

## Effective Mechanism for Media Distribution of Chinese Ethnographic Films

Geng Site\*

Faridah Ibrahim

Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur (IUKL), Malaysia

Corresponding email: 416788505@qq.com\*

### Abstract

*This paper sets out to explore the mechanisms and paths of ethnographic film dissemination in China. Although more and more studies have focused on the dissemination of fictional films and the mechanisms of information dissemination, in contrast, the dissemination studies of ethnographic films have received little attention, and the issue has only just begun to sprout in China's self-publishing operations and ethnographic academic screening activities. This paper narrows the scope to directors and self-publishers working on ethnographic film production and organizational dissemination in China. It explores how the media characteristics of ethnographic documentaries can be disseminated to the masses through new communication mechanisms. To understand the current distribution mechanisms of ethnographic films in China, this paper uses in-depth interview data to explore the distribution platforms and distribution influences of ethnographic films on different themes, as well as the impact and degree of influence of distribution mechanisms on content development. The findings reveal that museum-specific film festivals and university symposium screenings account for the largest share of Chinese ethnographic film dissemination mechanisms, in addition to niche internal film viewing exchanges and online platform collaboration models as a rising approach. The conclusion of this paper is that the closer the film's theme is to public awareness and the more mature the audiovisual language of the images, the more receptive the audience is and the more inclined they are to pay more attention to ethnographic films launched by media platforms.*

**Keywords:** *Ethnographic Film, Communication Mechanism, Audience, Media*

## **Kajian Dampak Mekanisme Pengedaran Media terhadap Filem Etnografi di China**

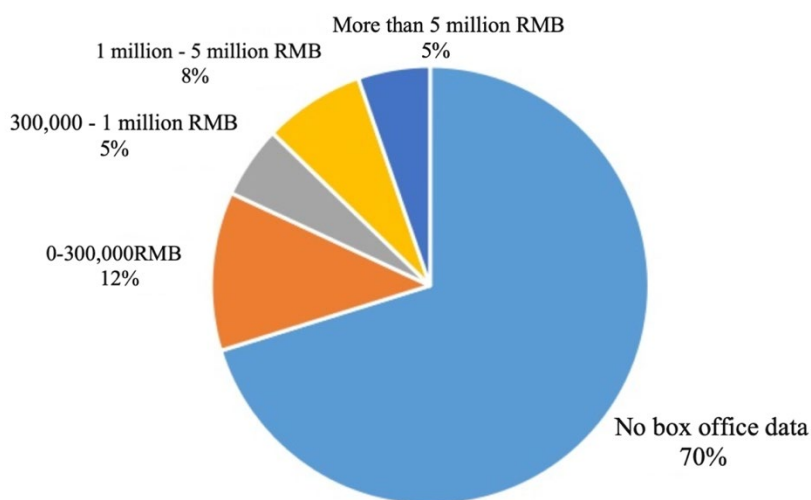
### **Abstrak**

*Makalah ini meneroka mekanisme dan cara penyebaran filem etnografi di China. Kajian lepas banyak tertumpu kepada penyebaran filem fiksyen dan mekanisme penyebaran maklumat tentangnya. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian berkenaan penyebaran filem etnografi kurang mendapat perhatian para pengkaji. Fokus kepada hal ini baharu sahaja mendapat tumpuan apabila muncul dan bercambahnya aktiviti penerbitan bebas dan tayangan filem etnografi secara akademik. Tumpuan kajian ini adalah kepada para pengarah dan penerbit bebas yang bergiat dalam organisasi penerbitan dan pengedaran filem etnografi di China. Ia meneroka bagaimana ciri-ciri media dokumentari etnografi boleh disebarkan kepada orang ramai melalui mekanisme komunikasi baharu. Untuk memahami mekanisme pengedaran semasa filem etnografi di China, makalah ini menggunakan data temu bual mendalam untuk meneroka platform pengedaran dan pengaruh penyebaran filem etnografi mengikut tema yang berbeza. Kajian juga meneliti kesan dan tahap pengaruh mekanisme pengedaran terhadap pembangunan kandungan sesebuah filem. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa festival filem anjuran pihak muzium dan tayangan simposium universiti menyumbang bahagian terbesar mekanisme penyebaran filem etnografi China. Selain itu, program pertukaran tontonan filem dan model kerjasama platform dalam talian menyumbang kepada meningkatnya penyebaran. Kesimpulannya, penyebaran filem etnografi bertambah disebabkan oleh kesedaran awam, dan meningkatnya mutu audio dan visual, menyebabkan ianya semakin diterima oleh penonton menerusi platform media baharu.*

*Kata kunci: Filem Etnografi, Mekanisme Komunikasi, Penonton, Media*

### **Introduction**

How do most viewers choose their favorite films to watch when they walk into the cinema or swipe their phones? How long do they usually stay with the film they are interested in after choosing it? How would they rate the movie? Which medium do they prefer to use to watch movies? How will audiences, especially those who are accustomed to the fast-food fragmented viewing of short videos, react to the appearance of a slightly boring ethnographic film? From the viewpoint of the current distribution channels of Chinese documentary films, as an ethnographic film with documentary value and attributes, its distribution mechanism is worthy of consideration. First of all, the dissemination paths and channels of Chinese ethnographic films in the traditional media environment are limited, as the dissemination channels of documentary films with the same attributes are mainly cinemas, TV and CDs. According to the "Cat Eye" Professional APP, 94 documentaries were released in the mainland in 2021, of which only 28 could be counted for box office output, with a total box office of only 87.22 million yuan, accounting for 0.19% of the annual box office.



