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Nostalgia as a Public Diplomacy Approach

A study of the feeling towards the homeland among chinese oversea citizen during pandemic crisis

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Master's thesis



Acknowledgments

As the author and researcher of this project, I am honored to present this Master Thesis as my master thesis of my 2 years studies at the Strategic Communication program in Lund University, Sweden. Throughout this journey, I have transitioned from curious learners to knowledgeable practitioners, deepening my understanding of China's public diplomacy and its impact on overseas Chinese communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This achievement would not have been possible without the support and guidance of several individuals and valuable supervision.

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Abstract

This Master Thesis Explores the importance of public diplomacy during the pandemic, examining how public diplomacy influences overseas citizens' perceptions of their country in times of crisis. By using nostalgia as a communication strategy and analyzing it from the perspective of digital communication strategies, this study aims to understand how governments should use strategic communication to engage with their national image. China's public diplomacy towards overseas Chinese during COVID-19 is analyzed as an example to use in this study. Public diplomacy, especially during global crises, plays an important role in maintaining and strengthening the connection between the country and its citizens abroad. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many overseas Chinese faced unprecedented challenges due to travel restrictions and social isolation. In response, the Chinese government launched various initiatives aimed at providing emotional and material support to these individuals. Using qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews with ten Chinese nationals living abroad, this study analyzes the narratives and emotional cues embedded in the Chinese government's communication strategies. The findings reveal that nostalgia can be used in these messages significantly influencing the participants' emotional connections with their homeland, but can not be used in every station. This thesis contributes to the broader understanding of public diplomacy by highlighting the effectiveness of nostalgia strategies in international communication. It provides insights into how digital platforms can be leveraged to strengthen national identity and support citizens during global crises. The study concludes with recommendations for future public diplomacy efforts to consider the feeling connection and psychological needs of overseas citizens.

Key words: *Public Diplomacy; Digital Public Diplomacy; Nostalgia; Oversea Citizen*

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1. Introduction

"During those three years of the pandemic, I really missed home, but I couldn't go back. Home felt so far away."

— from a Chinese person who has lived in Japan for over six years.

This is saying an overseas Chinese who could not return home during the pandemic, echoing the feeling of many other Chinese overseas citizens. The expression of these emotions starkly contrasts with the government's claims about the effectiveness of its public and digital diplomacy during the pandemic. This discrepancy has piqued my interest in the actual impact of public diplomacy on overseas Chinese, particularly in exploring how the government communicates with its citizens abroad through social media and other digital platforms, and the effectiveness of these strategies.

1.1 Background

Public diplomacy is a form of strategic communication conducted by states to influence the hearts and minds of foreign public diplomacy. to enhance soft power and achieve national goals. It uses media, dialogues, cultural exchanges, and even elements of psychological tactics to shape international public opinion and influence relations (Cull, 2009). This form of communication has become increasingly significant, as public opinion now plays a pivotal role in influencing foreign policies and international dynamics, positioning public diplomacy as a key element in political communication in the 21st century (Snow & Taylor, 2009).

In essence, public diplomacy is an information-sharing framework that allows information to be communicated in a targeted and consistent manner to the intended audience. This ensures effective coordination of national policies and activities, thereby increasing the impact of information. Researchers continue to focus on media strategies, advocacy, and knowledge dissemination in this area (Zaharna, 2009). The dynamism of this field of study underscores the continuing development of public diplomacy as an important tool for international exchange and policy manipulation.

Traditional diplomacy, which emphasizes official relations between governments rather than influencing public opinion abroad through media and cultural contacts, is not the same as public diplomacy, which is characterized by its adaptability and openness in using public opinion polls, cultural events, and informational broadcasts to introduce foreign audiences to national policies and cultural backgrounds. It also provides a clear and adaptable substitute for the sometimes mysterious conventional diplomatic procedures (Gao, 2005).

The rise of citizen participation in public diplomacy

Digital public diplomacy translates ideas and influences internationally through online tools and platforms, enabling widespread information sharing even with limited resources or poor media control, thus changing traditional practices (Gant, 2007). The rise of digital communication has weakened the role of traditional diplomacy, making individuals and non-state actors key players in global dialogue and relations (Jönsson & Hall, 2003). With the development of globalization, the scope of diplomacy has expanded, and citizen participation and direct social media interaction have been integrated into diplomatic activities, facilitating the shift of public discourse to the global sphere. Driven by the global Communications Network, this shift has shifted diplomacy from a traditional country-centered power dynamic to a more open, participatory model that emphasizes direct contact between people and collective contributions to shaping international relations (Castells, 2008). The increasing association of national and international audiences by global citizens has prompted some diplomatic sectors to adjust their public advocacy strategies. Strategies that originally targeted an international audience are now being redesigned to accommodate domestic audiences and have begun to involve cooperation with local citizens. Through activities such as cultural exchanges, these efforts aim to strengthen participation at home and abroad (Huijgh, 2019).

Government initiatives using social media promote citizen engagement online and enhance trust in public institutions (Warren et al., 2014). realizing an increased focus on dialogue, relationship building, mutual understanding, and publics as actors in the legitimization of nations and governments (Kim, 2015). Social media is defined by key characteristics: participation, openness, conversation, engagement, and connectedness, shaping its dynamic and interactive environment. It enables citizens to express their ideas freely, without the

influence of money and politics that can affect traditional media (Benkler, 2006). Social media like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter have transformed individuals into country ambassadors by enabling them to generate content, interact with others, and form online communities without the large financial investments previously required for broadcasting and international dialogue (Payne, et al, 2011). This is like what explain by Mills, (1956) described as mass communication, to be explained as this digital evolution has transformed public diplomacy from a primarily government-coordinated effort to a more democratic and inclusive process that was previously characterized by a hierarchical, top-down approach and reliance on mass communication channels (Mills, 1956) . Today, public diplomacy initiatives can be launched by anyone with Internet access, expanding the scope of discussion of global affairs and allowing a greater diversity of voices to participate in international relations. This shift represents a major move away from traditional methods, where senior government officials were the main actors, towards a more participatory model of diplomacy in the digital age (Zhong & Lu, 2013).

1.2 Lack of attention to oversea citizen

Although public diplomacy has been widely discussed as an academic field of study since its introduction by Edmund Gullion in 1965, and as more countries actively transcend territorial boundaries to engage in international relations, the body of literature on public diplomacy continues to grow. Traditionally, public diplomacy has been used to reach international audiences through the media, cultural exchanges, and other popular means to influence foreign publics' opinions of a country (Melissen, 2005). With the advancement of internet-mediated interactions, social media is increasingly seen as a technology that allows public institutions to promote citizen engagement (Criado et al., 2013). Political participation is no longer the exclusive right of certain individuals, and governments are also increasingly paying close attention to citizens' attitudes toward their own administrations (Warren et al., 2014). In this evolving public relations landscape, the concept of digital public diplomacy has gained increasing attention (Arsenault, 2009).

Individual and non-state actors are now key players in global relations (Jönsson & Hall, 2003). However, public diplomacy studies often overlook the important role of overseas citizens in receiving and disseminating information. Despite living abroad, expatriates remain

integral members of their societies. They occupy a unique position between domestic and international audiences, which often leads to their perspectives being overlooked. These studies tend to focus solely on state-sponsored media and cultural exchanges, ignoring the importance of citizens as informal ambassadors for their countries (Zhao & Liu, 2013). Even less discussed in the existing literature is the role of overseas citizens as recipients of government communication. This negligence is evident during international crises, as the unique status of these citizens greatly affects the image of their homeland abroad. The dissemination of the views and emotions of these overseas citizens through the expatriate community and the wider host society has played a crucial role in shaping a global perspective (Melissen, 2011). Particularly in times of crisis, the first-hand information provided by these individuals and their reactions have a significant impact on public opinion (Jindal et al., 2023).

Research on the impact of public diplomacy on overseas citizens' impressions of their own nation are sometimes disregarded, particularly during times of crisis. Overseas citizens' impressions and feelings toward their home country might alter dramatically during a crisis, making it necessary to develop and implement public diplomacy measures. Because of cultural and political variations, public diplomatic initiatives may have varying consequences on foreign residents' perceptions of the country. Although studies frequently ignore this variety, it is essential to comprehending the dynamics of international relations and public diplomacy tactics in a global setting.

In-depth discussion of how to strengthen the emotional ties between foreign nationals and their home countries during times of crisis through the use of social media and other digital platforms will be covered, along with how these ties impact the way in which they perceive a nation. This method offers fresh perspectives and depths for comprehending and putting into practice contemporary public diplomacy techniques. It also closes gaps in previous research on the viewpoint of people abroad and the interplay of cultural and political variety in public diplomacy.

1.3 Nostalgia as a public diplomacy approach

To address the research gap in public diplomacy, I will use nostalgia to public diplomacy. In examining nostalgia as a public diplomacy approach, it's crucial to understand why nostalgia is particularly relevant and potent in the public diplomacy communication landscape. Nostalgia, characterized by a longing for the past, can recall strong emotions and connections among people. It is almost always rooted in an experience of missing the past, a feeling of being adrift, a discomfort with oneself or one's surroundings (Holak & Havlena, 1998). Davis, 1979 suggested that nostalgia has intrinsic connections with broader macroscopic landscapes such as culture, history, society, and institutions, related to changes like globalization crisis, hyper-Westernization, immigration, and the conditions of expatriates. He believed that societies undergoing turmoil tend to produce nostalgic tendencies. During the COVID-19 period, due to the daily increase in death cases and infection numbers, overseas Chinese faced with uncertainty and a lack of belonging in a foreign land, found themselves missing their hometowns and families more intensely.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions and border closures prevented overseas Chinese from returning to their homeland, creating a unique backdrop for exploring the nuances of nostalgia and its impact on the perception of the national image. This period intensified the nostalgia among the diaspora, not only deepening their longing for their homeland but also affecting their views on China's national image. This study considers nostalgia as a communication strategy approach, examining how nostalgic sentiments have influenced these views, especially through memories of food (Seitz et al., 2021) and lifestyles (Hsu et al., 2016) that were unattainable during the pandemic.

The study explores in detail how, through narratives and images related to Chinese food, cultural customs and everyday life, not only positive emotions are generated about China's efforts to control the epidemic, but also national pride and cultural connections are strengthened. However, it should be noted that patriotism is only one of many factors affecting the perception of the country's image by overseas Chinese communities. The various strategies implemented during the outbreak, including policies and support systems aimed at Chinese citizens abroad, also play an important role.

1.4 Research Aim & Research question

The purpose of this study is to investigate and enhance our understanding of the country's participation in public diplomacy activities directed at abroad residents during times of crisis. Specifically, this study investigates how China's public diplomacy efforts during the COVID-19 outbreak affects Chinese nationals' experiences and attitudes about their motherland. By focusing on the strategic use of landscape as a communication tool on social media and assessing the overall impact of these diplomatic efforts, this study aims to investigate how public diplomacy effectively serves as a bridge between the Chinese government and global citizens, influencing their loyalty and perception of the country during critical times. This research will add to a larger discussion of the efficacy of public diplomacy techniques in protecting and improving the country's international image, particularly during difficult times. Furthermore, the study aims to better understand the function of digital platforms in advancing public diplomacy and their influence on the dynamic connection between nations and their foreign residents in the context of the epidemic.

