

## The CCTV Spring Festival Gala of China: National Self-Identity Construction in the Context of Chinesenization

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### Abstract

*This study is a basic research type, which conducts an interdisciplinary qualitative research method to study the phenomenon of the 'CCTV Spring Festival Gala of China' on the issue of National Self-Identity Construction in the Context of Chinesenization.*

*Gala's media discourse was made into a space combined with the creation of Chinese people both domestically and internationally through media culture mechanisms. The Gala, therefore, has changed its focus. "Reform and opening up" (1983-1992) continued together. It includes "Socialist Market Economy and Consumerism" (1993-2002), "Scientific Perspectives on the Development and Building a Harmonious Socialist Society" (2003-2011), "Realization of China's Dream of the Great Reconstruction of the Chinese Nation (2012-2023)." However, what we found to be unchanged is that the media practice of the Gala was a process of Chineseization with political and cultural significance. In this process, the Gala serves to rebuild the Chinese national community and reconstruct the national self-identity by reproducing Chinese "nation" and "state" images and discourse. This research proposed that the Gala was not only a comprehensive Gala that Chinese people watched on Lunar New Year's Eve but also the creative invention and modern transformation of the traditional folk rituals of the Spring Festival in modern society. In the context of globalization and Chinesenization, through the Gala, the Chinese government has created large social networks across regional boundaries and rebuilt the self-identity of the Chinese nation by integrating the reproduction of national ideology with the latest television technology. This is the significance of the Gala as a "new folk tradition."*

**Keywords:** *The CCTV Spring Festival Gala, Media Culture, National Self-identity Construction, Chinese national community, Chinesenization.*

### Introduction

The Spring Festival is the largest traditional folk festival in the Chinese nation. Based on this, in the new era of reform and opening, the Chinese government invented the CCTV Spring Festival Gala with the help of new TV media. The Gala changed the Chinese New Year customs by the 1990s and has become a media culture with profound influence on the Chinese government and Chinese people worldwide. Research on the gala began in the 1990s and increased significantly after 2000. Some researchers have criticized the Gala as a tool of state power practice and ideological control. Represented by Pan Zhichang (2007).

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Different from them, Qi Lin (2017) and others affirmed the positive construction of national ideology in the Gala. They found that the production and construction of such a medium can significantly affect the audience or national identity, which is influenced by the "ritual view of communication."

Both angles are based on the concept of an "imagined community" proposed by Benedict Anderson (1983). However, two critical problems need to be addressed in these studies: 1) Lack of historical perspective. The existing Gala studies treated the Chinese national community as a stiff and fixed concept and have not discussed the connotation and historical composition changes of this community. So, it cannot provide a starting point for in-depth research on the construction of the community by the Gala. 2) Lack of international perspective. These studies have failed to analyze the development of the Gala, the CCTV, China's social, economic, and cultural development, and the Chinese government's policy changes in the context of globalization. Therefore, it cannot reveal the significance of the 41 years of the Gala's media practice to the Chinese government and people.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala in shaping national self-identity within the framework of Chinese cultural influence through media mechanisms. The research question is: How does the CCTV Spring Festival Gala contribute to the formation of national self-identity in the context of Chinese cultural influence, and what is the importance of the Gala's media practices to the Chinese government and people?

This study takes the Gala as the research text, draws on "National Self-Identity" and "Chinesization" as the theoretical basis, applies the interdisciplinary qualitative research method, and takes the post-modern perspective to study the cultural and political significance of the 41-year media practice of the Gala in modern society. That is to study how the Gala rebuilds an imagined community of "Chinese nation" across ethnicities, regions, and nations and to reconstruct the national self-identity of all Chinese people through the integration of media reproduction and the latest TV technology. This research used two methods of information collection: Field Work via the Internet and Literature Research.

## Part 1. Reflection of The Times and Chinesization: Forty-one Years of Historical Development of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala

The Gala has had forty-one years of historical development. There are four stages based on the interaction between the Gala and Chinese society. Each stage verifies the nature of the programs, media discourse creation, and galas' influence at home and abroad. From the perspective of the media ecological environment, economic and cultural background, and policies of the Chinese government outline the roadmap for the development of the Gala as follows:

### 1.1 Stage One (1983-1992): Birth Period of the Gala as a Re-Invention of the Traditional Spring Festival in Modern Society

#### 1.1.1 Media ecological environment: Television began to replace newspapers and radio as the most influential "new media" in China

In 1983, at the 11th National Radio and Television Work Conference, the Central Government proposed "four levels (central, provincial, prefecture-level, county) to run radio, four levels to run television, and four levels of mixed coverage." TV stations at all levels have been established throughout the country, and China's television industry has entered a period of rapid development (Zhao Yuezhi. 2011:183). During this period, the Gala became an eagerly awaited program for mainland Chinese viewers every year. However, the external communication of CCTV was still in the pioneering stage, and the influence and coverage were small.

### 1.1.2 Socio-economic and cultural background

By early 1983, 93% of rural production teams in China had implemented the household contract responsibility system. According to Sun Liping (2004:39-41), in the 1980s, the market-oriented economic system reform undoubtedly had a wealth growth and resource diffusion effect. Most people were beneficiaries of reform. The so-called "common prosperity" situation has emerged.

In the Fourth Congress of Chinese Literary and Artistic Workers, Deng Xiaoping warned artists to use their art to serve modernization construction, to fight against all erroneous tendencies that hinder modernization construction and attempt to cause chaos and undermine stability and unity (Song Xiangrui, 2007:19-20). China's literature and art entered a period of unprecedented vitality with a "hundred flowers blooming."