**Figure 1: Documentary Rating Range Distribution in China, 2021**

From the statistical distribution data, documentaries are in a very weak situation in terms of market share and audience awareness. The vast majority of documentaries do not even have a chance to be scheduled in theaters, which is a very dangerous situation, as the director's work can neither participate in the capital profit, nor reach the audience. The dissemination effect is almost equal to zero. The film is like being put in a safe or folder without the opportunity to display. One of the reasons for this is that too many audiences have been discriminating against documentaries. On the one hand, they feel that documentaries are not movies. They also feel that there is no need to pay to watch documentaries in cinemas. Compared to traditional distribution paths, the Internet platform broadcasts documentaries with a rich genre style and a creative and dynamic aesthetic paradigm and industrial model that resonates with young audiences. According to the data released by the Supervision Center of the State Administration of Radio and Television of China, 377 online documentaries will be online for the whole year in 2021, compared to 259 in 2020 and 150 in 2019. These numbers continue to grow.

As a branch of documentary film, the current distribution status of ethnographic films are as follows.

#### ***Museum Exhibition***

The 4th China Ethnographic Documentary Academic Exhibition received 609 submissions nationwide in 2021, from which the organizing committee selected 63 shortlisted ethnographic documentaries. The shortlisted works were exhibited in professional academic film festivals at five universities, including Renmin University of China, Tsinghua University, Peking University, Central University for Nationalities and Beijing Film Academy. Guangxi Ethnographic Film Festival was founded by Guangxi Ethnographic Museum in 2012, which is an international ethnographic biennial exhibition facing the whole country and radiating to Southeast Asia, and has completed 6 sessions of the festival.

#### ***Academic forum exhibition***

There are a number of academic annual conferences held in the Chinese academia, through which ethnographic films are disseminated and screened internally on a small scale. As of

2021, the China Ethnographic Film and Television High-Level Forum, sponsored by the Ethnographic Film and Television Committee of the Chinese Universities Film and Television Association, has been held for seven times, with ethnographic films screened and post-screening academic exchanges. Since the first China Film and Television Anthropology (International) Symposium in 1996, the annual academic conference of the Film and Television Anthropology Branch, sponsored by the Chinese Society of Ethnology, has held 12 anthropological film exhibitions and excellent works promotion activities. The annual conference promotes the academic screening of excellent anthropological films, especially encourages the exchange between the stage results of long-time field work and new forms of video ethnography and multi-disciplinary Interaction.

### **Academic classroom or art institution screenings**

Chinese ethnographic films are still frequently shown as classic examples in the internal classrooms of colleges and universities with sociology and ethnography programs, and as academic research and reference. These films receive relatively cutting-edge currency due to the convenient resources of the professors and scholars who teach the courses, and student audiences can see the latest ethnographic films currently available, even some that have not been publicly screened. In contrast to universities, special screenings held in private bookstores, cafes, and art institutions are more like the underground cinemas of 19th century Paris, showing the most profound films but constantly negotiating and communicating with directors over whether or not they can be granted the right to show them, resulting in a negligible number of ethnographic films being shown in such institutions.

This study uses in-depth interviews from qualitative research with the producers and disseminators of typical works in Chinese ethnographic cinema. The production and dissemination of their works - award-winning films from current academic representative film festivals in China - are used to discuss the factors that influence the dissemination mechanism of ethnographic films, which, as a field that is being stimulated, is not a one-way information transfer or limited to internal communication within academic sessions, but a two-way information exchange and feedback between transmitter and recipient. Feedback is the expansion of shared anthropology in a broader and deeper sense in the Internet+ era. According to Liang(2018), the convenient information feedback provided by new media allows the scholarly expert to come down from the academic ivory tower, and his results are judged not by the academic committee but by the people he studies(as cited in Joen,1954). The audience can comment on ethnographic films in real time, which promotes the development of ethnographic films, especially when the audience includes culture holders, whose voice is more powerful. Therefore, how the communicators will be closely related to the audiences in the future communication mechanism and what role the technological means play are always the core of this paper.

### **Objectives of study**

Based on the purpose of this study, the following questions were formulated.

1. How does ethnographic film content development influence communication decisions?
2. What factors affect the effectiveness of ethnographic film dissemination?
3. What factors influence the audience's choice of ethnographic films' dissemination channels?
4. What is the future strategy of the ethnographic film dissemination mechanism?

## Literature Review

### ***The relationship between visual culture and mass communication - from Balázs to Mitchell***

The Hungarian aesthete Balázs (1913) introduced a concept called "visual culture." He believed that the emergence of the film was a new culture distinct from traditional sculpture and painting and that this visual culture, with its audiovisual language characteristics, had its own aesthetic value. One of Balázs' most important contributions was to define cinema as a new art style of visual culture. He suggested that cinema has enabled the public to develop and improve their understanding and perception more intuitively, and has made a profound and long-term prediction of the transformation of human spiritual culture into a form. It also has expanded the content of visual culture in a landmark way. Immediately afterward, the German thinker Benjamin, in his theories about art forms in the age of mechanical reproduction, gained insight into the function of film as a technology in the age of constant reproduction in the midst of the great transformation of human civilization. He argued that art in traditional societies had declined and that the relationship between art and the masses, as shaped by cinema, was a progressive one, allowing visual culture, including cinema, to point directly to the participation of the masses and to "shock" them. The German philosopher Heidegger further confirmed this tendency of the "age of the world image". He pointed out that "the world is grasped as an image". These three scholars make a clear connection between visual culture and the masses, but it is clear that their theories do not yet discuss the use of media and the dissemination of information, nor do they address audience reception.