In order to understand this topic more clearly, in this research, I will use the experience of overseas Chinese during covid-19 as an example, to analyze how China's public diplomacy was perceived and engaged by Chinese overseas citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, it examines how the Chinese government used digital communication tools and social media platforms to send information, foster a sense of community, and enhance national identity among the overseas Chinese community. This research intends to uncover the broader implications of public diplomacy during the COVID-19 era, exploring the challenges and opportunities it presents for sustaining and improving a nation's image. By delving into and analyzing how these factors have influenced changes in the overseas population's perception of the national image, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving role of public diplomacy in the digital age. It serves as a valuable example of how public diplomacy can be effectively used to garner recognition and approval from citizens abroad, demonstrating its significance in shaping international perceptions and relations in contemporary times.

Research Question:

Question 1 : How did China's digital public diplomacy, as a particular form of communication strategy, establish an emotional connection with Chinese overseas citizens during the pandemic crisis?

Question 2 : How did the feelings of their homeland among overseas Chinese citizens influence their experience of China's national image during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

This study will not investigate the COVID-19 pandemic itself but will use it as a concept within the framework of public diplomacy. This essay will add to a larger conversation about public diplomacy tactics' efficacy in maintaining and improving the nation's reputation abroad, particularly during trying times. Furthermore, in light of the pandemic, the study aims to comprehend how digital platforms function in advancing public diplomacy and how they affect the dynamic interaction between nations and their foreign nationals.

It should be made clear that, despite the study's setting in the global health crisis, it is not meant to address any wide-ranging crisis studies, including those that deal with crisis management techniques in general or crisis dissemination. Instead, the study solely examines how, during the COVID-19 situation, particular public diplomacy initiatives impact China's national image among foreign expatriates.

This study explicitly excludes a detailed examination of broader crisis management strategies or general crisis dissemination strategies for other entities or in different contexts. The focus of the study remains on the interaction between public diplomacy in China and Chinese perceptions of China abroad, through the perspective of long-standing involvement and emotional linkage during the pandemic. This approach enables the study to explore in depth the subtleties of public diplomacy as a national image management tool among overseas citizens without deviating from the operational details of crisis management or the wider area of crisis communication.

2 Literature Review

2.1 What is Public Diplomacy

"Diplomacy" usually refers to interactions between States through official documents, a practice known as traditional diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy focuses mainly on methods and techniques for dealing with intergovernmental negotiations (Deutsch, 1966).

An evolution characterized by three key phases: the Cold War era (1945-1989); the post-Cold War era (1989-2001); 9/11(2001-present). Public diplomacy, rooted in communication efforts during the World Wars and later shaped by the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War and a 20th century centered on mass media, adapted with the fundamental changes brought about by the digital revolution. This shift has transcended the limits of time and space with the rise of digital technology (Slvako et al, 2004). Traditional diplomacy, as described by Manheim (1990), focuses primarily on government-to-government communication. However, after the growing prominence of nongovernmental entities has further transformed diplomacy by moving it away from government-led initiatives alone and adding depth to the conversations surrounding it, Traditional diplomacy emphasizes the government-to-government communication (Manheim, 1990).

Public diplomacy studies are largely influenced by soft power (Ney, 2008). Ney believed that it was necessary to shift from traditional government-to-government diplomacy to a more focused diplomatic approach to direct communication with citizens, emphasizing relationships based on bilateral participation. The field of diplomacy is transitioning from traditional forms of government to public diplomacy (Delaney, 1968). Public diplomacy can be described as a government that directly or indirectly influences public attitudes and opinions, which in turn influence foreign policy decisions in other countries. Thus, after then Public Diplomacy is used to connect with international audiences, aiming to build bridges, inform and influence key groups and encourage open dialog. The concept has matured to reflect the evolution of global engagement and an expanded understanding of the role of diplomacy in a world that is more interconnected than ever before. This ongoing refinement,

driven by global events and technological advances, underscores its importance in the evolving field of international diplomacy (Melissen, 2005; Simonin, 2008).

International relations revolve around strategic decisions aimed at protecting national interests and achieving global goals, with diplomacy serving as a deliberate way for states to pursue international goals through interactions with governmental and non-governmental entities (Pamment, 2012). Foreign policy serves as a key tool for translating a state's envisioned interests and goals into concrete diplomatic actions to protect those interests (Senarclens & Kazancigil, 2007). Considered as a set of guiding principles and actions, foreign policy coordinates a state's interactions in different spheres-social, political, economic, and military-while also considering interactions with non-state actors. This policy reflects the state's strategy in international relations, connecting the external international environment with its internal domestic situation, including sub-state elements. Thus, foreign policy encompasses an organized framework of goals that articulates a state's approach to interacting with other states and non-state actors in the complexity of its domestic and international environment (Melissen, 2005).

The evolution of diplomacy has shifted from adversarial tactics and psychological warfare to a more inclusive and interactive model that emphasizes mutual dialogue and understanding. This transition, from "fighting to bridging," focuses on building relationships through transparent communication and the exchange of ideas, prioritizing cooperation and respect over coercion. This modern approach, which values respectful interaction over traditional power hierarchies, is especially relevant in today's global communications environment, balancing the influence on international perceptions with engagement with domestic audiences (Zaharna, 2021)

There are five basic elements of public diplomacy: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international news broadcasting (Cull, 2009).

An essential component of effective public diplomacy is listening. It entails gathering and evaluating information on the views and behaviors of the foreign public in order to manage the global environment. subsequently making changes to policies or enhancing the public

diplomacy approach as a whole using these facts. In the past, listening has been a crucial component of broadcasting, cultural diplomacy, exchange programs, and publicity. Each of these areas demands in-depth audience analysis and study (Cull, 2009). The term "public diplomacy" describes the process of influencing the global environment through international communication initiatives in order to actively advance particular ideas, policies, or general interests among foreign audiences. Through such propaganda efforts, even transitioning nations with lesser degrees of democracy and economy may improve their standing internationally (White & Radic, 2013).

Cultural diplomacy is defined as an act that influences the international environment by promoting the international dissemination of its culture by showcasing its cultural resources and achievements to foreign audiences (Cull, 2009). Exchanges of diplomacy are projects that influence the international environment through the implementation of exchanges, which typically include the dispatch of domestic citizens abroad and the reception of foreign citizens to their countries for study and cultural exchange in order to mutual benefit (Cull, 2009). There were differences between staff and participants in their views on the exchange project, and they felt that there was a conflict between the short-term, unidirectional exchange goals and the long-term two-way exchange objectives (Kim, 2015). International broadcasting involves the use of radio, television and Internet technologies to communicate with foreign audiences in order to manage the global station (Cull, 2009).

Public diplomacy is the activity of communication and persuasion carried out by political entities to build influence in the international arena. The purpose of public diplomacy is to inform foreign audiences about the policy decisions of practicing countries and to promote foreign policy (Hayden et al., 2013). Public diplomacy is a process in which a country seeks to engage with foreign audiences in order to disseminate certain narratives and self-descriptions (Hartig, 2016). Public diplomacy involves dialogue, mutual respect, partnership, and mutual understanding; it is a dynamic field characterized by open public opinion and debate, covering a wide range of competing voices. The recipients of public diplomacy are active participants, not just passive recipients, whose involvement is aimed at achieving their goals. The decentralization of social networks further enhances this active involvement (Zhang, 2013).

The shift of public diplomacy from solely intergovernmental interactions to encompassing a wide range of global actors marks its crucial role in promoting international cooperation and understanding. Joseph Nye, 2011 expands on this by emphasizing the need to leverage not only economic resources, but also cultural attractiveness, political values, and strategic foreign policies to exert significant soft power influence. This holistic approach underscores the essential role of public diplomacy in contemporary international relations, positioning it as a vital tool for enhancing global understanding and shaping positive international relations (Nye, 2011).

2.2 Soft power

The concept of "soft power" was developed by Joseph Nye in the 1990s and early 21st century. He expanded on the idea in 2011, calling it "relational power" and emphasizing its ability to influence people's behavior through attraction rather than coercion. By characterizing soft power as a synthesis of the second and third forms of power, Nye highlighted the complexity of this form of influence. His strategy of "winning hearts and minds" has become critical for political leaders seeking to enhance their influence through a mix of power strategies. Nye's "soft power," detailed in his seminal works (Nye, 2004), differs from traditional hard power by emphasizing the ability to shape preferences and influence through attraction and persuasion, moving from theory to practice in its application in policy development and its prevalence in media and political dialogue (d'Hooghe 2011). Unlike hard power, soft power takes a collaborative approach, using cultural appeal and moral authority to achieve desired ends, making it increasingly relevant in today's interconnected society (Nye, 2004).

Nye distinguishes between the tangible origins of hard power, such as military force and economic resources, and the intangible sources of soft power, like cultural influence, institutional values, and the legitimacy of policies (Nye, 2011). He introduces soft and smart power as distinct strategies for international influence. Soft power leverages the ability to attract and persuade through cultural charm and values, steering clear of coercive methods and instead aiming to shape attitudes and preferences (Nye, 2004). On soft and hard strengths, the academic community has different views on their effectiveness and usefulness. While soft power is generally seen as operating independently of hard power, it can effectively complement and even complicate the use of hard force (Nye, 2004). Increased financial

support for soft power projects would enhance its effectiveness (Schneider, 2005). In addition, with the expansion of the global information space, the influence of soft power is increasing and its reliance on hard power is decreasing (Chong, 2005).

While soft power concentrates on direct government-to-citizen communication, traditional diplomacy mostly involves direct interactions between countries. In the meanwhile, third parties including social media platforms, satellite networks, and international news media are used for mediated public diplomacy. These platforms are used in this manner to communicate with individuals throughout the world and shape public opinion (Kwak et al., 2006).

2.3 Digital public diplomacy

In the digital age, the landscape of public diplomacy has changed dramatically due to the proliferation of media and data. This shift has created a challenging environment of information saturation, forcing traditional methods of influence to evolve amidst intense competition for audience attention. Technological advances, particularly the Internet, have reshaped global communication and created new opportunities to engage international audiences. This underscores the need for public diplomacy to skillfully use these tools to effectively navigate and influence the complex, information-rich environment. (Arsenault, 2009). Digital diplomacy is a relatively new field of study, and researchers and practitioners have different interpretations and definitions of it, but their views are largely consistent (Sotiriu, 2015). Currently, there is no widely accepted definition or framework for digital diplomacy, indicating that research in this area is still in its infancy. This lack of a comprehensive framework is also the reason why there is no reliable methodology in the current literature to evaluate the effectiveness of social media in public diplomacy (Bjola & Jiang, 2015).

In today's globally interconnected environment, entities cultivate relationships by strategically using social media with a co-created communication approach that is characterized by ongoing exchanges from which both parties benefit. The advent of networked technologies is transforming traditional place moving from a top-down, asymmetrical model of communication with a distinct sender and receiver, to a more interactive and participatory approach (Ketter & Avraham, 2012). However, while public

diplomacy has benefited through this model by fostering deeper understanding and stronger relationships between governmental and nongovernmental actors, the expansion of communication channels has also introduced the potential for misunderstandings and challenges (Melissen, 2005). It is therefore crucial to develop communication strategies that are flexible and adaptable to the nuances of global diplomacy, which highlights the delicate nature of augmented communication: it has the potential to bridge differences through improved understanding, but its inherent complexity needs to be navigated carefully (Zaharna, 2012). Digital diplomacy is the process by which ambassadors connect with others and the public using digital means like social media (Holmes, 2015). This mostly entails using digital and network technologies including the Internet, mobile devices, and social media to undertake diplomatic tasks (Potter, 2002). The emergence of social media has catalyzed a significant shift in informational control from institutions to individual users, altering the power dynamic to favor audiences and changing stakeholder roles. This shift disrupts traditional communication models that viewed stakeholders as directly influencing or being influenced by an organization's actions (Henderson & Bowley, 2010).