### 1.1.3 The Gala's program characteristics and the discourse construction of "reform and opening up"

#### (1) Establish the excellent traditions of the Gala program production

The fundamental mode of broadcasting Gala programs was fixed in the 1990s: First, the evening Gala was fixed from 8 PM to 1 AM on Lunar New Year's Eve. The evening's most essential "holy hour" is when the clock strikes midnight. Second, the Gala is a comprehensive evening party comprising highly entertaining literary and artistic programs, such as skits, songs, dances, acrobatics, magic, opera, crosstalk, and grand non-literary and artistic programs. Third, the theme of the Party is basically around the atmosphere of unity, joy, endeavor, and reunion. Fourth, the evening party has the characteristics of a large platter, the most extensive coverage of 56 ethnic groups in China, different regions in the east, west, north, and south, and different social identity groups of workers, peasants, soldiers, and businesspeople. Fifth, every year, the Gala invites actors from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, as well as overseas Chinese, to perform alongside mainland actors to celebrate the Spring Festival.

#### (2) Actively construct the mainstream discourse of reform and opening up

The most striking clue is the shift from "suspecting wealth" to "wanting to be rich." Shi Libin (2014:18-19) explained that "the affirmation of the legitimacy of getting rich, the pursuit of material life, and the imagination of the individual subject based on private human space all became essential themes of the Gala in the 1980s ". For example, Chen Peis and Zhu Shimao's sketch "Mutton Skewers" (1986), Wang Fuli and Chen Yude's sketch "Loving Couple" (1987), Xiao Lin and Li Guosheng's crosstalk "Comparison," Lei Kesheng and Song Dandan's crosstalk "Blind Date with Lazy people" (1989), Jiang Kun's crosstalk "Elevator Adventure" (1988).

## 1.2 Stage Two (1993-2001): Golden Development Period under the Background of Media Marketization Transformation

### 1.2.1 Media Ecological Environment

#### (1) CCTV has an exclusive leading competitive advantage in the Spring Festival program market in the context of media marketization transformation

On June 16, 1992, the "Decision on Accelerating the Development of the Third Industry" was launched. Chinese media began a market-oriented transformation of independent operation and self-responsibility for profits and losses. Due to the strong appeal and influence of the Gala brand created after ten years of market cultivation in the 1980s and the dominant position of television media in the media ecosystem, CCTV, as a national media, has more legitimacy and authority in occupying the sacred time of Spring Festival Eve. At this stage, popular music in mainland China has begun to mature, and many good songs with emotions and markets have been released. The sketch is in a golden

development period, with rich works and diverse styles. Therefore, despite the stimulation of local satellite TV's division of the Spring Festival Gala market and the bottomless marketization of a variety of entertainment programs, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala can still effectively form a solid appeal to domestic audiences on New Year's Eve, practicing its social integration and media governance functions.

(2) CCTV opens a new situation in external communication: Implementing the "Two Lines" and "Three Steps" plans

In May 1992, Xu Xiongxiang, Director of CCTV's External Center, proposed new ideas for external communication; namely, with one hand grasping the "underground" and the other hand grasping the "sky". Yang Weiguang, the head of CCTV, presided over the development of a "three-step" implementation plan for external broadcasting (Li Shudong, 2013:38-39). Under the guidance of the "Two Lines" and "Three Steps" plans, CCTV expanded its international reach, and the international influence of the Gala has dramatically increased. On October 1, 1992, the fourth program, the first international satellite television channel of CCTV, officially began broadcasting. It mainly serves Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese audiences. (Li Shudong, 2013:64-65). From then on, more overseas Chinese can watch the Gala programs through Chinese international channels to ease their homesickness.

### 1.2.2 Social background

(1) The establishment of the socialist market economic system in China

From January 18 to February 21, 1992, Deng Xiaoping made a series of essential speeches during his southern tour, pointing out that the pace of reform needed to be further accelerated and China's economic reform had entered a new historical stage. In the mid to late 1980s, the debate about getting rich shifted to gradually recognizing market value in the 1990s. On March 29, 1993, in the constitutional amendment passed at the first session of the Eighth National People's Congress, the original Article 15 of "the state implemented planned economy based on socialist public ownership" was changed to "The country implements a socialist market economy." Thus, the discourse of market economy has obtained legal protection (Shi Libin, 2014:171-172).

(2) The contradiction between one-sided economic growth and comprehensive social development in China has begun to emerge

The contradiction of uncoordinated economic and social development is highlighted by the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the aggravation of the binary contradiction between urban and rural areas, and the unbalanced development of the eastern and western regions. In Chinese society, a considerable number of vulnerable groups have appeared. According to Sun Liping (2004:41-41), the vulnerable groups include the following components: Firstly, farmers' "weak" characteristics are gradually emerging, and the urban-rural gap is rapidly expanding. Secondly, Migrant workers are a typical vulnerable group created by dual economic and social factors. Thirdly, the impoverished class in the city is mainly composed of laid-off and unemployed individuals.

### 1.2.3 The Gala's discourse construction of "socialist market economy"

On the one hand, it actively advocates value pursuits such as "market economy," "fair competition," "competition for success," and "self-realization." Representative works include the 1993 sketch "The Ugly Fight for Spring," "Shoe Cleaning," "Bridge," "Market Sketch," and crosstalk "Auction," as well as the 1996 music skit "Crossing the River." On the other hand, it exposes the "perverse wind" in satirizing the market economy and the decline of social morality caused by it. It reveals the adverse effects of replacing traditional moral values with the law of money, such as moral decline, vanity, and utility, distrust between people, and social disharmony. Representative works include skits such as "Promoting" (1993), "Playing Poker" (1994), "Demolition Variations" (1994), "Packaging

Star" (1995), "Father" (1995), "Working Adventures" (1996), "Intersection" (1996), "Shoe Nails" (1997), and "Heart to Heart" (1999); Cross talk "Dianzi Company" (1994), crosstalk "Free Eating"(1999).