The masses who have entered the postmodern consumer society will be influenced and conditioned by the visual culture in many ways in the scenic society, which is different from the traditional society and the cultural formations of early modernity with text, discourse, and language as the main factors (Debord, 2012). Mirzoeff (1999) argues that consumers seek information, meaning, or pleasure from visual technologies. However, they are more likely to get lost and confused in this search. In the age of the visual screen, the point of view is crucial. These forms of visualization are now being challenged by interactive visual media such as the Internet and virtual reality software. There is indeed a rift between our myriad visual experiences of postmodern culture and our ability to analyze these observational materials, which is both an opportunity and a necessity for visual culture as a field of study.

This has led to a discussion about the visual experience of the public. Mitchell (2002) gives his view which is representative, as he argues that visual culture is the study of the "social construction of visual experience". He argues that there are three keywords that illustrate important concepts in the category of visual experience: symbol, body, and world. He argues that this would involve a wide range of visual experiences and visual phenomena in the context of everyday life for the general public. Mitchell's argument points to a contemporary issue that cannot be avoided in the development of the medium of mass visual experience: from the traditional art of painting to the contemporary internet, the experience of mass visual reception today is more tangible than ever before. As Mirzoeff suggests, "Visual technology refers to any form of artifact used to be viewed or to enhance natural vision, including painting, television, and even the Internet. The traditional concept of culture is certainly not extinct, but the fascination with the visual and its effects has become the hallmark of modernism, which has given birth to a postmodern culture, and the more visual the culture, the more postmodern it is. The most obvious outward expression of this postmodern culture is the technology of the Internet, which allows the public to become anonymous commenters or randomly selected recipients of information at any time.

### ***The relationship between the chain of narrative symbolic communication and audience receptivity - from Metz to Bal***

Many scholars have used a narrative approach to the study of film, as represented by Christian Metz (1972). According to Metz, the main body of cinema is narrative art, and in the process

of development, cinema has produced various narrative forms and structures. Then film semiotics should pay attention to the study of narrative time and space, and Metz's "eight-combination theory" is actually a practical method of film narrative analysis. Mayes divided the shots into eight combinations. In these eight combinations, Mayes analyzes the narrative possibilities of the shot in detail. "How film expresses continuity, progression, temporal continuity, causality, confrontation, spatial distance, etc., are the central questions facing the cinematic sign." Thus, it can be seen that Mays has made an "interactive" theoretical fusion of narratology and cinema. A clear beginning of film narratology is beginning to emerge. Narrative film is used as a research text to explore narrative issues such as narrator and receiver, time and space, story and plot, and point of view and structure in narrative film. It is based on such a pair of hypothetical contradictions between the narrator and the receiver. Narration is a process in which the narrator struggles with the receiver. In this process, the narrator always uses various possibilities to control and influence the receiver. The scholar who introduced the narrative theory to the modern cinema is the French Jost (1995), who argues that any narrative as a product has a beginning and an end. A narrative has a beginning and a corresponding end. Time is very important here. From this, we know that ethnographic films should reflect social life and promote social progress, rather than just reflecting the smell of life and showing vain decorations. The question of how to use reasonable narrative devices in ethnographic films so that the narrator and the receiver can reach effective communication is exactly the research question of this paper.

In Bal's semiotics of visual narrative, focalization is a keyword, the gist of which lies in the narrator's perspective and line of sight. Four key cores are involved in Bal's claim about the chain of symbolic narrative transmission: the coder, the symbolic code, the decoder, and the context of transmission. The coder refers to the author's intention, while the symbolic code refers to the work itself; the decoder is the reader's (popular) interpretation orientation, an important orientation mentioned by Bal. In the context of visual communication, Bal emphasizes the reading and interpreting role of the audience in the whole communication process. As she mentions the concept of "reframing," the reframing of a narrative from the standpoint of the audience involves rhetorical, logical, and conceptual knowledge. The entry point of this paper is to discuss whether the symbolic code itself in Barr's symbolic theory can be further extended to ethnographic film works that use the language of images as an expressive element. Chinese sociologist Ai (2020) argues the following:

*The image ..... allows the audience to see a very concrete situation, which can be presented visually in a few minutes of the documentary, without the need to associate through concepts, and it has a rallying power in recognition, an infectious power. In that moment, people are moved, and this emotional shock conveys a human value. We have love, hate, empathy and reflection in this moment, and if there is some discussion afterwards, it will influence the audience's attitude towards things. (p.209)*