Now, anyone who participates in an online discussion can influence perceptions of an organization, regardless of their actual involvement or stake in the organization (Payne et al., 2011). At the same time, public diplomacy is being forced to move from a predominantly one-way flow of information to a more interactive, two-way communication model. This evolution toward more meaningful engagement reflects a broader shift from controlled messaging to open, participatory dialogue in the digital age. It underscores the need for adaptability and flexibility in both the corporate and diplomatic arenas, and highlights the changing landscape of communication and interaction facilitated by digital platforms (Ross, 2011).

This shift reflects broader trends in public diplomacy, such as the growing role of public opinion, the expansion of media on a global scale, the challenge of maintaining cultural diversity amidst globalization, and an increase in global transparency (Potter, 2002). In addition, the landscape of public diplomacy is evolving with the growing importance of non-state actors, making it a critical aspect of international strategy and fostering greater collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations (Gilboa, 2008). This evolution has democratized access to information and broadened the range of

participants in public diplomacy to include not only state actors and the general public, but also nonprofit organizations and businesses, decentralizing authority and distributing power more broadly (Yepsen, 2012).

Social media's integration into public diplomacy brings the advantage of nurturing a new form of collective memory that preserves stories and events, potentially extending their influence well beyond the lifespan of specific campaigns. This digital collective memory ensures continued online accessibility of information, enhancing the durability of public diplomacy efforts (Luoma-aho & Paloviita 2010). Moreover, the redefinition of public diplomacy aims to evolve it into a collaborative mechanism that fosters better relations and understanding between states and citizens, moving beyond traditional state-centric approaches. This shift to a network-oriented model that incorporates the contributions of non-state actors underscores the growing strategic importance of public diplomacy in adapting to the dynamic global communication landscape, and demonstrates its role in maintaining the relevance and expanded impact of diplomatic initiatives in the digital age (Arsenault, 2009).

2.4 Communication Strategy in Public Diplomacy

People's varied connections to a country—which can be behavioral, linguistic, or visual—shape the country's collective image (Zenker & Braun, 2010). The official media campaigns, the nation's worldwide endeavors, and its historical, cultural, and environmental traits all contributed to the formation of this image (Kaneva, 2011). Furthermore, by emphasizing particular images and behaviors, content published on digital media by governmental and non-governmental organizations has a big influence on these impressions (Sevin, 2017). As a result, communication via digital media is a potent instrument that can alter how the world views a nation.

Information is designed to help specific organizational goals and is the actual outcome of a communication strategy (Hazleton & Long, 1988). The researchers developed a classification system that includes six strategies commonly used by governments in sending information to the public: information strategies, promotion strategies and persuasion strategies, commitment and reward strategies; threats and punishments; bargaining strategy; and collaborative problem-solving strategies (Werder, 2006). Information strategy provides

neutral, impartial facts for the audience to interpret. Promoting strategies to support individual-oriented actions by providing the necessary resources. Convincing tactics, through emotional appeals, often contain explicit or implied calls for action. Commitment and reward strategies imply that compliance with the rules brings positive results, while threats and punishment strategies warn that non-compliance will have negative consequences. The bargaining strategy emphasizes group differences in languages such as “we” or “them” through interactive communication. Collaborative problem-solving strategies use inclusive language to unite people and work together to goals, thereby fostering a common sense of goal.

Amid the evolving dynamics of international relations, understanding the sentiments and reactions of global audiences poses a significant challenge. Despite strategic efforts in messaging and advertising, the impact on public opinion remains unpredictable. This complex landscape demands a refined approach to public diplomacy, capable of navigating the intricacies of global communication and audience engagement. Given communication's dual potential to either resolve misunderstandings or incite new conflicts, public diplomacy must maintain flexibility and proactiveness. Recognizing the need for advanced communication techniques is crucial for effectively managing the delicate balance of international relations and public perceptions, underscoring the importance of adaptability in today's interconnected world (Yepsen, 2012).

Opinion leaders in the domain of public diplomacy are shifting from merely spreading information to becoming focal points for specific issues, transitioning into roles as leaders of attention. This evolution emphasizes the critical nature of engaging with audiences through active listening, a concept underscored by Grunig et al. (2002). In public diplomacy, the distinction between tactical and strategic listening is crucial. Tactical listening aims to enhance communication effectiveness and involves two-way asymmetrical communication. In contrast, strategic listening, which is part of two-way symmetrical communication, informs decision-making and policy development. This differentiation underscores the need for strategies that genuinely engage and address audience interests, ensuring diplomacy efforts are truly audience-centric (Yepsen, 2012).

While information was initially intended for an international audience, public diplomacy has now expanded to include domestic people, who may assist shape foreign policy by providing

input and clarifying international policy objectives to the home audience (Szondi, 2008). With the advancement of communication technologies, the lines between communicating information to foreign and domestic audiences have blurred, making it increasingly difficult to discern between public diplomacy and public affairs (Melissen, 2005)

3. Theory

Now I am going to show you a different approach to public diplomacy using nostalgia . To study and better understand why nostalgia is crucial in the theoretical exploration of emotional connections between expatriates and their homeland, it is particularly important to know under what circumstances nostalgic feelings arise. Zhou et al. (2013) describe that during significant global crises or social upheavals, an increase in existential feelings and social insecurity heightens people's reliance on nostalgic emotions.

3.1 About Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a sentiment of mindfulness that brings with it a desire (nostos) or pain (algos) to return to one's home or to that lost past. It makes one feel painful and turns one's attention from the present to the past, where memory brings a sense of integrity and belonging.

Nostalgia is seen as an emotional state that contains memory components (Holak & Havlena, 1998). Since the concept of "nostalgia" was first introduced (Hofer, 1688), its meaning has changed significantly. Initially, homeopathy was seen as a condition of both physiological and psychological symptoms, and was often considered a homesickness in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. By the early 20th century, nostalgia was classified as a mental illness. But by the middle of the 20th century, the perception of nostalgia had changed again, with some theories suggesting that nostalgia was a subconscious desire to return to the early stages of life, and even suggested that it was seen as a psycho-compulsive disorder (Sedikides et al., 2008). Nostalgia has been described as "the longing for yesterday," a longing for the past that consists mainly of positive memories and sensation-evoked thoughts. While memory is based on actual past experiences, it often involves distortions of memory that provide a better view of the past than what actually happened (Davis, 1979).

Nostalgia is considered to be a universal and personal feeling that is closely related to and different from distant past events (van Tilburg et al., 2019). In addition, it has several benefits, such as helping individuals to better understand their lives and providing support during difficult times (Juhl et al., 2010). This feeling is deeply connected to the past, which is why it is often used as a political tool.

Nostalgia, a multifaceted concept, can be categorized into two types: individual and collective. On the individual side, there are personal and historical nostalgias. Personal nostalgia is deeply rooted in an individual's unique experiences and memories, while historical nostalgia stems from an individual's imaginative connections to past historical events or periods, often influenced by media portrayals of eras before their lifetime. In the realm of collective nostalgia, we find cultural and virtual nostalgia (Holak & Havlena, 1998). Cultural nostalgia binds a group together through shared experiences of significant events, such as Christmas or 9/11, and fosters a communal sense of remembrance and celebration. Virtual nostalgia represents an indirect collective experience in which a generation or nation shares memories that reflect their broader cultural, generational, or national identity, transcending personal experiences to emphasize the shared heritage and identity that binds communities and societies together (Cui, 2015).

3.1.1 Elements Contributing to the Development of Nostalgia

Gender

Research has shown that people of different genders exhibit unique ways in the intensity and expression of nostalgic emotions. This difference suggests that gender influences the way nostalgic emotions are perceived and expressed (Holbrook & Schindler's, 1989). In this regard, research shows that women are more responsive to traditional emotions than men (Hepper et al., 2012), and that older women are much more sensitive to their history than older men (Gergov & Stoyanova, 2013). This discrepancy may be due to the influence of gender roles on memory and emotional processing (Havlena & Holak, 1991). Differences in the experience of nostalgia between genders can be compared to their different responses to concepts such as romance or fantasy. This underscores the fact that while nostalgia is a

universal experience, its interpretation and intensity can vary greatly between genders, highlighting the complex relationship between gender and psychological phenomena such as nostalgia (Stern, 1992).

Age

In their 1989 and 1991 studies, Holbrook and Schindler explored how people form taste and preference for pop music in late adolescence, and noted that this preference usually peaked around the age of 24. Nostalgia emotions often originate from experiences in adolescence and early adulthood (Davis, 1979). Earlier studies have shown that nostalgia often revolves around experiences in childhood or adolescence. Studies have shown that nostalgia memories are often associated with experiences from childhood or adolescence, which connect people with themselves when they were young (Wildschut et al., 2006). This suggests that while nostalgia is a common feeling experienced by people of different ages, the specific triggers of nostalgia vary depending on the individual's experiences of growth in adolescence, leading to different age groups of people recalling different objects or experiences when nostalgia, which reflect their unique growth phases and life experiences (Holbrook & Schindler, 1993).

3.2 Preference for Nostalgia

3.2.1 Feeling Influence

Nostalgia has multiple functions, including eliminating loneliness in a personal environment (Zhou et al., 2008), it can help people overcome boredom, because nostalgia reminds people of past experiences that affirm a general understanding of the meaning and purpose of life (Van Tilburg et al., 2013). Nostalgia is frequently connected with profound and lasting experiences, such as a lovely childhood, a significant graduation, or a memorable birthday. This emotion has the quality of pain since it may elicit both good and negative feelings (Huang et al., 2016). The positive and negative dual impacts that nostalgia may have on one's own emotions or conduct are highlighted by the fact that it can also have a negative influence and can be interpreted as a yearning for prior sorrow or misery (Ortony et al. 1990).

At the personal level, research has found that nostalgia can help eliminate loneliness (Zhou et al., 2008). It is closely related to personal identity and social relationships, often around self-awareness and relationships with important others, such as family and friends. These

nostalgic reflections help to strengthen personal identity and social bonds (Wildschut et al., 2006). In a social environment, awakening can meet people's needs for belonging (Gardner et al. 2005) and can enhance social connections (Wildschut et al, 2006).

Nostalgia is often a complex combination of positive emotions and slight sadness, making them emotionally more complicated than everyday memories or pure happy memories. This mixture of pleasure and sadness defines the characteristics of nostalgia. Although nostalgia emotions are complex, because of the more positive components, nostalgia generally produces more positive emotions than negative emotions (Wildschut et al., 2008). When individuals engage in nostalgia, people tend to feel stronger positive emotion, which is more pronounced than reflection of daily events, and negative emotion does not increase accordingly. This phenomenon suggests that, although nostalgia can sometimes lead to sadness, it mainly promotes positive emotion (Zhou et al. 2008).

In nostalgic narrative, you can often see the interaction of positive and negative factors, this structure usually begins with a challenging or negative experience and ends with a positive, victorious ending. Such a narrative emphasizes the transitional processes in these experiences. Such storytelling in nostalgia emphasizes the transformation process in these experiences. The past of difficulty or pain is often combined with positive insights or results, which shows how nostalgic is able to re-shape past difficult moments when one recalls one's growth, achievement, or happiness (McAdams, 2001).

