experiences.

5.3 Instructional Scaffolding Reduces Cognitive and Social Stress

Teachers implement evidence-based scaffolding strategies to reduce cognitive load and emotional stress for students with ADHD, including visual schedules, task chunking, guided instructions, and structured routines (DuPaul et al., 2018). In crowded classrooms, such scaffolds not only facilitate task completion but also help prevent social conflicts or feelings of exclusion. For instance, a teacher may break a writing assignment into smaller steps, display each step visually, and assign a peer mentor to provide subtle guidance, reducing frustration while modeling cooperative behavior. These practices demonstrate the teacher's dual role in supporting cognitive development and social-emotional regulation, integrating individual attention with classroom-wide expectations, and emphasizing the relational dimension of learning that is central in social-science analyses of inclusive practice.

Instructional scaffolding also involves culturally responsive strategies that acknowledge students' lived experiences and prior knowledge. For example, teachers may incorporate local stories, examples, or metaphors into tasks to make content more relatable, increasing engagement while simultaneously scaffolding attention and comprehension. By connecting learning to students' social and cultural realities, scaffolding becomes a holistic tool that addresses both academic and socio-emotional needs, reinforcing the teacher's role as a mediator between curriculum content and student experience.

5.4 Flexible Learning Structures Enhance Engagement

Teachers employ flexible learning structures to accommodate the attentional and social needs of students with ADHD, combining peer collaboration with individualized support (Mikami et al., 2020; Hoza, 2007). Strategies include rotating small groups, pairing students with ADHD with patient peers, and providing quiet or low-stimulation areas for focused work. These practices reflect the teacher's adaptive role as a social and cultural mediator, interpreting students' behaviors within the context of classroom norms, cultural expectations, and peer dynamics. For example, a Filipino classroom might integrate cooperative math problem-solving where students take turns explaining their reasoning, allowing those with ADHD to participate actively while receiving peer modeling and scaffolding. This approach reinforces inclusion not only academically but socially, demonstrating how flexible structures can mitigate stigma, promote peer acceptance, and strengthen classroom cohesion.

Flexible learning structures also require ongoing observation and responsiveness. Teachers must continually assess student engagement, adjust groupings, and modify tasks to accommodate fluctuating attention spans or emotional states. By dynamically adapting the learning environment, teachers demonstrate expertise not only in curriculum delivery but also in social orchestration, creating classrooms that are sensitive to the interaction between individual needs, peer dynamics, and cultural expectations.

5.5 *Integration of Cultural Awareness and Reflective Practice*

Across all roles, teachers exhibited reflective, adaptive, and culturally grounded practices. They interpreted behaviors through the lens of local social norms and classroom culture, mediating between individual student needs, peer interactions, and institutional expectations. By combining relational, instructional, and collaborative strategies, teachers produced inclusive environments where students with ADHD could engage academically, regulate their behavior, and participate socially. From a humanities and social sciences perspective, this highlights how classroom inclusion is a culturally situated social practice, in which teachers act as agents shaping not only learning outcomes but also students' social experiences and identities.

The implications of these findings extend beyond pedagogical technique to broader societal, cultural, and policy domains. First, at the social level, teachers' practices demonstrate the centrality of relational mediation in reducing stigma and fostering peer acceptance. By interpreting ADHD-related behaviors through culturally informed frameworks—acknowledging local norms such as *pakikisama* (harmonious relationships), respect for authority, and collective responsibility—teachers actively shape social norms within classrooms. This positions the classroom as a microcosm for negotiating cultural values, social hierarchies, and inclusive behaviors, providing students with experiential opportunities to learn social competence alongside academic content.

Second, at the cultural and identity level, reflective practice allows teachers to consider how ADHD intersects with students' personal and social identities. By adapting strategies to the unique sociocultural context of their students, teachers help normalize neurodiversity, promoting self-efficacy, resilience, and a sense of belonging. These practices suggest that inclusion is not only about curriculum adaptation or behavior management but also about fostering the social and cultural recognition of difference, empowering students to navigate broader societal expectations while retaining their individuality.

Third, at the policy and institutional level, the study underscores the need for frameworks that support culturally responsive inclusion. Teachers' reflective and adaptive practices illustrate the importance of professional development that integrates social, cultural, and behavioral understanding alongside evidence-based instructional strategies. Policies that recognize the classroom as a socially and culturally embedded environment—not just a site for academic delivery—can guide resource allocation, teacher training, and multidisciplinary collaboration in ways that make inclusion both practical and socially meaningful.

Finally, these insights have implications for research in the humanities and social sciences. Understanding ADHD inclusion through the lens of social practice, cultural mediation, and teacher reflection highlights the complex interplay between individual behavior, social norms, and institutional structures. It encourages scholars to examine inclusion not only as an educational intervention but as a socio-cultural phenomenon, where teachers, peers, families, and communities co-construct the conditions for equitable learning and social participation.

6. Conclusion

This study illustrates that teachers occupy complex, multidimensional roles in fostering inclusive classrooms for students exhibiting ADHD-related behaviors. Their strategies—including structured community-building, family collaboration, support staff engagement, and instructional scaffolding—demonstrate that classroom inclusion is not solely a pedagogical concern but also a social and cultural practice. Teachers interpret behaviors through the lens of local norms, peer interactions, and institutional expectations, acting as mediators who balance academic, behavioral, and social-emotional demands. These efforts enable students with ADHD to participate meaningfully, regulate their behavior, and develop a sense of belonging, highlighting the interplay between education, culture, and social equity.

From a humanities and social sciences standpoint, the findings underscore that inclusive classrooms are microcosms of broader societal dynamics. Teachers' culturally responsive strategies help students navigate social hierarchies, peer relationships, and normative expectations, reducing stigma and shaping identity formation. Inclusion, therefore, emerges as an ethical and socially situated practice where educators are agents of socialization as well as learning. By foregrounding relational, cultural, and reflective dimensions, teachers contribute to holistic development, demonstrating that effective inclusion requires both empathy and deliberate, evidence-informed practice.

7. Recommendations

Teacher education programs should embed neurodiversity, inclusive pedagogy, and culturally responsive strategies into pre-service and in-service training. Emphasizing reflective practice, social mediation, and cultural awareness equips teachers to navigate classroom norms, peer interactions, and institutional expectations while supporting students' behavioral and academic needs. Ongoing professional development, mentoring, and collaborative peer networks can reinforce these competencies, enabling teachers to adapt strategies effectively in diverse classroom contexts.

Schools and policymakers should strengthen family–school partnerships through structured, culturally sensitive communication systems, such as conferences, messaging platforms, or home visits, ensuring consistency between home and school environments. Expanding access to multidisciplinary support—including educational assistants, counselors, and special educators—fosters shared responsibility for students’ academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development. Integrating flexible frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), adapted to local cultural and classroom contexts, can enhance inclusive practice while honoring students’ social and emotional experiences.

Future research should explore inclusion as a socio-cultural phenomenon, incorporating perspectives from students, families, and communities. Investigating the classroom as a site where social norms, cultural expectations, and power relations intersect can generate insights into effective strategies for promoting equity and participation.

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