## **Methodology**

The research method chosen for this paper is a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is used to understand the reasons, perspectives, and motivations of the research subjects. It provides insight into the problem. Qualitative research is also used to reveal certain philosophical musings and certain trends for the future. Qualitative data collection methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observation. Sample sizes are usually small, and respondents are selected to meet a given quota. This study used in-depth interview methods from qualitative research to conduct an analysis of respondents' production experiences. A total of four directors specializing in ethnographic films and one self-publishing staff member participated in an in-depth interview, which ranged from thirty to ninety minutes in length. The selected informants worked in the industry of ethnographic filmmaking, some reaching more than ten years, and some were first-time filmmakers. A sample size of interviewees with different experience accumulation was

satisfied. This study analyzes the data collected through a series of qualitative interviews. It contributes to the field of research on current mechanistic models of ethnographic film dissemination in China. It also provides a better understanding of the existing mechanisms of ethnographic dissemination in China and aims to begin to identify areas for solutions to be developed. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze verbatim data from the interviews and to illuminate common themes from the directors' experiences. The study, from inception to analysis, was conducted in Nanning, China, from March 2022 to September 2022. Interviews were conducted in the different cities where the participants worked and lived. For this preliminary study, keywords that reached saturation were extracted from the four interviewees to provide preliminary data for this paper.

In order to screen all interview informants for this research questions and prepare appropriate guidelines for the interviews, the questions are graded from 4 master questions to several small sub-questions. A standardized two-tier interview outline was designed to suit the four different research questions. Four different but logically related topic questions are set up as a Level 1 outline, followed by a more specific Level 2 outline. The answers to each sub-question are the units of analysis, and the details of the answers, such as type, length, and questions shared, are extended more broadly with the semi-open interview. Therefore, every answer shared by the information provider during the study will be analyzed. The sub-specialized version of the target question is studied, and the core words with the highest frequency are screened out under all the sub-questions. All the interview data that were recorded and analysed using content analysis method provided the study with descriptive results. In addition, thematic analysis was done to get better depth out of the data. All the data were carefully compared in order to identify the themes that were similar as well as contradictory among the four informants.

In this paper, the research Instrument is used as a cloud server. The data collection about communication platforms is done via the cloud server *Elastic Compute Service*, an IaaS (Infrastructure as a Service) level cloud computing service with excellent performance, stability and reliability, and elastic scalability. Its calculations make it possible to visually count the viewing effectiveness of such distribution platforms.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This paper reports on the results of three surveys of the award-winning ethnographic films "Passing of the Lamp", "The Death of the Village" and "Face" which entered the dissemination mechanism and eventually reached the audience, as well as the viewing data of all the films shown on the "Field Image" app so far. Based on the questions, it is divided into four themes.

The findings are based on the directors' personal creative statements and discussions of the three ethnographic films "The Passing of the Lamp," "The Death of the Village," and "The Face" compiled during in-depth interviews, as well as the rationale for the development and current status of dissemination by one of the creators of the "Field Image" app.

### **Findings for RQ1**

#### **How does ethnographic film content development influence communication decisions?**

In this in-depth interview with several informants, the film had a few very clear core keywords in how content development influenced communication decisions – the ***authenticity of participation, relationship to the subject, and choice of subject matter***.

#### ***Authenticity of participation***

Zhu (2014) argues that participatory ethnography is a rethinking and revision of observational ethnography, which enriches the textual genre of anthropological video ethnography and further strengthens the cultural relevance between the author and the subject of the

ethnographic film. The basic concept of participatory documentary film is that the "truth" of pure objectivity and positivism does not exist, but what really exists is what the "cinematic eye" sees, and the "cinematic ear" hears. What really exists is what is seen through the "cinematic eye" and heard through the "cinematic ear", the so-called "filmic truth", which needs to be inspired by the camera and interpreted by the participants. Zhu (2014) further emphasizes that this truth is constructed by a combination of factors and is constantly drifting in meaning depending on the context and mode of interpretation. Several key factors for constructing the real were presented in the directors' interviews: spatially and philosophically real. Informant 1 emphasizes that her films change from a focus on emotion to a genuine engagement. She explains her film "The Village Dies" as follows:

*"The first is the physical space, such as the collapse of the village buildings and the new construction. The second is the interpersonal relationship, where the folk customs of the whole village and the relationship between people and the land are changing; the third is on a philosophical level, understanding that the village is fading because our memory of it is gone. These three points allow me to define my core theme."*

Informant 3 mentions another reason for the spatial meaning-forming reality.

*"I work in a beauty salon, and I shoot people in that space, so it's a very efficient and convenient way for me to shoot them. So even though my equipment is average, and I don't have any skills in my films, I pour all my emotions into them."*

Photographing the subject matter that you feel most deeply about should be something you know and understand, and have a close relevance to yourself. It is an expression of realism. The choice of subject matter is combined with local culture, in line with the inner logic of creative filmmaking and authentic participatory observation. Informant 1 adds this explanation as follow:

*"At the beginning I based it on my emotions, because I grew up in that village, and I was mainly concerned about their emotions."*

It can be found that participation can extract the truth from life and draw some power from it. "Truth" is the basis of ethnographic filmmaking authenticity, and artistic truth is more important than absolute truth. Unlike the small moods of everyday life, they are more concerned with the real drama of real life.