3.2.2 Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is often thought to be related to the present situation, but it can also originate from memories of the past, thus provoking a sense of pleasure or pain in the present. This form, known as “the sense of belonging from a distance,” deals with experiences related to different times, and includes various types of memories. Among them, “memories in action” refers to how past experiences positively influence current feelings (May, 2017). Collective nostalgia refers to the shared longing for the past within a community, stemming from the inherent human need for belonging and the creation of strong emotional bonds within a group. This phenomenon plays a key role in fulfilling the need for belonging. When individuals collectively engage in nostalgic reflections, it not only helps them assimilate into the group but also fosters an environment of empathy and warmth. This shared experience of nostalgia mitigates feelings of loneliness and enhances a sense of security, thereby connecting

individuals to their past and deepening their bonds with others who share similar nostalgic sentiments. This strengthens group cohesion and emotional support, highlighting the importance of collective nostalgia in both individual and communal well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In the absence of a dominant mainstream culture, people often exhibit a heightened nostalgia for historical and cultural aspects of the past. This trend is particularly noticeable in contexts where there's a perceived lack of cultural orientation. Consequently, such environments foster collective nostalgia, which is shaped by a broader societal inclination to seek identity or comfort in historical and cultural recollections. The insights highlight the unique interplay between cultural context and nostalgic tendencies in different societies (Zhao, 2006).

4. Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore how public diplomacy affects overseas citizens' perceptions of the country in times of crisis, especially China's practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. We mainly analyze how Chinese public diplomacy, by ignoring such strategies, influences the perception of Chinese overseas citizens in the Covid-19 crisis. The study will also assess the challenges and opportunities China encounters in communicating with their overseas citizens, as well as the effectiveness of these strategies in changing their overseas citizen's response to the Chinese national image. Furthermore, the study will explore how the Chinese Government applies nostalgia in its public diplomatic efforts, including the use of official social media platforms and strategies to support Chinese citizens overseas.

Chinese nationals who were living overseas during the COVID-19 pandemic were questioned by me to have a fuller knowledge of the problem. The purpose of this research is to investigate the tactics used and their rationales in order to gain a thorough understanding of how China's public diplomacy affected their overseas citizen perceptions of China during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study tries to have a deeper knowledge of public diplomacy through analysis of China's actions during the COVID-19 epidemic. The study will illustrate the practical impact of public diplomacy on how foreign nationals see their country during times of crisis.

4.1 Epistemology

Epistemology focuses on how knowledge is created, learned and disseminated (Scotland, 2012). These theories explore how epistemology is formed and disseminated, based on a number of high-level theoretical principles that help us understand reality and the origin of knowledge (Pascale, 2010). Episteme refers to a set of concepts and norms of a particular

period, including language, discovery and system development. It also deals with the distinction and integration of different areas of knowledge (Foucault, 1972). From the perspective of epidemiology, knowledge is essentially the way an individual explains and understands the world based on his or her own observations and interactions, influenced by existing knowledge structures, experiences, or rational thinking. In qualitative research, knowledge is derived from experiential thinking, while empirical thinking can help to understand social phenomena in depth. This approach relies on intuition and sensitive insights into the individual's inner world, linking consciousness, emotion and being (Hernández & Padrón, 1997).

Epistemology is the study of how knowledge is generated and understood, and is an important philosophical basis for the choice of research methods. It explores the nature and limits of knowledge and guides researchers in how to collect, analyse and interpret data (Lather, 2006). Epistemology influences all stages of research, including initial assumptions about the nature of knowledge, the construction of theory, the framing of research questions, and the overall structure of research. It fundamentally guides researchers in the design and conduct of research. The impact of epistemology is not limited to the conduct of research, but also extends to how the academic community shares, interprets and evaluates research findings. This impact also extends to different understandings of knowledge and influences the way in which research findings are accepted and applied (Pallas, 2001).

The choice of research methods and approaches is heavily influenced by epistemology, which is the study of the origins of knowledge and how it is interpreted; it examines the processes of knowledge formation, acquisition and dissemination and how they are influenced by basic theoretical positions about reality and the nature of knowledge (Pascale, 2010). From the development of fundamental ideas about the nature of knowledge to the production and dissemination of research findings, these theoretical frameworks are essential to the entire research process (Pallas, 2001). Epistemology influences how researchers approach research questions, generate hypotheses and plan studies. According to this view, knowledge is created through an individual's interactions with their environment and is shaped by their prior knowledge, past experiences and logical reasoning. In qualitative research, for example, information is gained through experiential thinking, with an emphasis on using the close links

between intuition and personal experience - which encompasses all facets of awareness, emotion and existence - to understand social phenomena (Pallas, 2001).

Furthermore, the belief in epistemology is deeply embedded in a particular period of the 'episteme', a conceptual framework that contains specific ideas and norms and involves the creation of language, discovery and system (Foucault, 1972). When researchers publish their research findings, the cognitive views they hold will strongly influence how these findings are interpreted and used by the academic community, thereby affecting the degree of acceptance of the research findings (Pallas, 2001). Epistemology not only guides the specific conduct of research, but also influences how academics understand and conduct research, reflecting different views of knowledge and its application (Crotty, 1998; Lather, 2006).

4.2 Research Strategy

This study uses qualitative research methods to explore how Chinese public diplomacy used country sentiment to establish an emotional connection with Chinese citizens abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach is suitable for studying complex and subjective phenomena involving emotional resonance and national identity in international crises. Qualitative research can explore cognitive and emotional depths and facilitate the collection of detailed data (Bryman 2016). The aim of such research is to deepen understanding of theories and concepts by analysing how individuals make sense of their experiences. It focuses on emotion and memory and provides in-depth insights into the subject of study. The flexibility of qualitative research also allows for the study of emerging topics and the detailed observation of participants' emotional and physical responses (Warren & Karner, 2005).

This study employs qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex life experiences of Chinese citizens abroad. Through interviews and qualitative content analysis, the study aims to capture the emotions, subjective ideas, and perceptions of individuals participating in and responding to China's digital diplomatic activities. This approach considers reality not only as an observable experience, but also as a construct created by the individual through interaction with the media and personal experience (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009).

Detailed data analysis includes searching for patterns and associations with the aim of establishing a theoretical or conceptual framework (Bryman 2016). I conducted a series of interviews from late March to early April and transcribed the conversation in a timely manner after the end of the interview. The data encoding process combines interpretative and summary approaches (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). Through this summary approach, researchers can identify themes and patterns directly from the primary data, helping to naturally form insights. This approach avoids the restrictions on the use of traditional rigorous frameworks and is therefore a preferred approach. The summary method is widely used in social science research (Creswell, 2009), because it keeps research openness, allowing research results to develop naturally from data, without being bound by pre-emptive assumptions or theories. This approach broadened my research horizons, allowing me to explore more potential discoveries from interviews.

4.2.1 Selection of research site

China is one of the countries with the biggest number of expatriate populations in the world, according to statistics (statista.com, 2023). As of the now, 10.7 million Chinese nationals reside overseas, and there are roughly 60 million of their descendants (Guotu, 2022). The significance that these Chinese expatriates play in advancing China's public diplomacy is highly valued by the Chinese government.

Many Chinese living abroad were unable to return home as a result of China's stricter "zero policy" and restrictions measures during the pandemic than many other nations. In order to deal with this situation, the Chinese government began using text and video strategic communication to build an attachment with its people on an emotional level. The goal of this is to make sure that Chinese living abroad continue to appreciate the love and support of their home country, which will enhance their sense of Chinese identity. The Chinese government uses these emotional and nostalgic communication strategies not only to keep in touch, but also to deepen ties with overseas citizens during this difficult time of the pandemic.

This study explores how the Chinese government communicates to Chinese overseas through strategic communication during the epidemic. I have selected three concrete examples to

show how Chinese tradition is used as a communication strategy to express concern from the motherland, and these examples reflect how to use this technique to maintain emotional connections with Chinese abroad in a global crisis.

The first example, titled "The Motherland is Always With You," and the second, titled "Health Pack," were submitted by an overseas Chinese who lives in Japan. The following examples demonstrate the considerate acts and emotional feelings that the Chinese Embassy in Japan used to communicate concern during the crisis in an effort to provide Chinese expatriates with a feeling of support and connection with their homeland. A YouTube video titled "We will wait until life returns to normal" serves as the third example. The public can see in this film the measures taken by the government to ensure the safety of its residents throughout the pandemic and the anticipated return of normalcy to life in the near future. Notably, YouTube is prohibited in China, indicating that the video was created specifically for Chinese living abroad.

These campaigns were chosen because they directly relate to the research question of how nostalgic communication strategies affect the emotions and identities of overseas Chinese. Supported by direct experiences from respondents and public resources, they provide a solid empirical foundation for the study.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Identifying informants

Easy sampling and rolling snowball sampling are both used in this study. Easy sampler is a non-random sampler strategy that selects participants based on availability, convenience of location, or willingness to engage, as opposed to random selection. Due to its simplest form of use and effectiveness in gathering data, this approach is frequently employed (Dörnyei, 2007). I started my study with friends and selected the first responses using simple sampler techniques. This makes it possible for me to collect effective data from populations that can easily be accessed, which simplifies the study process.

In addition to facilitating sampling, the study also used rolling snowball samplings to extend the range of participants beyond the crowd I have direct contact with. In the snowball sampling, participants who already participated would recommend others in their network to participate in the study. This process continues until the data is saturated, i.e. no new information appears (Burns & Grove, 1993). In this way, as participants recommend others from their own social circles, the study is able to gather more diverse perspectives, thereby improving the depth and quality of qualitative analysis. This process continued until sufficient data was collected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences during the study.

4.3.2 Semi-Structured interview

Since qualitative interviews are well-suited for in-depth insight into individual perspectives—a crucial component of investigating the nuanced perceptions of Chinese citizens abroad regarding Chinese public diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic—they were selected as the primary method for this study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Individual narratives that highlight the participants' nuanced experiences, emotional reactions, and ways in which individuals change their perception of their nation can be gathered using this methodology.

While the interviews contain some structured content, they are mainly guided by a range of topics or issues with flexible wording and order. This flexibility allows researchers to adjust quickly to respondents' answers, perspectives, and new insights that may emerge in the discussion. Semi-structured interviews have obvious advantages for qualitative research, such as the ability to collect data purposefully while allowing participants to express their personal views. However, this type of interview may encounter some challenges when analyzing data and comparing responses from different participants. Whether to use semi-structured interviews depends on what kind of data the study requires and the specific focus of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In order to study how the Chinese Government used nostalgia as a communication strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic, and its impact on the perception of the image of the country by overseas Chinese, I interviewed 10 Chinese citizens who living abroad, they lived in

countries such as Sweden, Denmark, the United States and Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic, all of whom had long lived abroad and actively followed the Chinese government’s policies and public diplomatic activities on social media.

The interviews in this study will be conducted separately through Zoom or WeChat platforms, which are very popular in the Chinese community, and I am currently in Europe, so it is not realistic to conduct face-to-face interviews. Interviews will be held in Mandarin because all respondents are Chinese nationals residing abroad. This will facilitate clear communication and guarantee that their opinions are completely understood. It should be mentioned that my buddies and their acquaintances are the participants in this study. Their great trust in me allows me to be more open and truthful during the interview, which in turn allows them to share more intimate feelings and perspectives. The legitimacy and persuasiveness of the research findings are enhanced by this trust, which also greatly enhances the quality and depth

Table 1: Interviewees

Interviewee	Occupation of Interviewee	Date of Interview	Interview duration	Location of Interviewee
1	Student	25.03.2024	00:59	Sweden
2	Brand Manager	28.03.2024	01:10	USA
3	Software Engineer	28.03.2024	01:20	USA
4	Marketing Specialist	30.03.2024	01:13	USA
5	Phd student	22.03. 2024	1:20	Japan
6	Master student	21.03. 2024	1:14	Japan
7	Sales	21.03. 2024	1:28	Japan
8	Student	17.03. 2024	0:45	Sweden
9	Student	21.03. 2024	1:20	Japan
10	Phd	03.04. 2024	1:02	Denmark

4.4 Qualitative interviews

As qualitative interviews are well suited to providing in-depth insights into individual perspectives - a crucial component of exploring the nuanced perceptions of Chinese citizens abroad of Chinese public diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic - they were chosen as the primary method for this study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Rich individual narratives that highlight the participants' nuanced experiences, emotional reactions, and ways in which individuals shape their perception of their nation can be gathered using this methodology. Research can also delve further into newly discussed issues thanks to the flexibility of qualitative interviews, which helps to clarify the impact of China's diplomatic initiatives on these individuals. Using this approach, the aim of the study is to capture the diverse and complex attitudes towards Chinese public diplomacy in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Chinese public Diplomacy on the national image of foreigners during the global crisis.