1.3 Stage Three (2002-2011): A Period of Imbalance and Adjustment in the Value Pursuit of the Gala in the Context of China's "Peaceful Rise" and the Enhancement of China's "Cultural Soft Power" Strategy in the New Century

Entering the new century, China is fully involved in globalization. To cope with international competition and re-seek China's international positioning, the Chinese government proposes a "peaceful rise" and vigorously improves the country's "cultural soft power" to enhance the influence of Chinese culture in the world. Since 2009, the word "rejuvenation" has been widely discussed by the Chinese government and Chinese academics. At the same time, in response to the unbalanced economic and social development in China and the aggravation of social contradictions, the Chinese government put forward the development concepts of a "Scientific Outlook on development" and "Building a harmonious socialist society."

#### 1.3.1 Media Ecological Environment

(1) CCTV's external communication enters a prosperity period under the needs of the global development strategy of China

In 2003, CCTV proposed establishing a new strategy of "television media with international influence and competitiveness commensurate with China's international status" and put forward a response to overseas landing work. In 2009, CCTV put forward the goal of building first-class international TV media, vigorously promoted the branding strategy of professional channels, accelerated the construction of multi-language international channels, strengthened the construction of overseas sites, established, and improved video resource exchange platforms, and actively expanded overseas operations, thus entering a new period of prosperity and development of external communication of CCTV (Li Shudong, 2013:117). At the end of 2012, the global coverage of CCTV programs has been preliminarily completed.

(2) The Gala's self-innovation and adjustments under the increasingly intense international and domestic competition

In dealing with the fierce competition from provincial TV stations, the CCTV Gala implemented "Open the Door for the Gala" in 2005. The Gala gathers national efforts to organize the Spring Festival Gala, pressuring provincial TV stations through administrative orders to provide the best programs and program planning, and enjoys priority rights over the best programs in the country. Furthermore, the Gala integrated CCTV's internal channel resources and actively used new network media to strengthen the dissemination of the Gala.

By the 2010 Gala, the number and frequency of product placement reached an all-time high and was fiercely criticized by the audience (Chen Lu. 2012:96). When the Gala's market-oriented behavior affects the program content's coherence, impedes the discourse appeal of national ideology, and destroys the broad social ritual foundation on which the Gala depends, political power will intervene in the ideology of consumerism. In addition, since entering the new century, the Gala shoulders the mission of promoting national culture to go out, which also requires that the program content of the Gala cannot be destroyed by commercial product placement. Based on the double needs, the Gala after 2010 entered a new period: putting social and cultural interests above commercial interests and pursuing "green advertising."

### 1.3.2 The Gala's discourse construction on “The Scientific Outlook on Development” and “Socialist Harmonious Society”

Considering the persistent inequality in urban-rural development and the disadvantaged position of migrant workers, the central government of China has implemented a series of policies and measures to acknowledge the contributions of migrant workers to the country's industrialization and market economy. Guided by the relevant policies, the Gala focuses on constructing grassroots (migrant workers/farmers) images, breaking through the "conscious" collective silence of the media in the 1990s. The image of migrant workers has transformed actor portrayal to inviting farmers or migrant workers with real farmer identities to participate in the Gala. It is also a means for the Gala to maintain a solid competitive position in the highly competitive media market (Yuan Yan. 2015:143-144).

There are three themes of discourse construction of the grassroots programs in the Gala. The first theme is to respond to national policies to rectify the name of migrant workers. Another theme is expressing migrant workers' life attitudes, actively pursuing their dreams, and the value of pursuing self-esteem and self-improvement. The Gala serves as a "pressure relief valve" for social emotions by constructing a "myth" of the grassroots's realization of their dreams of performing on the top stage. The third theme is to express the missing and caring for "home" of ordinary people living away from home and struggling outside, like Xue Cun's "Away from Home" (2002) and Ren Yueli's "Homesick" (2011). For all Chinese people, "home" is the eternal source of strength and emotional destination for all those who wander outside. It is also an important cultural factor that can summon Chinese people to form an identity.

### 1.4 Stage Four (2012-2023): A Cultural Innovation and Development Period for the Gala to Strengthen the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community under the Background of Realizing the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation

In October 2012, the report of the 18th National Congress of the CPC put forward the strategy of strengthening the country through culture. Cultural power is reflected internally in the improvement of national quality and the cohesion of the Chinese nation while externally in the enhancement of the influence of Chinese culture. The proposal of the cultural power strategy means that culture has shifted from serving local areas to serving the overall national strategy, enhancing the subjectivity of culture, and completing the leap from cultural consciousness to cultural confidence at the theoretical level.

#### 1.4.1 The Chinese government and the Gala have successfully created an offline and online social network for the global dissemination of Chinese culture through the window of Spring Festival culture

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the influence of China's cultural exchanges with foreign countries has been increasing. A pattern of foreign cultural exchanges with high-level support, simultaneous participation of officials and civilians, and multiple parties has gradually formed (Hu Zhengrong et al., 2018:248). The Chinese government has successfully created two well-known Chinese and foreign cultural exchange brands related to the Spring Festival: "Happy Spring Festival" and "Cultural China · Universal Spring".