### ***Relationship to the subject***

In the selection of characters, the viewer's emotions are considered for the sake of watchability, to control the frequency of characters. Documentaries rely on characters to drive the plot. But object selection does not mean consuming the characters. To get the subjects familiar with the camera and gain their trust is a very difficult task in itself. They have a strong sense of wariness. So, eating and working with the subjects, sharing their emotions, and empathizing with their sorrows and joys, is a kind of family-like intimacy. Informant 1 explained the relationship between her and her subjects:

*"My emotion is a state that mobilizes me to shoot, my emotion is not closed, I am very empathetic to their lives, so I can finish observing and shooting in such a field process."*

To sum up, a reflection on the nature of documentary images, rooted in life, to discover a core law. Documentary images are handcrafted in a traditional way that takes time to cultivate, a slow process of living with life and the subject. Informant 3 believes that the conversation with the subject is more important. She believes that:



*“The relationship between the people in my film is very simple, they are all people I know well. So I could easily connect the characters of the whole story, and I was fully involved in their dialogue, but later on during the editing I found my own voice was too loud, which would affect the presentation of my content.”*

From the results of the interviews, the "sense of distance" is objective, and one of the important tasks of the director's filming and production is to reduce this "sense of distance". In the filming, the distance is reduced, but in the editing, the opposite is true: to expand the distance and reconstruct a logic. "Distance" also refers to a kind of field, the process of recreating the original has a higher transcendence, so that the approach is enough to move different communities, nationalities and ethnicities. Informant 3 continues to add:

*“Because the first few protagonists are women, I chose men because I did not want to discuss the issue of beauty only from the female perspective. Then I planned to start with gender differences as an entry point.”*

The author communicated with his subjects over a long period of time, refusing to "landscape" or "flavor" the image expression.

### **Choice of subject matter**

From the interviews, it is worthwhile to refer to the actual political background. Because the sadness and happiness of unimportant person is also a political implication. Informant 2 (Liu Guangyu) made a very plain thinking in choosing the theme. He emphasizes that,

*“I meditated for a long time on how I would go about cutting into this story to begin with. I finally decided to start with the craftsmen who made it, the people at the bottom and the characters at the key nodes of the whole production process.”*

In choosing the focus of her film, the director of Informant 3 considered more on the subject of significance and value. She explained that,

*“The theme of this film is the chaos of the medical aesthetic market, and I was driven to think about such issues. I think my film will help some people and provide information for those who want to do related cosmetic surgery in the future.”*

Informant 1 also responded accordingly as follow:

*“The theme of this film is the chaos of the medical aesthetic market, and I was driven to think about such issues. I think my film will help some people and provide information for those who want to do related cosmetic surgery in the future.”*

Informant 1 also responded accordingly that,

*“Among my many selections, a trail would appear in my memory, and every time I went home my relatives would stand on the hillside at the junction to see us off. So I was driven by emotion to shoot, but after I started I realized that the people in the village had so many faces and their relationships were so complicated.”*

More crucially, the right theme can drive things in a new direction in its own right. The director of Informant 3 further emphasizes that,

*“I hope that I can promote the legitimacy of the regulation of the local medical beauty industry in Chengdu, and it was for this purpose that I went to shoot.”*

Interviews with informants revealed that the choice of subject matter for the documentary was to be demystified. " Disenchantment " refers to the subject's cultural attitude towards the sublime, the paradigmatic, the refined, the grand narrative, the meta-discourse of the energetic doubts or representational confirmation, dissolving the huge subject matter and thus allowing more space for the minor characters to be noticed.

## Findings for RQ2

### What factors affect the effectiveness of ethnographic film dissemination?

Themes that emerges from this research question are – **Narrative dramaturgy , audiovisual language.**

#### **Narrative dramaturgy**

Ethnographic film making has to achieve good looks and profundity. Playwriting principles and dramatic tension are very important. Informant 2 has a very clear intention for the formation of his narrative, he explained that,

*"It depends on the ethnicity and community represented by the individual. An ethnographic film is not opposed to storytelling, but it does not seek to tell a story, nor does it seek dramatic conflict, much less be chagrined by the lack of access to drama. An ethnographic film has to articulate the culture through the understanding of the maker. You have to communicate, you have to make things clear .Ethnographic film creators should not only achieve the narrative, but also shoot the picture well."*

This finding can be supported by another opposite situation, where Informant 3 considers narrative to be a key point of detour when evaluating her film. She described that,

*"At a private niche screening, a local Chengdu documentary filmmaker said the film was as bad as a news fragment without a beginning or an end. And then I couldn't agree more. I don't think my film has an aesthetic, even though I also have a narrative structure. Both ethnographic films and documentaries have their own aesthetics, which make a film look more like a movie, with a complete story of the beginning and the end."*

From this, it can be found that a very important key to attract audiences to watch the film is the means and strategies of storytelling. Compared to a boring film, having a rich conflict and continuous reversal of plot, as well as the actions and happenings of the characters with changes before and after, is an important reference indicator to make the audience willing to give their time to watch an ethnographic film.

#### **Audiovisual language**

Aspects of the interviews related to audiovisual language revealed that mature audiovisuals and large shots of context were what the directors were looking for, and a more authorial and professional post-production of music was common to all of these films. The authoritative video style can directly stimulate the audience, who will carry out visual and aural visual works more intuitive to get emotional appeal and empathy. It is the primary reason why ethnographic film has application value. This authorial expression includes the use of original tunes and collaborative compositions with music producers. Informant 2 elaborates on his musical design in the work as follow:

*"The music I used in the beginning of the film was a local rap song. I wanted to show the magnificence of the festival in one minute through camera movement, and I designed the sound to contrast with the image, so I had to make the music has a rough texture and use the rap that best reflects the local culture to reflect it, which is intended to show that the festival is from the local culture."*

The use of original tunes to fill in the lyrics later to complete the expression of the intention is ethnographic films in the use of music in the formation of the stylization of the audiovisual language is exploratory, generating a new trend worthy of attention. In addition, the use of dialects and ethnic languages has a more local quality and is closer to the texture of life. It goes straight to the texture of life.