4.4.1 Translation

All interviews were conducted in Chinese, so all interview records were also in Chinese in order to keep the interviewees' answers. Another reason for choosing this method is that the interviewee's English level is not sufficient to express his thoughts freely. Therefore, all the quotations used for analysis are translated from Chinese to English. I recognize that there may be some problems in the translation process. Because the same wording may have different meanings and subtleties in different languages, it can be challenging to translate the text. In the process of translating the content of the interview from Chinese into English, there is a high likelihood of misunderstanding the original information. In order to minimize misunderstandings and maintain the accuracy of the information, I raised a number of follow-up questions during the interview, and after the interview the original text and translation of the speech will be sent to the interviewee with confirmation.

4.5 Method of Analysis

4.5.1 Coding

Organizing and encoding various data segments using shortcuts like words, characters, numbers, phrases, or colors is essential for processing qualitative data. Finding and rapidly retrieving specific information is made easier using this label system (Tisdell & Merriam, 2019). The primary data can be arranged conceptually to aid in data interpretation. Researchers must actively seek for and identify comparable projects, viewpoints, or phenomena inside data. Organizing and analyzing the gathered data using this methodical technique is important (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

In this study, I develop categories after coding the data and group the codes into different categories. such as : Feeling _Trigger, Government_ Care, Government_Support, Longing_Connection.

4.5.2 Narrative Analysis

The use of narrative as a fundamental framework for meaning creation in strategic communication has received increasing attention in recent times. According to this method, narratives are texts that require strategic analysis. Narratives are seen as an individual category of texts in public diplomacy. This strategy is not the same as conventional communications strategies. Narrative has a significant role in public diplomacy by influencing organized cognition and moral judgment, not only by serving as a stand-in for facts. This difference demonstrates the creative influence of narrative-centered methods in public diplomacy (Hayden, 2013).

My paper explores in detail how the Chinese government used social media content as a public diplomatic tool for overseas Chinese during the COVID-19 pandemic through narrative analysis. This analysis covers the contents, themes and emotional clues of social media narratives, and evaluates how these narratives link and influence Chinese abroad. In addition, I visited 10 overseas Chinese to supplement my narrative analysis with a deeper understanding of how these government messages are received and read emotionally. This comprehensive analysis revealed not only their consistency with broader diplomatic objectives, but also their impact on international awareness and strengthening cultural ties during the global crisis.

In the process of telling stories, emotions are closely linked to the cognitive aspects of the narrative. The narrative needs to explore not only the cognitive dimension of emotion, but also to express the emotion itself, making it a central part of the story (De Sousa, 1990). The narrative demonstrates the close connection between emotion and cognition, and it can even be said that they are inherently united, which provides an in-depth insight into our understanding of human experience. Emotions do not exist independently, but are integrated into the stories we experience, shaped by the characters, circumstances and events in the stories. This view challenges the traditional approach to separating thinking and emotions, emphasizing the inherent link between them (Jochen, 2011). When analyzing stories, language is the key to capturing the essence of emotion. Different emotional narrative structures are characterized by the following: happy narratives tend to be less dramatic; angry narratives follow the traditional ups and downs and ending structures; and fear narratives peak when they peak, after which the action does not diminish (Hudson et al., 1992).

In this study, storytelling is a key method to explore the emotional and cognitive responses of overseas Chinese citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study uses narrative structures to analyze how these citizens perceive emotionally and relate to their country. Using De Sousa's (1990) and Jochen's (2011) theories, this analysis explores in depth how language captures emotional details. It looks closely at how vocabulary choices, speaking rhythms and the use of metaphorical language reveal hidden emotional states, and the relationship between these states and the participants' associations with their homeland. This approach emphasizes the importance of analyzing emotions in narratives and provides a detailed dynamic view of human experience and emotions through descriptive narratives. This approach aims to deepen our understanding of the emotional experiences of overseas Chinese citizens during major global events.

4.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves accurately describing the phenomena under study, interpreting and explaining the data through a conceptual framework, and classifying the data accordingly. This process leads to the development and interconnection of concepts, ultimately building a coherent analytical structure (Dey, 1993). To analyze the qualitative

data collected from the semi-structured interviews, I used a thematic analysis approach because it is highly effective in identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). I began by developing a detailed coding scheme, which involved categorizing the data into specific themes based on recurring patterns and insights derived from the interview responses. I started with going through and understanding all the responses we got from the interviews and that is the reason why I need to document each interview clearly and completely to ensure not missing any important data. Following transcription, I read through the transcripts multiple times to familiarize with the depth and breadth of the content. This iterative process of reading allowed me to begin identifying preliminary codes, which were then grouped into potential themes that consistently appeared across the data set.

After then, I refined the coding scheme by combining similar codes and defining overarching themes. Each theme was carefully reviewed and defined to capture the essence of the related data. I also constantly compared themes with each other to ensure that they were distinct yet interrelated in meaningful ways, providing a comprehensive view of the data. The themes I used to analyze data are: *Sounds from homeland, Longing for the homeland, Isolated Alongside the Homeland, Sense of belonging, care from homeland*

4.7 Reliability and Validity

Reliability in qualitative studies is considered to be the consistency of data interpretation by different analysts. Reliability is assessed by testing whether other researchers can obtain consistent interpretations and results when analyzing the same narrative data under similar conditions (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). A reliability test is the ability to obtain consistent results for different participants in the process of duplicate data collection and analysis (Kirk & Miller, 1986). This reliability is often referred to as "replicability", involving researchers' efforts to identify and record any changes that may affect their observations (Trochim, 2005). The key to ensuring the effectiveness of interviews is to formulate questions that are relevant to research issues and are clear and concise. In addition, the interview questions should be open-ended so that participants can provide comprehensive answers (Tisdell & Merriam, 2019).

In this study, the respondents were Chinese citizens who lived abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic and had a personal experience during that period. What is very important is that researchers need to make sure that their prejudices and assumptions do not affect the results. To reduce this impact, researchers must be aware of and consciously avoid bringing in any preconceived ideas or prejudices during interviews (Tisdell & Merriam, 2019). Reliability is ensured through the use of standardized interview methods and carefully documented analytical steps, ensuring consistency in the explanations obtained by different researchers. In order to maintain validity, the interview questions are designed in a clear and concise manner and are relevant to the topic of the study, which are open and allow participants to provide detailed, substantive answers. These measures ensure the reliability of the results of the interviews and accurately reflect the views and experiences of respondents on the policies of the Chinese Government during the COVID-19 crisis. However, a potential limitation of the study is that the sample volume is small, with only 10 respondents, which may affect the study's wide applicability and depth.

4.8 Research Ethics

Ethical standards are essential to ensure that everyone involved in the study, including researchers, participants and those using the results, understands and adheres to the correct code of conduct (Bryman, 2016). Before the start of each interview, I would make it clear to the participants the purpose of the study and encourage them to express their true ideas. I will also inform them that the interviews will be recorded for analysis. Protecting the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of participants is key to addressing ethical issues in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In this study, we strictly adhere to ethical norms and ensure that the welfare and rights of participants are protected. Our basic practices include obtaining informed consent before the start of the interview, ensuring that participants' answers are confidential and anonymous, and conducting interviews in a private environment. After the interview, participants were given the opportunity to learn about the purpose of the study and were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. These measures are key to protecting the physical and mental health of participants and ensuring that research is conducted on the basis of integrity and respect (Tisdell & Merriam, 2019). Given the sensitivity of discussing

Chinese government policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have taken additional measures to protect the identity of participants. To ensure the safety of participants, all personal identification information is kept strictly confidential. Participants were free to express their views and share their experiences without fear of being affected. Any information that could identify individuals was omitted or modified when presenting the data, not only in accordance with research ethics standards, but also helping to openly discuss the views and experiences of participants during this critical period, while protecting the integrity of the study.

5. Analysis

The way China is handling the COVID-19 outbreak has drawn interest from around the world. The international media said that the restrictions were worse than those in many Western nations. Widespread blockades of large cities, severe travel bans, and stringent preventive efforts known as "14+14+7"—14 days of intense prevention, 14 days of home prevention, and 7 days of health monitoring—are some of these tactics. Furthermore, a number of cities were restricted, underscoring China's rigorous measures to stop the virus's spread (BBC, 2020).

Some expressed confidence in China's implementation of such strict policies, claiming it as evidence of the country's organizational strength and commitment to public health. Others, on the other hand, were worried about the blockade's effects on society and the economy as well as how it might limit people's freedoms. In addition, they were worried about how disruptions to foreign flights may affect family relationships, cause concerns about traveling abroad, and result in psychological stress from extended isolation.

In addition, overseas Chinese society responded differently to the Chinese government's public-diplomatic strategy during the epidemic. Some people praised China's involvement in international cooperation, the provision of medical supplies for the global fight against COVID-19 and the sharing of its experience in containment, as enhancing its image as a responsible world power. However, there was also criticism of China's lack of transparency and openness in sharing pandemic information and data, arguing that this undermined global confidence and understanding of Chinese response to the pandemic.

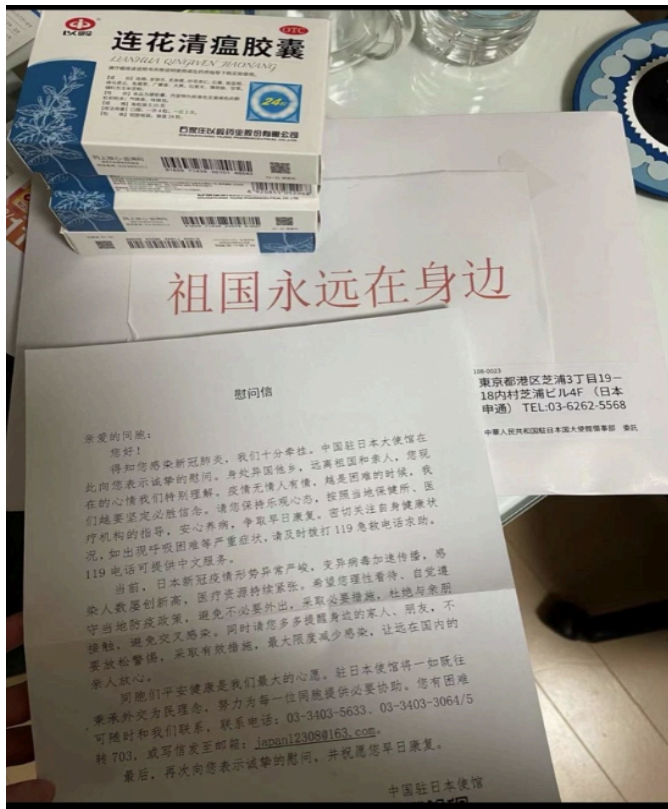
The Chinese Government considers overseas Chinese to be an important population resource, and President Xi emphasized that uniting a united front is key to uniting Chinese children at home and abroad and making China a superpower (Xinhua, 2022). The Chinese government has developed a system relating to Chinese residents with two main objectives: 1) to use them

to enhance China's cultural soft power, and 2) to build a "bamboo network" to promote the development of foreign affairs. Soft power refers to a country's ability to persuade others to act according to their will through the promotion of positive cultures and values. In a public speech, President Xi said that the role of overseas Chinese is to help strengthen China's soft power and increase its attractiveness and credibility through creative communication and media forms (China news, 2014). Therefore, the international community generally considers overseas Chinese as one of the most potential groups to effectively enhance China's image. Next, I will make a detailed analysis, combining examples and the contents of the interview.