CCTV actively builds a multi-level and all-round international media matrix to promote the Chinese Spring Festival and Chinese culture. Since 2014, China International Television Corporation has focused on the overseas dissemination of the Gala, launching the "China Spring Festival Gala" series of programs (Tang Shiding, 2016:82). With the establishment of the China Media Group (CMG) in 2018, the promotion methods of the Gala overseas have continuously innovated, including news reporting on multilingual international channels, overseas media advertising, large screen rolling promotion in public places, and real-time pre-broadcast program preheating (Ji Deqiang & Yan Bowie, 2023:6-7).

#### 1.4.2 Cultural shift: The modern transformation of excellent traditional Chinese culture by the Gala

The "cultural shift" is a cultural practice and a political one. The state attaches great importance to the development of traditional culture and has introduced a series of policies in recent years, from the macro guidance to the micro-operation level. The 2015 Spring Festival Gala specially set up a creative program section for intangible cultural heritage. The Gala production team is increasingly consciously exploring the traditional culture and aesthetics contained in programs such as songs, dances, acrobatics, and martial arts. At the same time, it is combined with television communication and performance technologies such as 5G+4K/8K+AI to showcase the breadth, profundity, and artistic beauty of Chinese culture.

In the past 41 years, the content and form of the programs, the audience scope, the stage technology, the TV presentation mode, and the theme of media discourse construction of the Gala have undergone significant changes with China's comprehensive involvement in globalization. As a media culture, the Gala has become a reflection of The Times. However, at different stages, the ideological discourse of the Gala has never changed: national unity, ethnic solidarity, and social harmony, in which the Gala has played an essential role in uniting Chinese society and constructing Chinese self-identity through positive discourse production in globalization. Therefore, the 41-year media cultural practice of the Gala is a dual process of globalization and Chinesization. The Gala is, in essence, a powerful media weapon for the Chinese government to actively promote "Chinesization" in both domestic and international situations.

### Part 2. The CCTV Spring Festival Gala and the Chinese National Community

The Chinese national community is not an imagined community in the sense of the Western nation-state; it has richer historical and cultural resources and connotations. Meanwhile, it was formed in a hundred years of history and social process, and its composition changes were accompanied by the Chinese government's consideration of its own national interests in the special era. Under the new historical conditions of reform and opening, the Community includes 56 ethnic groups in China, compatriots from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, and overseas and foreign Chinese. In the past 41 years, the Gala has reconstructed this Chinese national community through active content production and the application of media technology.

#### 2.1 From "Imagined Community" to "Chinese National Community"

Benedict Anderson (1983), in his book "The Imagined Community: The Origin and Spread of Nationalism," considers the nation, national identity, and nationalism as a "special cultural artifact" and defines the nation as "an imagined political community." As He Guimei (2014:116) explains, this nationalist theory based on the Western European state as the basic model is often inadequate in facing China's problems. "Its most prominent feature is to emphasize that 'China' is not a 'nation-state' in the general Western European modern state form, but a unique 'civilization-state': It has a long history of state composition and is a special unified state form, which can overcome the nation-state homogeneity and form a 'pluralistic unity' pattern inclusive of cultural and historical diversity (He Guimei, 2014:118). The Chinese nation can be divided into broad and narrow senses, which have the dual meaning of historical and cultural community in the sense of cultural anthropology and citizen community in political science.

#### 2.2 Historical Process and Realistic Basis of the Formation of the "Chinese National Community"

##### 2.2.1 Ethnic Policies of the Chinese Government in the Past Century

The concept of "the Chinese nation" has gone through the construction of "the nation" from Sun Yat Sen's integration of "Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui and Tibetan" to Chiang Kai-shek's "the Chinese nation is Han" and then to the construction of "56 ethnic groups" and "the pluralistic integration of the Chinese nation" of the CPC. The contemporary construction of the "Chinese nation" has gone from "diversification" to "integration," from the development and prosperity of various ethnic groups to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and has forged a strong sense of community among the Chinese nation (Shen Guiping, 2020:54).

### 2.2.2 Changes in the Relationship Between Chinese Overseas and China in the Past Century

"Hua Qiao" and "Hua Ren," as a group composed of Chinese immigrants and their descendants, although often used together legally, are two different concepts. Overseas Chinese ("Hua Qiao") "refers to" Chinese citizens who have settled abroad, "And "foreign Chinese" ("Hua Ren") refers to "former Chinese citizens who have joined foreign nationality and their foreign descendants" and "foreign descendants of Chinese citizens." The former is a Chinese citizen, while the latter is a foreign citizen (Zhang Xiuming, 2021:3-4). Over the past century, the identity of Chinese overseas immigrants has undergone three stages of change: from "Qi Min" to "Qiao Min," from "Hua Qiao" to "Hua Ren," and then the restoration of "Chinese identity." This reflects the significant impact of the Chinese government's overseas Chinese affairs policy on the relationship between overseas Chinese and China. From political identity to economic mutual benefit and cultural co-development, it continuously adjusts the relationship between the two sides. Since the reform and opening, the positive effects of overseas Chinese in politics, economy, culture, and other aspects of China's development strategy have included this group in the scope of the Chinese National Community.