### Findings for RQ3

#### What factors influence the audience's choice of ethnographic films' dissemination channels?

For directors with different filming experiences, two important key themes were frequently brought up by the three informants in the in-depth interviews. These two key themes clearly explain the communication pathways that influence audiences to choose ethnographic films- ***Aesthetic literacy , Hobbies.***

#### ***Aesthetic literacy***

Ethnographic film, as one of the forms of film art, is a cross-cultural anthropological academic research method that possesses a very high aesthetic characteristic of authenticity in terms of the viewability of film art, from the field of research to editing into a film. Whether this aesthetic characteristic is combined with the local audience's psychology of cultural belonging and aesthetic literacy in the Chinese context, some findings were obtained from the creator's interviews. Informant 1 acknowledges that her video creation has both flaws as she claimed that,

*"First of all, I don't think I am qualified to stand in a position to say that I want to cultivate the audience. Because there are too many viewers, including 80-year-olds and 3-year-olds, their life experience and life environment is too rich, their aesthetics is a lot of elements, now the network is so developed so they can see a vast array of films, they are actually cultivating their own aesthetics. As creators, what I want to do is to improve my own creativity and my own aesthetics. Only professional scholars and researchers think about cultivating audiences, I can only communicate with audiences with my works, I have to promote this thing, I and my works can grow together with audiences, I think this should be the case. We can't qualify the audience and say that their aesthetics are worse than ours."*

From the interview informants' evaluation and analysis of the audience's aesthetic literacy, we know that the audiences' choice of which route to use and to watch ethnographic films is determined by their own knowledge of ethnographic video art and the aesthetic connotations of the films they are interested in. They hope that the intention about the director's creation obtained by a certain route will be well understood by themselves. Informant 1 goes on to explain this relationship between audience and director that,

*"Another question that makes me think a lot is how exactly do they define the relationship between themselves and the audience in ethnographic films? Does it not need the audience to be produced and preserved only as a documentary or other possibilities? A friend of mine has produced many ethnic minority films, but has not been involved in the process of mass distribution, but only preserved them."*

#### ***Hobbies***

As mentioned earlier, audience aesthetic literacy determines some of the communication channels being used. And the formation of an audience's viewing system is determined by a more personal hobby. Informant 3 elaborates on this with great certainty that:

*"This is decided by the audience's own viewing system, which they have cultivated themselves. They will choose whether to see a certain film according to their own*

system. There is no way for us creators to nurture them. Those viewers will see the previews of the film, and they will choose to see it if it is to their liking. I don't think it's necessary to pay too much attention to their initial intentions. Instead of nurturing the audience, then after nurturing, there may be a group of people who like a particular director's film."

Informant 1 also provides a further explanation that,

*"The big screen and the cell phone through the platform to see, there is a fundamental difference in the quality of the picture, of course, the big screen will require very high. The platform on the cell phone, we have to consider the audience's demand, many people may just brush to see, it is full of randomness and serendipity. The mindset and purpose of the audience are different, so it will also lead to the audience's evaluation of the film is different."*

From the informant's point of view, the audience's aesthetic is personal, which means that the disseminator - the media's gatekeeper and preference of the film's content will also indirectly influence the audience's preference. Conversely, the frequent attention of viewers to a certain genre also directly determines the media's preference to disseminate films of that genre.

#### **Findings for RQ4**

##### **What is the future strategy of ethnographic film dissemination mechanism?**

Themes that emerge from this research question are – Full use of technology, Development of communication platforms

##### ***Full use of technology***

All three directors admit that participation in film festivals is currently one of the filmmakers' usual means of dissemination. Compared to commercial films that enter the capital market and are disseminated through cinemas, ethnographic documentaries with small investments, long production cycles and relatively lean teams are mostly disseminated in China through museum film festival programs, film festivals organized by private scholars and some academic film exhibitions. Informant 3 explains it,

*"Because I was making a documentary, I would pay special attention to documentary developments, public numbers and so on, and in the process of information crossover I found out that there was this film festival. Because after the film is finished, I have to think about its way out, which direction it can go."*

Film festivals and film festivals are one of the most traditional and reliable dissemination mechanisms for ethnographic documentaries. As the director's experience, he believes that the full use of technology will give her film more possibilities for dissemination.

*"I also submitted to several film festivals at that time, one of which I paid for, but then there was no news. I submitted to a film festival in Hong Kong, but I was not selected, and I was also not selected for the Xining FIRST Film Festival, because I edited the trailer for the festival myself. But in the next two film festivals, namely the China Ethnographic Film Festival and the China Student Documentary Competition, I asked my friends to help me edit a slightly better version of the film, and I was selected."*

The photography technique and post-editing thinking of ethnographic films can really accomplish a kind of information transmission for the photographic subjects with national identity and social attributes, and it is the starting point of a more worthy artistic language expression. The director experiences the individual in the collective state through the camera lens and his concept of the subject's life, and works on the basis of having good narrative thinking, giving the story the possibility of a second subjective telling, which is especially important for a film that can be selected for the festival.