5.1 Strategic use of Nostalgia

During the pandemic, the Chinese government or its embassy spoke with overseas Chinese three times: "The motherland will always be with you," "the health package," and "we will wait until our lives return to normal." The Chinese government underlined that, wherever they were, the motherland stood with foreign immigrants, and these communications reflected the country's warmth and caring.

5.1.1 Strategic narrative of Home:



In response to the pandemic, the Chinese Embassy in Japan published a letter to Chinese abroad citizens titled "The motherland is always with you" in 2022, expressing concern for those people whose affected. The letter confirms their emotions of isolation from their homelands and separation from their families, and it points out clearly that the motherland will be with them forever. The message encourages people to be positive, follow local medical guidelines, and aggressively seek assistance in crises. At the same time, the letter underscores the serious nature of the pandemic in Japan and urges everyone to follow the vaccination program and limit exits and exposures to avoid cross-infection. The Embassy agreed to give the necessary assistance and provided contact phone numbers and email addresses. Finally, the Embassy once again expressed its sincere condolences to the people affected by the epidemic and wished them early recovery.

Firstly, the medical aid provided by the Chinese embassy to overseas citizens carries a strong emotional undertone. because when you get the letter it will feel like it has been taken care of by the government. he or she has not forgotten their motherland. It hopes to invoke nostalgic feelings towards the motherland and accept the medical help, especially when accompanied by a letter from the motherland, which can recall warm memories of Chinese culture and

homesickness. This emotion is particularly potent abroad. Nostalgia is not only a remembrance of the past but also an emotional solace for the current state of isolation, reinforcing one's sense of self and strengthening communal connections (Wildschut, et al, 2006). In this context, nostalgia as a public diplomacy strategy can strengthen the emotional ties between overseas Chinese citizens and their homeland.

Second, Chinese people living overseas may be able to share these messages with their friends via Weibo or Wechat. Sharing letters and images of medical supplies on social media can send messages that strengthen these connections both visually and emotionally. Images and storylines can travel quickly on social media, influencing more overseas Chinese and instilling trust and goodwill in China. It also comforts Chinese people that no matter where they are in the globe, their motherland will not forget them. They have a strong and caring motherland, which strengthens their passion for the country.

In analyzing this case, this case uses emotionally charged language that gives a sense of protection and belonging. Like "The Motherland is Always by Your Side" are specifically chosen to resonate with the deep-seated feelings associated with home and safety. The provision of medical supplies alongside through the letter gives emotional support reinforces the idea of an ever-present, caring homeland. The Chinese government may use nostalgia as a tool of soft power, providing emotional connection and recognition for the aid from the homeland through the sending of these letters and medicines during the highly unstable social context of a pandemic. This strategy especially emphasizes the use of nostalgic emotions, connections of affection, and belonging, as well as reliance on the homeland during a global crisis. The actions of the Chinese Embassy provide tangible aid and psychological support to overseas Chinese citizens, strengthening their emotional ties to China by evoking their shared memories and cultural identity. As described by Holak and Havlena (1998), this tends to evoke positive emotions and feelings of warmth and gratitude, which can create excitement associated with them. This strategy likely played a positive role in enhancing the image of the Chinese government among its citizens abroad during the pandemic. It is not only a response to immediate needs but also a deeper emotional and cultural strategy that, through a nostalgic lens, emphasizes the importance of national identity and cultural continuity. In times of uncertainty and difficulty, such an approach could be particularly effective because it provides individuals with psychological comfort and a sense of belonging. However, whether overseas Chinese believe these words depends on their trust in the government. Moreover,

how many overseas Chinese truly care about the comfort these words may provide? As people filled with anxiety and unrest during the pandemic, most of them desire tangible help rather than empty words.

5.1.2 Strategic narrative of Care:



In April 2020, many WeChat groups of Chinese people in Japan received a public account post about the distribution of "health bags." The post allowed people to log in to the embassy's website, fill in their information, and collect the supplies at their locations. Through this message, the Chinese government expressed its care and support for the overseas Chinese in Japan. It acknowledged the contributions of these students to the fight against the pandemic in China and praised the patriotism of the Chinese people in Japan. They were moved by the heartfelt patriotism shown through donations and collection of supplies to support the homeland's fight against the pandemic. As the situation in Japan worsened, the homeland also showed its concern by providing protective materials. The article emphasized the government's attention to the safety and health of overseas Chinese and highlighted the embassy as a reliable support channel they could turn to for help. It also urged students to pay attention to pandemic information and take appropriate personal protection measures.

When the spread began overseas, the Chinese Embassy launched a well-planned effort through cultural and emotional connections, using patriotic sentiment as a link. By strengthening their ties with their country of origin, this letter demonstrates China's concern for its overseas people. In the

midst of the global pandemic, the embassy's help and equipment provide not only physical but also emotional comfort. This shows that even in exotic countries, overseas Chinese can still feel the care of their homeland.

The article praised the Chinese in Japan for their contributions to the country's fight against the pandemic, which inspired them to feel their homeland's recognition and appreciation for their actions. In addition, the embassy's reference to "all-heartedness" and concern for the health of the students' lives adopted a strong retrospective and emotional resonance strategy aimed at evoking and strengthening the overseas citizens' identity with the country.

In analyzing the letter, the concern and support shown in the analysis of the letter demonstrated the Chinese government's desire to maintain and strengthen the ties between overseas citizens and the country. Studies have found that loneliness is associated with homelessness, while homelessness is associated with a greater sense of social support (Zhou et al., 2008). An old-fashioned mood helps alleviate loneliness and increases social support. This link can not only convey the message that the motherland is willing to help, but also build a mutually supportive image of the community, which is important for overseas citizens in these times of uncertainty. This strategy makes overseas Chinese feel that they are not isolated individuals, but part of a larger social collective, thereby stimulating their interest in the Chinese government or China itself.

5.1.3 Strategic narrative of Hope:

The government has produced a video showing an example of how China used social media to conduct public diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The film attempts to influence Chinese citizens by using memory as a communication strategy. The video was posted on YouTube and various official WeChat accounts, highlighting the national medical rescue personnel working together to hurry to Wuhan, as well as the first-line staff and medical personnel's unselfish dedication. It not only demonstrates the spirit of crowding in the face of the epidemic, but, more importantly, it utilizes the audience's sentiment of pre-epidemic life and depicts the optimistic prospect of returning to normal life. This strategy effectively conveys a warm and familiar feeling, strengthens the emotional link between the people and the country, and demonstrates China's determination and ability to fight the epidemic

(Brewer et al., 2021). Through YouTube, the main audience of the video is overseas Chinese. Thus, as a public diplomatic tool, the film seeks to use the history of China to enhance the national image and international influence, especially among overseas citizens, and to promote understanding and support for China's COVID-19 policy and efforts.



(The perseverance of medical staff ; I am with you)



(Medical teams from cities across China were dispatched to support Wuhan; We support each other)



(Frontline workers, working 24 hours a day to build makeshift hospitals; We care about you)



(Life back to normal; We have hopes)

These images are from the third camping, moments captured in a YouTube video. These moments and the text showcase how the Chinese government is trying to emotionally connect with overseas Chinese through words and film.

5.2 Feelings of Nostalgia

5.2.1 Sounds from homeland

In public diplomacy, especially during public crises, the credibility of government information is particularly crucial, as it directly influences the public's trust in and compliance with government measures. During this interview, when I asked the interviewees about the credibility of the information released by the Chinese government during the pandemic, most of them told me that their trust was divided into three phases: the initial outbreak, the middle phase, and the end phase of the pandemic. One interviewee told me:

“At first, I would believe it, but later on, I would start to view a lot of the information with skepticism [...] I believed the government for the first two months, but later on, I increasingly felt that the credibility was getting lower.”

“If it were out of 100 percent, I would say 80% at the beginning, 60% in the middle, and only 30% at the end. The government seemed more willing to use certain data and information to convey control and reassurances, rather than providing in-depth understanding and solutions, which only increased the pressure on front-line workers.”

According to the responses from the aforementioned interviews, a lot of respondents think that initially, people tend to have more faith in government information. This is a result of the public's tendency to look for reliable information sources in order to comprehend and react to events. But when the situation worsens and goes on, people's trust in the government will erode if they believe that information provided by the government is inaccurate or if they believe that the government is not acting promptly or transparently in handling the problem. Initially, the government gained a higher level of confidence (80%), but over time it declined significantly to only 30% at the end of the epidemic. The decline is mainly due to the fact that governments may be too focused on controlling emotions when publishing information, rather than emphasizing transparency and effectiveness, leading to public doubts about the authenticity of information and the efficacy of government measures.

5.2.2 Feelings Collection

While discussing how the Chinese government can maintain feelings of contact with overseas Chinese through its social media strategy, cultural, emotion and self-identification has

become important when discussing how the Chinese government can maintain emotional connections with overseas Chinese people through its social media strategy. The use of cultural nostalgia refers to a form of collective memory within a group that is linked to important national events or cultural traditions (Holak and Havlena, 1998). This communication strategy is more than just a message, it is also a cultural and emotional exchange that aims to strengthen and rebuild the emotional identity and cultural identity of Chinese overseas.

Longing for the homeland

The three-year epidemic has caused many Chinese overseas to be trapped abroad and unable to return home. When I asked them if they wanted home, everyone said they missed it. In Chinese culture, home is a very important concept. Being able to reunite with family, especially on holidays, is one of the most precious moments in Chinese culture.

“During the pandemic, being stuck overseas and unable to return home for the festivals was really frustrating. I miss my home and all the memories came back. Scrolling through Weibo or WeChat, it was all too easy to come across celebration photos and videos of the Spring Festival from family or friends[...] You know the feeling, as if you were right there, but then you realize you're actually just staring at a screen[...]”

Spring Festival and other traditional festivals are very important to Chinese people, whether they are at home or abroad. Emotional stress is greater for people who are unable to go home due to epidemics. The Chinese government has tried to alleviate this pressure by sharing festival videos and pictures on social media (such as Weibo and WeChat) that help overseas Chinese people stay in touch with their homelands and participate remotely in family celebrations (Holak and Havlena, 1998). This connection provides a cultural and emotional comfort. However, the indirect experience of festival celebrations through the screen, although helpful, may also increase their feelings of loneliness and homelessness, especially when they are unable to gather home during the epidemic. Another interviewee noted that this sense of loneliness could lead to a negative view of the government (Zhou et al., 2008).

"After moving to Japan in 2018, I had planned to return home in 2020 since I had just been accepted into a PhD program. I felt it was crucial to go home for the Spring Festival before starting my doctorate, as I might not be able to return for several years during my studies. However, due to the pandemic, I couldn't go back because it was too complicated with the required quarantines. The policies made it impossible for me to return, and I really missed my home. This longing made me very angry about the government's quarantine policies. The films and pictures shared by the government didn't really strengthen my emotional connection to China. Instead, they made me miss home more, and being unable to return only fueled my anger."

"On the contrary, being unable to return home during the pandemic made me feel indifferent about not returning, especially since there was a domestic sentiment against students studying abroad returning, and the process of returning was complicated and unwelcoming."