### 2.2.3 "One Country, Two Systems" Policy

On June 22 and 23, 1984, Deng Xiaoping systematically elaborated on the complete meaning and policy concept of "one country, two systems" during his meetings with the visiting delegation of the Hong Kong business community to Beijing and the renowned Hong Kong figure Zhong Shiyuan. After two years and up to 22 rounds of negotiations, the Chinese and British sides officially signed the "Sino-British Joint Declaration" on December 19, 1984. Two sides decided that from July 1, 1997, China would establish a particular administrative region in Hong Kong and exercise sovereignty and governance over Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon Peninsula south of Boundary Street, the New Territories, and other land. On April 13, 1987, the governments of China and Portugal signed the "Joint Declaration of the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Portugal on the Question of Macau," declaring that the Macau region (including the Macau Peninsula, Taipa Island, and Coloane) is China's territory. The People's Republic of China resumed sovereignty over Macau on December 20, 1999. According to Chen Duanhong (2015:41), "The wisdom of 'one country, two systems' lies in thinking about the relationship between 'one and two and 'state and system'. 'One' is harmony and identity, and 'two' is division and difference".

## 2.3 Re-Construction of the Chinese National Community of the Gala in the Context of Chinesization

### 2.3.1 Shared Time and Unity Space Construction of the Gala

#### (1) Beijing time: Share the same moment across the world

According to the 24 time zones around the world, at exactly 20:00 Beijing time, the whole world happens to be on the same day. At the midnight moment, the imagination of the "state" and "nation" has become the true "protagonist" in the Gala, occupying a vital gateway to bid farewell to the old and welcome the new. The image of "state" and "nation" will be presented in three different narrative ways.



Firstly, the appearance of national leaders at midnight. Either personally visit the live broadcast of the Gala to pay New Year's greetings (1990) or appear in the form of New Year's greetings videos (for five consecutive years from 1991 to 1995) or borrow the host to read the New Year's greetings written by leaders (2000). For Chinese citizens, it is undoubtedly a call to their "Chinese" identity.

Secondly, arrange a specific theme song before midnight. Songs are usually around patriotic themes such as singing the motherland, singing the CPC, singing the Chinese, or eulogizing the new era. The composition of singers is becoming more complex, with a lineup consisting of mainland Chinese singers, ethnic minorities, and representatives of singers from Hong Kong and Macau (such as in 2020 and 2021). Performers of ethnic minorities and representatives of various industries often appear on the stage, dancing or singing with the singers.

Third, arrange some planning programs with unique themes. The Gala Choose the theme of the motherland's reunification and the country's prosperity, which can stimulate the Chinese people's national pride and patriotic enthusiasm, such as the return of Hong Kong (1997), aerospace theme (2008,2009), and sports theme (2009).

(2) "Beyond 9.6 million square kilometers": All Chinese people united and co-presented together through the Gala

The Gala builds a trans-regional concept extending from domestic to overseas in the production of the program: through synchronous live streaming of the main venue and sub-venues, by singing the same song at the same time, creating a national community imagination of "East West North South Central, National People's Great Reunion"; By playing footage of Chinese and overseas Chinese celebrating the New Year in front of landmark buildings overseas, it has constructed a cross-border regional imagination of "Four Seas Together," extending the National Community to the Chinese National Community, including overseas Chinese. In addition, the Gala actively expands overseas media communication channels, genuinely achieving the global coverage of CCTV programs, television networks, and social media, building a vast global communication network, using the unified image of the Gala to summon cultural and emotional appeal to Chinese people around the world, and constructing a community imagination of the "Chinese nation."

### 2.3.2 Image Presentation and Discourse Function of Different Constituent Groups of "Community" in the Gala

#### (1) Ethnic Minority Groups in the Gala

The presence of ethnic minority images directly serves the three discourse expressions of "unity of all ethnic groups," "cultural diversity and unity," and "national unity" in the Spring Festival Gala. The discourse narrative of "ethnic unity" and "cultural diversity and unity" are often carried out in three ways: Firstly, through group performances showcasing ethnic minority costumes and songs and dances to express cultural diversity and ethnic unity. The second is to express their support for the development policies of the Party and government, and the deep friendship between ethnic minorities and the Han people through the presence of ethnic minority actors. The third is to complete the interpretation of "ethnic unity" through "being represented" by some star singers with minority identities. The state will summon the emotional centripetal force of the ethnic minority group toward the Party and the country through the singer's singing. The images of ethnic minorities also often appear in the program of expressing the grand discourse narration of "state" and "nation" in the Gala, and as an indispensable part of the Chinese nation, they help complete the expression of the "national unity".

#### (2) Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan Programs in the Gala

Focusing on the most numerous and typical song programs of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, this research found that the songs sung by Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwanese singers basically have four main themes.

First, pop songs with healthy content expressing personal emotions such as love, friendship, and kinship. The Gala swiftly transformed private emotions such as love, friendship, and kinship into public emotions and grafted an emotional space more suitable for expressing the feelings of "family - state" on the matrix of popular songs. 1) To transform the children's love for their mother into the love of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan wanderers for their motherland, China. 2) To transform personal friendship into mutual assistance and joint efforts of compatriots in Hong Kong, Macao, and the mainland. 3) Transform love into kinship. The second theme around the New Year festival is to express good wishes to relatives and friends, the ardent expectation of spring, and the joy of infinite hope for the future. The third type of theme focuses on "family" and "state" to develop a grand discourse narrative of "family and state." The fourth theme revolves around Chinese culture, expressing the recognition and love of Chinese people towards Chinese culture.