**Development of communication platforms**

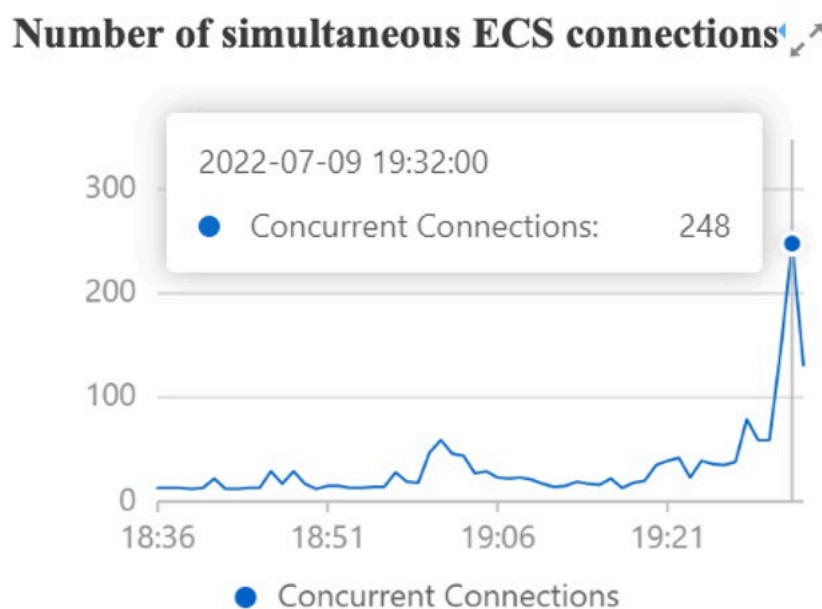
The directors provided very diverse examples of possible ways of dissemination mechanisms for ethnographic films other than film festivals. From the analysis of the content of this in-depth interview, there is a very important future direction for ethnographic films to enter the dissemination process as an important message - the development and use of dissemination platforms. As the director of the newly developed live media platform "Cloud Cinema" in 2022, Informant 4 emphasized the purpose of the development that,

*“The idea of creating the Field Image App first started in 2019, with the initial intention of solving the problem of spreading anthropological documentaries. Because anthropological documentaries are a very niche art discipline, the way to disseminate works is more limited to participation in film festivals, small-scale private screenings, etc., which cannot meet with a wider audience. For most students and enthusiasts, it is also difficult to find resources to watch excellent anthropological documentaries.”*

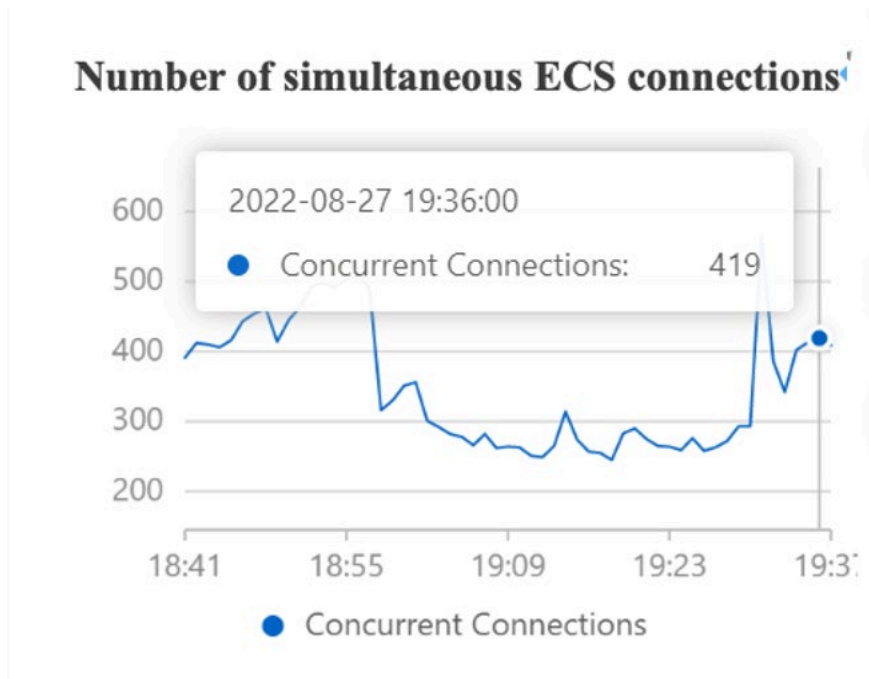
From his description, we can find a phenomenon that every one of us can take an image with a cell phone and edit it into a short film on the phone. For traditional cultural image recording and dissemination, everyone can be the creator. However, in this context, what is lacking is not only professionals and technology, but also a professional platform for everyone to share traditional cultural images. Informant 4 continues to add his proposition of developing a platform.