While social media and digital technology allow overseas Chinese people to keep in touch with their families through video calls and sharing photos and videos, this virtual way of connecting does not really ease their feelings of homeland. In fact, publishing nostalgia content tends to make their homeland feel stronger. Inability to return to the country personally transformed this strong sense of homeland into dissatisfaction and anger with policy. However, the emotional impact is not so apparent for those who have lived overseas for more than a decade. For example, a person I interviewed who has lived in Sweden for over 10 years expressed that

"It had no effect; I didn't feel anything. The sense of festival has been fading over time, and with the complications and cost of returning home, including quarantine and testing, it's not worth[...]"

At the same time, a male interviewee who has lived in Japan for 10 years told me that he feels there is a festive atmosphere in Japan as well, because there are many Chinese people there. Even without returning to China, he can experience a strong sense of the New Year, as some Chinatowns in Japan host events like dragon and lion dances, and hang lanterns among other

activities. Therefore, during the pandemic, due to China's strict quarantine policies, he felt fortunate to be in Japan instead.

Sense of belonging

During the pandemic, the Chinese government or the Chinese embassies overseas released some emotionally charged posts, such as slogans about 'united in spirit, solidarity, facing challenges together, the motherland progresses with you.' These posts had different impacts on overseas Chinese due to varying levels of credibility of the government. One interviewee told me:

“It might have happened when I was a child, but definitely not now. There was a time when I returned to China to take care of my grandfather, and that period made me very angry because of the pandemic. Our family couldn't enter the hospital to take care of my grandfather, we faced many restrictions, and could only hire a caretaker. Also, two incidents deeply impacted me: the first incident was the Tianjin explosions, and the second was the Zhuozhou flood [...] This is our country's propaganda style: always trying to portray disasters as if they were weddings, constantly praising what the government has done, always making many promises to the public, but actually not fulfilling them. I harbor skepticism and distrust towards the media's conveyed messages because they do not match the reality of the situation.”

This viewpoint also appeared among several other interviewees.

‘I didn't feel any emotional support or sense of belonging. It all seemed like official rhetoric with no real help [...]’

“Previously, I felt empathy, such as during the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, because I was young at that time and it was effective for me. But now, I increasingly realize that this is actually a tradition, and it's not a good thing. They rationalize these things through rhetoric and language. But now, I don't really acknowledge these things; I am in a state of more or less mocking them [...] It

makes one feel a bit repelled. If it were the China of the past, I would still have confidence, but now I feel very disappointed.”

The interviewees consistently expressed a significant discrepancy between the government media's portrayal and their personal experiences or observed realities. Although government media might depict the country's situation and government efforts in an optimistic light, the interviewees felt that these portrayals did not align with actual circumstances. For instance, government media might focus extensively on positive news and successful cases, while downplaying or ignoring problems and challenges. This gap led to confusion and even dissatisfaction among the interviewees, as they felt that the information provided did not fully or accurately reflect their real-life situations and challenges they faced.

Furthermore, some interviewees have mistrusted and been dubious of information from the government and media because of prior experiences. They believe that governments are more concerned with maintaining their reputation than they are with being sufficiently open and sincere when handling public crises and disseminating information. They thus keep a close eye on any official information. The majority of respondents claimed that although the government had published emotionally charged messages in an effort to increase residents' sense of emotional support and belonging, these efforts had not really improved their sense of self or belonging. Rather, they saw the information as more of a government statement, a dearth of useful advice, and a strong emotional connection.

However, this is not the only viewpoint. Among my interviewees, due to varying personal experiences, there is also a group of people who praise the content released by the government.

“At that time, when I saw posts on Weibo and WeChat about how our government was united in fighting the epidemic, I really felt a resonance in my heart”

“I do have some emotional connection. These reports highlighted the unity of the Chinese people during a crisis and showcased the positive spirit within society.”

The interviews showed how differently Chinese overseas saw official information. During the pandemic, a few interviewees expressed gratitude for the government's unity and resolve. They experienced the strength of strong bonds and national solidarity with their homeland through social media posts from the government or embassy, which strengthened their love for it. However, the majority of interviewees disapproved of the government-issued material, believing it to be misleading and providing an escape from reality. These discrepancies suggested that winning the public's confidence and support in public diplomacy required information to be honest and transparent.

During the outbreak of the epidemic in the United States and other Western countries, the Chinese government changed its dissemination strategy and significantly increased the reporting of outbreaks overseas, especially at the time of the worst outbreak in the US. Not only television broadcasts, but also Chinese social media platforms such as Douyin, Weibo, and WeChat have regularly reported deaths overseas, noting some negligence of foreign governments in the policy of the epidemic. These reports also highlight the responsibility and dedication of Chinese medical personnel, as well as the courage of frontline staff to set up temporary hospitals, and highlight government assistance to the public. The content sparked widespread discussion in overseas Chinese communities, with different opinions amongst interviewees, one of whom said,

“ Initially, I, along with those around me, criticized the Japanese government's response because at the beginning, the Japanese government did not control well, did not have complete preventive measures and awareness, and was almost entirely voluntary. In comparison, the Chinese government's response seemed better [...]”

Another interviewer who lives in Japan also expressed her opinion.

“China and the USA are two extremes, with the latter believing that not wearing masks could overcome the pandemic without the government being able to enforce mask-wearing. Japan can't enforce it either but calls for it, so people wear masks for their safety. The Chinese government's forced quarantine policy was over-corrected, becoming politically motivated[...].”

“During that beginning period, the dynamic and zero policies were indeed effective. At the height of the pandemic, China managed to bring the situation under control. On one hand, there was consistent reporting on the failures of other countries, with claims that Western countries were disregarding human lives, while China was actually achieving results. At that time, I realized their success. The posts on social media criticizing the pandemic response in the West were evidently effective; during that period, the Chinese around me were all saying that China had handled it well. They would say things like, "Indeed, only a big government like China's could achieve this," and some overseas Chinese expressed a strong desire to be in their homeland, missing their country”

The interviewees told me that when they were overseas during the outbreak of the pandemic, they were not only influenced by posts from Chinese media or the embassy, but their families, influenced by media reports, called them daily to express their concerns. Many interviewees said that much of their panic was fueled by reports from China and their families' worries, with many family members even calling daily to urge them to return to China. This influenced their thoughts, leading some interviewees I spoke with to reach a peak in their recognition and longing for their homeland during that period.

During the outbreak, many overseas Chinese were affected by the double influence of reports from Chinese government media and family concerns. Many interviewees said that they felt panic and anxiety abroad, mainly because Chinese news reports highlighted the severity and danger of the outbreak abroad and their families frequently telephoned to express concern for their safety, and even urged them to return home. This concern from their families, coupled with media reports, exacerbated the pressure and concern they felt. Some interviewees mentioned that their gratitude and concern for the motherland had reached unprecedented heights during those difficult times.

“That period did strengthen my confidence in the government's measures against the pandemic, and I thought that the U.S. was doing poorly in controlling the situation[...] Some rapid and strict measures taken by the Chinese government seemed indeed to help control the spread of the pandemic. Even though these

measures may have caused some inconvenience and controversy, looking at the results, I feel they were striving to do better, at least in ensuring people's safety.

“When I saw the outbreaks and spread of epidemics in Europe, I live in Denmark, I do think Denmark was doing OK, but other European countries, the various approaches they took to control the outbreaks, I have to say that I began to understand and trust the Chinese government's response more[...]But at least in this matter of epidemic response, I think our country is still doing quite well, which makes me feel a little bit of comfort and pride in this difficult time”

The communication strategies used by the Chinese government throughout the pandemic had a profound effect on the mental health and feelings of Chinese nationals living abroad. At first, a large number of respondents confirmed that the epidemic could be effectively controlled by China's stringent measures, including the blockade and mass detection. Chinese people's sense of regret and thankfulness for their own country has grown at the same time as a result of continuing reporting in the international media and family issues.

5.3 Feelings of Homeland

5.3.1 Isolated from the Homeland

During the three years of the epidemic, the main problem faced by Chinese overseas citizens was that they had to go home hard because of China's strict “zero-COVID” policy. They also have to perform multiple COVID-19 tests and provide negative results, which have to be completed within the prescribed time and are valid for a short period of time. Even if they succeed in boarding their flight back to China, they have to remain isolated for long periods at their own expense in designated facilities, which not only adds to the economic burden, but also creates psychological stress. In addition, they have to report their reasons for returning to the governments of the cities in which they live. These strict measures, while aimed at preventing the transboundary spread of the virus, significantly increase the economic and psychological burden on overseas Chinese, and also affect their ability to reunite with their families. Though their thoughts and love for their home country are very deep, these difficulties affect their view of national policies. Among my visitors, the majority of those

who choose to stay abroad during the epidemic, but some also return to China, describing the process of uncertainty and their return to their homeland.

“ The process of returning to my home country was really quite convoluted, and every step, from buying tickets to isolation, was challenging[...]

During the three years of the pandemic, many overseas Chinese experienced significant changes in their attitudes towards the Chinese government. One interviewee told me

“ I believe that the government always says one thing and does another, so I don't trust the government. For instance, whatever happens here, I never contact the embassy for help; I would rather seek help from the Japanese government. It's probably because the government's policies during the pandemic have been disappointing, so the people around me, including my parents, have started to lose faith in the government.”

“The high prices of flights during the pandemic made it impossible for many overseas Chinese to return home, indirectly hindering their return while the government outwardly claimed to always support them with the strong backing of the motherland[...], to be honest, I am not surprised at all with what they did”

Many overseas Chinese people have changed their perceptions of the Chinese government during the pandemic. Interviewees shared that they used to love their homeland when they were abroad, were reluctant to accept any criticism about China, and were very proud of themselves as Chinese, especially in cultural and economic terms. However, the epidemic brought with it many challenges and complicated emotions, on the one hand they were very longing for their homelands and on the other they were worried about the safety of their relatives back in China. These complex emotions led them to question whether some of the government's pandemic management measures were really effective or transparent. This situation has led to a more objective assessment of the Chinese Government's policies and actions, and has begun to be critical of some decision-making, in particular the implementation of epidemic control measures and the transparency of information.

“To be honest, before the pandemic, my attitude towards the government was mostly positive. However, this pandemic has caused me to change my perspective slightly. When I saw the news about China's quarantine policies and the suspension of flights, my feelings were complicated [...] I feel that both the quarantine policies and the online discourse regarding us overseas Chinese make us feel unwelcome to return to our own country, yet we are also Chinese. Why don't we have the right to return to my home?”

“ I found them especially unreasonable and disappointing. As a Chinese person, I should have the right to return home. The overly long quarantine and excessive requirements for covid tests made returning too difficult. ”

During the epidemic, Chinese overseas people were most touched by the massive production of films about patriotism in China during the first two years of the outbreak, the most famous of which was a film called "Wolf of War". The theme of the film is: "Wherever you are in the world, you have a strong motherland protecting you." Before the pandemic, all overseas Chinese were convinced of this, and their identity as Chinese reached its peak. However, with the outbreak of the pandemic and the accompanying travel restrictions, strict isolation policies, and discrimination against overseas Chinese, there is a lot of unfriendly messages on the Internet, the most disappointing of which is "When the motherland is in trouble, you are absent; when it comes to causing harm, you are the quickest" The majority of Chinese are beginning to break up with overseas Chinese, and it is worth wondering whether these cuts are due to the lack of proper propaganda by the government, too much propaganda of the dangers of the overseas pandemic, leading to a very large number of Chinese believe that foreign Chinese will return to the country at this time will surely bring the virus back to China. Many overseas Chinese are beginning to feel forgotten or neglected by their motherland, especially when they find it difficult to seek help but feel helpless. This situation has shaken their sense of protection and belonging to the motherland, and has led some to reassess their feelings for the country. This complex emotion is interwoven with disappointment and reluctance. Especially in times of crisis, people are more likely to feel nostalgic, wishing for life to return to how it was before (Sedikides et al., 2008).