### (3) Overseas and foreign Chinese in the Gala

Overseas and foreign Chinese, as a member of the Chinese nation, have been present since the birth of the Gala. Overseas and foreign Chinese generally ensure the "presence" in three forms: 1) "Oral presence". It refers to the presence of overseas and foreign Chinese in the language during the Gala: The Gala host will express New Year's greetings to them in the opening; They may also appear in the New Year's greetings of national leaders. 2) "Image presence". Usually, the Gala inserts video footage of them celebrating the Spring Festival immediately after midnight Beijing time, creating a sense of "being together" ceremony of "sharing the moment with the world" and "enjoying the world together" by television editing technology. 3) "Physical presence". It refers to breaking through regional restrictions, where overseas and foreign Chinese actors collaborate with domestic actors to personally participate in the live broadcast of the Gala. Most overseas and foreign Chinese programs express homesickness and Chinese cultural identity among wanderers.

## Part 3. The CCTV Spring Festival Gala's Re-Construction of National Self-identity in the Process of Chinesenization

The Gala TV plays an important role in building the national identity of the Chinese national community. The Gala has united all Chinese people from different regions at home and abroad, of different groups and social identities together, and appeals to them for a unified national identity. The reproduction of media content includes the creation of non-literary and art programs, the active use of "China" images and symbols, and the active reproduction of star images and subcultures.

### 3.1 Conceptual Discussion: National Self-identity

In his book "Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age," Anthony Giddens (1991) proposed a new framework for explaining the relationship between modernity and the self. In his book "National Identity," Anthony D. Smith (1991) explored the origins of national identity and constructed the ethno-symbolism system. He criticized both modern and proto-nationalism, arguing that national identity is not purely an artificial product or rooted in the blood of a nation. Instead, it is rooted in the history and culture of an ethnic group, providing individuals with an identity. Anthony Smith refuted the "extinction theory" and "decay theory" of national identity in the face of globalization. This research used "National Self-Identity" to explain the cultural and political significance of the 41 years of media culture practice of the Gala for the Chinese state and nation. The "national self-identity" of the Gala audience is not spontaneous and conscious. The Chinese government needs to build an "image community" through the innovative content production of the Gala to reconstruct a unified Chinese identity.

### 3.2 Cultural Memory Construction: Path Choice for the Gala to Reshape National Cultural Identity in the Context of Chinesization

The memory of culture is vital for a nation to maintain cohesion and gain a sense of cultural belonging. In his book "How Society Memories," Paul Connorton explores "how collective memory spreads and is maintained." The research of the Asman couple has advanced the evolution of memory theory from individual and collective memory to social and cultural memory (Ouyang Hongsheng and Xu Shujie, 2018:142).

Non-literary and art programs have a unique "annual memory" nature. Their theme is based on significant events in the past year and is determined by the audience's social cognition and social memory. The Gala reinforces and strengthens the public's social and cultural memory through continuous repetition, review, and traceability, completing a single national historical and cultural narrative in the mainstream. By sorting out and analyzing the nonliterary and art programs of the Gala over the past 41 years, this research found that non-literary programs use six types of narrative discourse to construct historical and cultural memory and reshape the national cultural identity of the Chinese people.

#### 3.2.1 Promoting the core socialist values through the media coronation of national moral models

Every Gala has a segment where the host solemnly introduces national moral and era model representatives. These "role models" wearing honor ribbons sit on the round table in the front row of the audience. The camera will feature mid-shots and close-up shots to highlight the importance they place on them. Their morality and spirit best reflect the core socialist values. The fundamental task of building a socialist cultural power is to construct the socialist core value system. Fan Ke (2022:12) believes, "To strengthen the awareness of the national community, we should also consider the direction of national community development. Building a moral community should be a direction". Therefore, each Gala promotes the socialist core values by coronating national moral model representatives through the media, which is conducive to building a moral community of the Chinese nation, and conducive to the formation of recognition of the Chinese culture in the community.

#### 3.2.2 Highlighting the achievements of modernization construction to stimulate the Chinese people's national pride and identification with the current regime by comparing the present and the past

After statistics, nonliterary and artistic programs that reflect the achievements of modernization construction involve three types of themes: 1) One type reflects the country's strength through breakthroughs in high-precision and cutting-edge technology research and development, such as aviation and aerospace. 2)The second type expresses China's remarkable sports achievements. 3)The third reflects the achievements in economic and social development achieved during the implementation of Party and government policies, such as the "Western Development" strategy, the construction of the "Qinghai Tibet Railway," the "South to North Water Diversion" project, and poverty alleviation. The Gala often presents tremendous changes by tracing history and comparing the past and present. Through the "reappearance" and reconstruction of the past historical memory, the Gala forms an evaluation and historical positioning of the present and achieves the legitimacy of the demonstration of the current regime and country.

#### 3.2.3 Revisiting historical moments through anniversaries of the Party and the country to summon the high recognition of the national spirit of all Chinese people

Another way for the Gala to "recreate" historical memories is to connect history and the present by celebrating significant national anniversaries, gaining a high degree of recognition from the Chinese people for the national spirit. Such as the Red Army Long March Spirit (2017) and Jinggangshan Revolutionary Spirit (2019). The commemoration and review of significant historical events in the past by the Gala will be carried out

cyclically through discourse expression and media construction as the number of commemorative days continues to increase. The large-scale replication and permanent preservation of the media will continuously affect modern people who rely heavily on media, reshaping the historical memory of Chinese people worldwide and forming their identification with national culture.