*“With the concept of open sharing, we try to call on users and organizations to upload and share cultural heritage image content, and jointly create an open and shared image platform.”*

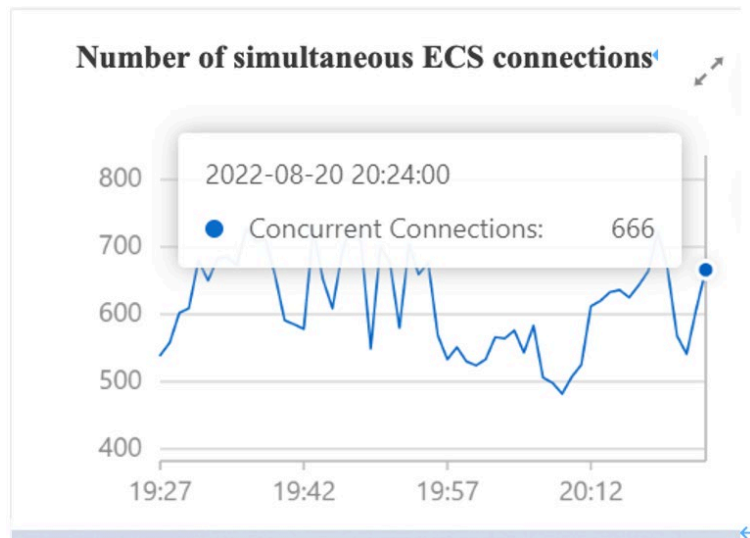
Informant 4 shows real-time monitoring data from the initial to the peak of the films shown on the platform he found as followed:



**Figure 2: Ethnographic Film "Seven Sacred Temples" Cloud Cinema Play Data (2022)**



**Figure 3: Ethnographic Film "Shadow Film and Racer" Cloud Cinema Play Data (2022)**



**Figure 4: Ethnographic Film "Under Goddesses' Shelter" Cloud Cinema Play Data (2022)**

One result that can be clearly drawn from the gradual upward trend of the data is that Cloud Cinema's live screening method is receiving very good ratings. Obviously, for a new platform, higher numbers mean more possibilities to reach the audience. A very important context covered in the informant 4 interview is big data, which means that more attempts to push media platforms can allow ethnographic films to be disseminated to the greatest extent possible, and that the basis for pushing such dissemination platforms is determined by judging whether the platform's aesthetic preferences for the audience match the aesthetic expression of the film to arrive at a rationale for pushing.

## Conclusion

How to make the aesthetic expression of the film more effectively conveyed to the audience is an important key for future record shooting and editing creators to focus on, which is also a new way to extend the direction of expression of ethnographic filmmakers. At the 7th China Ethnographic Film and Video High-Level Forum, Zhu (2021) discussed the theme of "Academic Advocacy and Video Practice of Contemporary Chinese Ethnographic Films", stating that ethnographic films do not attach importance to commercial value, but to documentary, social and life values, and citing and analyzing cases of "deep plowing" in Chinese ethnographic films. According to Zhu, the cultural position of ethnographic filmmakers is to "be in the field and keep watch" with the humanistic qualities of scholars. To be far away from the rivers and lakes and to establish the foundation of the field. We will cultivate the thick soil and roots of culture, and watch over the fairness and goodness of society. Through the recording and dissemination of images, we seek common ground and conscience.

Identity as a mechanism for the experience of ethnographic cinema in the medium, and the narrative and aesthetic kernel it involves, has been discussed earlier as a "mechanism through which the audience experiences the reception and interpretation of the text [medium] from within, as if the event were happening to them. This is quite important because this experience can translate into more personal and internalized feelings and attitudes toward the individuals and events portrayed on the screen. Cohen (2001) defines identification as a transient.

Thus, the quality of the film determines audience acceptance, which is highly valued, and directors and communicators tend to give them what they want. The development of self-publishing app is the broadest way of communication mechanism to reach the audience in a wider public space.

## References

- Ai,X.M.(2009). Visual social transport: Ai Xiaoming and Bu Bit. Conversation, *Communication & Society*, Vol.10, 209.
- Bal, M., & Lewin, J. E. (1983). The Narrating and the Focalizing: A Theory of the Agents in Narrative. *Style*, 234-269.
- Balázs, B., Carter, E., & Livingstone, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Béla Balázs: Early film theory: Visible man and the spirit of film* (Vol. 10). Berghahn Books.
- Cohen, J. (2001). Defining identification: A theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters. *Mass Communication & Society*, 4(3), 245-264.
- Debord, G. (2012). *Society of the spectacle*. Bread and Circuses Publishing.
- Hediger, V. (2019) Engines of the historical imagination: Towards a phenomenology of cinema as non-art. In Jean-Pierre Meunier (Ed.), *The structures of the film* (pp.321-335). Amsterdam University Press.
- Jost, F. (1995). The authorized narrative. *The film spectator. From sign to mind*, 164-180.
- Liang,M.D. (2018). *The construction of minority cultural identity in anthropological documentaries from the perspective of new media communication* (Master's dissertation): Chengdu University of Technology, Chengdu, China.

McLuhan, H. M. (1966). Marshall McLuhan. *Information theory*, 234.

Metz, C. (1972). *A significação no cinema* (p. 295). São Paulo: Perspectiva.

Mirzoeff, N. (1999). *An introduction to visual culture*. Psychology Press.

Mitchell, W. J. (2002). Showing seeing: A critique of visual culture. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1(2), 165-181.

Mourenza, D. (2020). *Walter Benjamin and the aesthetics of film*. Amsterdam University Press.

Zhu, J.J. (2020). *The Mission and Practice of Contemporary Chinese Ethnographic Cinema*, China Ethnic News, p6, Retrieved from [http://www.mzb.com.cn/zgmzb/html/2020-11/20/content\\_16734.htm](http://www.mzb.com.cn/zgmzb/html/2020-11/20/content_16734.htm)