5.3.2 Feelings tied to be cared for by the motherland

Information about the "health packages" :

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese government initiated a "health package" program to send medical supplies to foreign nationals via the official website of the embassy. Chinese nationals can apply for these items through this website. This is a part of a larger initiative by the Chinese government to help Chinese people all over the world by extending the government's protective measures overseas during the crisis.

“At least there was some action. However, it was quite peculiar that the national bodies did not know how many people were in Japan. The items distributed were needed at the moment, so receiving them did feel helpful. The consulate certainly has this responsibility and should offer protection, which they did [...]”

“ I did receive help from the embassy, such as masks and gloves, which indeed made me feel supported and cared for by the country, and increased my favorable impression of the country quite a bit more than before”

Many interviewees said that they were grateful to the government for providing help and that the consulate had the responsibility to protect overseas citizens, and that they also acknowledged the Government's fulfillment of this responsibility by distributing health packages. This demonstrates that, in the context of a global crisis, the protective role of the Government is not limited to domestic, but also extends to overseas citizens, strengthening the image of State accountability to the outside. The assistance provided by the Chinese Government has, in part, strengthened the sense of dependence and belonging of overseas citizens to their homeland on a psychological level. On a global scale, this can enhance the soft power of a country and change the image of a responsible big country by showing care for overseas citizens. But they also felt that help was limited, and at the time of the epidemic, they received more help from the countries in which they lived, like in Japan, that the Japanese government gave more food to the infected people who were isolated at home, and more livelihoods. They do not deny the government's help, but they hope that the government can provide more.

6. Discussion

6.1 Emotional Connections Through Nostalgia

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese government strategically employed digital public diplomacy, attempting to establish and nurture emotional connections with overseas Chinese through text and video. While traditional public diplomacy typically involves government communication to a foreign public (Szondi, 2008), the evolution of technology and the increasing political engagement of citizens (Jönsson & Hall, 2003), it has expanded China's public diplomacy efforts to include its own overseas citizens (Huijgh, 2019).

The article places the pandemic communication techniques in a theoretical context that includes nostalgia, public diplomacy, and overseas Chinese participation. Theoretically, by harnessing the emotional power of nostalgia, a nostalgia narrative like "the motherland is always with you" can strengthen social bonds (Holak and Havlena, 1998). In isolated events like the Pandemic, nostalgia is also thought to reduce loneliness and strengthen community identity (Zhou et al, 2008). However, the reliability of nostalgia may erode over time, particularly when government information is out of date, as the effectiveness of nostalgia strategies during pandemics may be influenced by the perception of the authenticity of government information and by the first-hand experiences of foreign Chinese people. For instance, even if the embassy could tell Chinese living abroad that "the motherland is always with you" and offer help, the difficulty of actually receiving such support in a time of need may highlight the stark contrast between expectations and reality. A lot of people who are alone overseas depend heavily on the support and company of their families; yet, stringent travel regulations and onerous procedures for returning home not only negate the efficacy of these sentimental feelings but also have the potential to cause more disillusionment and seclusion (Van Tilburg et al., 2013; Zhou et al, 2008).

Social media has helped governments disseminate a lot of information. When they receive letters, many Chinese people post photos of these letters on their WeChat Moments. This

channel not only assists the government in promoting to the overseas Chinese community but also facilitates the transmission of information to citizens within China. Through this method, social media acts as a bridge for information dissemination, not only strengthening the connection between Chinese communities at home and abroad but also enhancing the timeliness and interactivity of government communications to a broader audience (Grunig et al. 2002; Huijgh, 2019).

From this perspective, nostalgia has a certain appeal in dealing with the global crisis. It can temporarily enhance the sense of solidarity of overseas communities, but in the long term period, it may damage the image of a country and the credibility of a government if policy implementation and information are mismanaged.

Care initiatives such as "health packages" not only benefited Chinese living abroad, but also confirmed their role in the epidemic's height and sent a message that the motherland did not forget them, providing them with the assurance that aid would arrive in good time. All of the overseas Chinese who took part in the survey acknowledged this, which improved their feeling of community (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Nevertheless, a number of factors affected the strength and longevity of emotional ties, even though this practice showed concern. Even if financial aid like health plans might help with some of the most pressing issues, it might not be sufficient for Chinese living abroad who are dealing with more tough situations. They may need more support, more transparent information, and more practical interaction with their homeland, such as easier opportunities to return and full support for living abroad.

Using digital public diplomacy during the COVID epidemic, the Chinese government enhanced its emotional and cultural ties to the Chinese population worldwide on social media by identifying culture and identity (Nye, 2004). For instance, during traditional Chinese holidays, they released sentimental holiday greeting videos and images for Chinese living abroad. These were uploaded on WeChat and YouTube, taking advantage of the audience's nostalgic feelings for life before the epidemic and portraying an optimistic future with expectations for a normal life (van Tilburg et al., 2013). The goal of using this soft power is to improve the nation's image, and it is greatly impacted by the cultural backgrounds and individual experiences of the viewers. For instance, interviewees who have experienced other crises before and feel that the government has provided effective support and timely

information may be more inclined to trust and support the government in future crises. On the contrary, if their experiences were government response slow or information untransparent, this mistrust could affect their perception of government follow-up.

At the same time, the Chinese government also extensively reported on the severity of the pandemic in other countries through their major digital media platforms like Weibo, Wexin and Douyin(Chinese version of Tiktok). By doing so, they strengthened a sense of identity among overseas Chinese, aiming to own their support and approval for China's 'zero policy'. At the beginning of the pandemic, as overseas Chinese experienced the serious and chaos of the pandemic in their living countries, they might, through comparison, grow to appreciate and agree more with China's 'Zero Policy'. By showcasing China's effectiveness in controlling the pandemic, the government not only enhanced its national image but also deepened the national pride and sense of belonging among overseas Chinese.

The Chinese government wants to establish stronger emotional ties and a sense of belonging among Chinese living abroad by using the digital platform. Through digitalization, it immediately influences public emotions and perceptions, in contrast to conventional country-to-country communications (Gao, 2005). It is challenging for governments to use traditional diplomatic channels to swiftly and extensively interact with individuals worldwide and to deepen these relationships via cultural and emotional bonds(Gant, 2007). This is made possible by digital public diplomacy (Huijgh, 2019). This change also demonstrates a significant trend in public diplomacy: in the age of globalization and digitization, a nation's reputation and soft power are more and more dependent on its ability to use social media and information technology effectively (Kim,2015; Payne, et al, 2011). Digital public diplomacy presents issues, particularly with regard to information openness and authenticity, even while it opens up new avenues for communication with residents of other countries or with audiences throughout the world. To prevent mistrust or animosity from the public, caution must be used when putting these tactics into practice while handling the discrepancy between knowledge and reality.

7. Conclusion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and social distancing measures, while effective in controlling the spread of the virus, led to widespread feelings of isolation. This paper explores the importance of public diplomacy during the pandemic and examines how public diplomacy influences foreign citizens' perceptions of their country in times of crisis. By using nostalgia as a communication strategy and analyzing it from the perspective of digital communication strategies, this study aims to understand how governments should use strategic communication to deal with their national image. The study uses China as an example to explore this area of study, showing how the Chinese government sought to maintain and strengthen national identity and loyalty among its diaspora during the pandemic.

Traditional public diplomacy aims to influence foreign publics through soft power strategies such as media, cultural exchange, and international dialogue. With the advent of digital technology, these tools have not only expanded the reach of public diplomacy, but also enhanced its immediacy and personalized methods of communication. The digital age has democratized the process of public diplomacy, allowing non-state actors and ordinary citizens to actively participate in shaping national identity and international relations.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the Chinese government used nostalgia as a powerful emotional and communication tool to strengthen ties with its overseas citizens coping with the isolation and helplessness caused by the pandemic. The nostalgic appeals embedded in the digital content shared by Chinese embassies and consulates evoked memories of home and emotional ties to the homeland among overseas Chinese. However, given China's strict zero-COVID policy, which prevented many overseas Chinese from returning home, this nostalgia for home and the gap between reality and expectation may have led to more negative emotions among many overseas Chinese.

Moreover, this study found that when the government attempts to use nostalgia to strengthen ties with overseas citizens, trust in the government and transparency of information are crucial to enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of its public diplomacy. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the strategic use of digital public diplomacy during global crises. The research shows that nostalgia is effective in communication strategies, but the many details behind nostalgia require the government to use it more cautiously. Successful public diplomacy in the digital age is not only about communicating information, but also about engaging more citizens in public diplomacy. Therefore, the government should ensure that any information released is subject to public scrutiny, especially during a pandemic when citizens abroad should receive more attention from the government. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the study emphasizes the need for governments to adapt to changes in the global communications landscape and adjust their diplomatic approaches. Particularly through the strategic use of nostalgia and other culturally resonant themes, the emotional dimension of diplomacy is becoming a critical component in engaging with overseas citizens.

For future research, I would like to suggest it would be beneficial to explore the long-term impacts of digital public diplomacy on the emotional connections and national identity of overseas citizens and investigating the specific elements of digital content that most effectively foster a sense of community and national pride could provide valuable insights.

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Appendix I: Interview Guide

Question 1 : How did China's digital public diplomacy, as a particular form of communication strategy, establish an emotional connection with Chinese overseas citizens during the pandemic crisis?

General questions

Q1: During the pandemic when you couldn't return to China, did you have homesickness?

Formal question:

Q1: During the COVID-19 pandemic, how do you view the credibility and effectiveness of the information shared by the government and Chinese embassies on platforms like WeChat or Weibo?

Q2: During the COVID-19 pandemic, when you couldn't return to your country and reunite with your family, did seeing videos and photos filled with traditional festival atmospheres (like Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival) on social media evoke memories of shared times past? Did this longing increase your emotional connection to your homeland/hometown? How might this dependence affect your perception of China?

Q3: In the early stages of the pandemic, did posts about the unity and collective support of the Chinese people in facing challenges, published by government media (like People's Daily or Xinhua) on Weibo and WeChat accounts, resonate with you emotionally?

Q4: By following the social media accounts of the Chinese government or embassies (like WeChat or Weibo), did you feel emotional support or a sense of belonging from China? Did this feeling reduce your sense of loneliness or anxiety during the pandemic?

Q5: When observing reports on the severe situation of the pandemic in other countries through official media, did it increase your confidence in the Chinese government's measures against the pandemic? After learning about the pandemic handling methods and outcomes in different countries, did you trust the Chinese government's actions during the pandemic more, believing that the government was truly responsible for the people's welfare?

Q6: What are your thoughts on the reports/videos from People's Daily/other official media about the unwavering efforts of grassroots workers and frontline medical staff in fighting the pandemic?

***Question 2** : How did the feelings of their homeland among overseas Chinese citizens influence their experience of China's national image during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Q1: Did you return to China during the pandemic?

Q2: What is your view of the Chinese government or the embassy during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q3: Did you receive any pandemic-related help or information from Chinese embassies or consulates abroad? How did these experiences affect your perception of China's national image and the government's public service capability?

Q4: Did specific support measures provided to the overseas Chinese community during the pandemic (e.g., donating masks, health advice) make you feel cared for and supported by your homeland? Did this feeling improve or strengthen your positive perception of China's national image?