#### 3.2.4 Expressing political demands for ethnic solidarity and national unity through solemn ceremonies

Such political ceremonies with "national unification" as the theme appeal include "Seeing the Mother River" (1995), "Mother River" (1998), "Beijing Time" (1997), and "Land soil convergence" (2003). The reunification ceremony is highly symbolic in the choice of ceremonial symbols. Elements such as "Yellow River" and "native land" emphasize that the Chinese nation has a shared history and culture. The ritual actions of "convergence" emphasize the recognition of the "central" status of the Chinese state.

elements such as "bronze ding" and "army" emphasize that China has absolute sovereignty over its territorial boundaries.

#### 3.2.5 Representing disaster and trauma situations to strengthen the sense of community in the Chinese nation

China's socialist modernization is not sailing smoothly, and it often faces the test of sudden disasters, such as floods raging in nature, frozen disasters that have not occurred in decades, earthquakes, and the COVID-19 epidemic sweeping the world. The Gala reflects the disaster events with the discourse narrative as follows: The external disaster has become the touchstone to test the internal unity of the Chinese nation. If all the Chinese people unite closely around the Party Central Committee and the Government, they can turn the crisis into a turning point and strive for the final victory. Therefore, the disaster narrative in the Gala transformed into a "nation-state" narrative. Four narratives intertwined in it: 1) emphasizing the national unity. 2) Praising the "national heroes" who fought the disaster at the critical moment. 3) Affirming significant social progress through historical comparison. 4) Proving the legitimacy and rationality of the current regime.

#### 3.2.6 Cultural programs such as "National Treasure Comes Home" are specially planned to stimulate Chinese people's identification with national culture

Since 2012, the Gala has vigorously explored the inherent spiritual connotations and aesthetic styles of Spring Festival folk culture and excellent traditional Chinese culture and creatively presented them using TV communication and expression technologies such as "5G+4K/8K+AI". The 2015 Gala also created a unique program section for intangible cultural heritage. No literary programs such as "Bring National Treasures Home" and "Bring National Treasures to Life" activate Chinese people's cultural memory and imagination of the past by creating a cultural context and space of the past, thereby stimulating Chinese national pride and identification with Chinese culture.

### 3.3 National Self-identity Re-Construction: The Image Expression of "China" and Ideological Reproduction of the Gala

#### 3.3.1 The Image Expression of "China" in Gala

##### (1) Images of the Spring Festival Folk

The Spring Festival folk symbols in the Gala are Chinese twelve zodiac animals and signs, red lanterns, red Fu characters, festive red clothes, red Spring couplets, Chinese knots, window paper-cuttings, red envelopes, dumplings, family reunion, saying auspicious words, New Year greetings. Since 2012, the Gala has begun to show programs dedicated to exploring the cultural history of the year and reflecting folk traditions: the children's program "Legend of the New Year's Eve" (2012), the dance "Dragon Phoenix Auspicious" (2012), the song "Zodiac" (2013), and the children's rhyme "Cutting Flower" (2013). From

sincere prayers for families and individuals to sincere blessings for the Chinese state and nation, the Gala creatively uses the folk symbols of the Spring Festival to create a global cultural celebration that can call on all Chinese people's identity.

## (2) Images of the Chinese State Power

The Gala programs often use highly political symbols of state power and territorial sovereignty to summon the national identity of every Chinese. Symbols such as the national flag of China, the flag of the People's Liberation Army, the flag of the CPC, and the Chinese army often appear in non-arts programs. In some grand main melody songs praising the motherland, the Chinese nation, the CPC, the Chinese Great New Era, and the Frontier Liberation Army soldiers, there are often images of Chinese national leaders across different generations and symbols such as the national flag, the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square, Huabiao in front of Tiananmen Square, Zhongnanhai, and China's border lines.

## (3) Images of the Chinese National Culture

Chinese civilization is the only brilliant civilization in human history that has lasted for over 5000 years and has not been interrupted to this day. The various material and intangible cultural heritages, including the Yangtze River, Yellow River, Silk Road, Chinese cultural relics and treasures, Chinese martial arts, Chinese landscapes, Chinese calligraphy and painting, Chinese music and dance, and Chinese cultural classics, as well as the Chinese philosophical wisdom, traditional aesthetics, Chinese thought, and Chinese spirit reflected in these cultural heritages, have become an inexhaustible cultural resource treasure trove for the Gala content production and artistic creation.

### 3.3.2 Star Images: The Ideological Reproduction of the Gala

#### (1) From "Making Star" to "Borrowing Star": Cultural Production Strategy of the Gala in the Context of Chinese Media Market Transformation

In the 1980s, due to the advantages of new television media and the cultural market was still in the cultivation stage, the Gala formed a monopolistic advantage with innovative artistic program production. Its star-making ability has been widely recognized. After 2000, the explosive growth of entertainment reality shows on provincial satellite TV stations, the rapid development of Internet media, and the improvement of the audience's awareness of participation in media entertainment culture have made many grassroots singers popular through Internet or TV talent shows, and the pop culture market has shaped endless myths from grassroots to stars. The Gala is happy to invite or borrow celebrities with a market appeal to appear in the Gala. This is done for political and market considerations. Through the reproduction of star images, the Gala can enhance young people's attention to the Gala. In addition, the subculture in which market stars participate can be incorporated by the Gala to reduce its possible impact on national mainstream culture to better serve the expression of national ideology.

#### (2) From "Wild Wolf Disco" to "Chinese New Year Disco": The Gala's Reproduction of Network Subculture and National Self-identity Reconstruction

##### 1) "Wild Wolf Disco": The Internet song that swept across China in 2019

In the second half of 2019, the famous domestic rap song "Wild Wolf Disco" was composed and performed by Northeast rapper Dong Baoshi and performed in the second season of iQIYI's self-made variety show "China New Rap." On TikTok, "Wild Wolf Disco" has been viewed more than 4 billion times; On Weibo, the number of views on "Wild Wolf Disco" related topics exceeded 100 million, and the number of discussions exceeded 50,000. At the same time, "Wild Wolf Disco" is one of the top three singles in the 2019 China hip-hop Music genre chart and one of the top ten most popular Chinese singles selected by Douban Music.

##### 2) Three reasons for the popularity of "Wild Wolf Disco."

Firstly, it collages the retro and romantic pop culture scenery of the 1980s and 1990s with a "garlic-flavored vaporwave" music style (the fusion of Northeastern dialects and vaporwave music), successfully stimulating the audience's nostalgia and emotional resonance. Secondly, it ensures the "political correctness" of the work by suspending reality through collective revelry and downplaying the "pain" and sad emotions of the times. It selects the "Ding Ting" (An entertaining hall for singing and dancing Disco) as the narrative space. The "Di Ting" retains the hustle and bustle of China's rapid social development stage but thoroughly filters out the pains and losses of the social transformation period (Jiang Yi, 2020:54). Thirdly, the media dissemination of this song has successfully attracted the attention of official mainstream media by utilizing a multi-level dissemination matrix of mobile internet social media and short video platforms to form a phenomenon of popular online rap culture.

### 3) From "Wild Wolf Disco" to "Chinese New Year Disco"

In 2020, Dong Baoshi became the first rap singer to appear on the CCTV Spring Festival Gala stage. At the request of the Gala production team, Dong Baoshi adapted the "Wild Wolf Disco" into the "Chinese New Year Disco," which is more suitable for the stage and atmosphere of the Gala. The theme has transformed dramatically from the rich "Disco" pop culture of the Northeast region in the 1980s and 1990s to the enormous development achievements of China's economy and society since the reform and opening, as well as the joy and pride of Chinese people towards a happy life. The personal characteristics of the celebrities were downplayed entirely on the Gala stage, replaced by highlighting their shared identity as "Chinese people." The body of celebrities has become an important carrier and venue for expressing the grand ideology of the state. Thus, the popular subculture representative of online rap in China in 2019, "Wild Wolf Disco," was successfully incorporated into the Gala and reproduced as a mainstream song that can express and summon Chinese identity.

## Discussion

The development of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala can be divided into four stages:

1. Stage One (1983-1992): This stage focused on the "Reform and opening up" and the creation of a new cultural identity. It featured a mix of traditional and modern elements, including folk performances, singing, and dancing. The production quality gradually improved, making the Gala more professional.
2. Stage Two (1993-2002): This stage was characterized by the "Socialist Market Economy and Consumerism." The Gala became more commercialized and entertaining, with a focus on celebrity appearances, humor, and pop culture, appealing to a wider audience, including younger generations.
3. Stage Three (2003-2011): This stage focused on the "Scientific Perspectives on the Development and Building a Harmonious Socialist Society." The Gala became more serious, promoting social harmony and development, with an increased emphasis on Chinese culture and history.
4. Stage Four (2012-2023): The current stage is focused on the "Realization of China's Dream of the Great Reconstruction of the Chinese Nation." It has become more patriotic and nationalistic, promoting Chinese culture and values, and has a globalized approach with performances from international artists.

The four stages reflect a mix of traditional and modern elements, a shift towards commercialization and entertainment, a focus on promoting social harmony and development, and a promotion of Chinese culture and values. The Gala has evolved to reflect changes in Chinese society and government priorities.

This study has highlighted various examples of how the CCTV Spring Festival Gala has contributed to the construction of national self-identity. Researchers have pointed out how the Gala serves to rebuild the Chinese national community and reconstruct the national self-identity by reproducing Chinese "nation" and "state" images and discourse. Additionally, the study discusses how the Gala has changed its focus over the years, including "Scientific Perspectives on the Development and Building a Harmonious Socialist Society" (2003-2011) and "Realization of China's Dream of the Great Reconstruction of the Chinese Nation" (2012-2023). Furthermore, the study highlighted how the Gala has become a "new folk tradition" that integrates the reproduction of national ideology with the latest television technology. These examples provide a clearer understanding of the significance of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala in the construction of national self-identity.

The CCTV Spring Festival Gala has played a significant role in shaping Chinese national identity by promoting and preserving Chinese culture and values through media culture mechanisms. The Gala serves as a platform to display Chinese culture, history, and accomplishments, fostering a sense of national pride and identity among Chinese people both domestically and internationally. Through the Gala, the Chinese government has established extensive social networks across regional boundaries and revitalized the self-identity of the Chinese nation by integrating national ideology with cutting-edge television technology. The Gala has evolved into a "new folk tradition" that combines the propagation of national ideology with the latest television technology. It has also contributed to the construction of Chinese national identity by perpetuating Chinese "nation" and "state" images and discourse, thereby rebuilding the Chinese national community and reconstructing national self-identity.

The CCTV Spring Festival Gala has been widely embraced by the Chinese people, who consider it an integral part of their cultural heritage and a means to celebrate the Lunar New Year with family and friends. The Gala has also been commended for promoting Chinese culture and values and showcasing China's achievements on the global stage.

However, the Gala has also faced criticism, particularly from those who view it as a tool for state power and ideological control. Some argue that the Gala reinforces a narrow and exclusionary definition of Chinese identity by promoting a single, homogeneous vision of Chinese culture. Additionally, some have criticized the commercialization of the Gala and its emphasis on entertainment over cultural education. Internationally, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala has garnered increasing attention and recognition, especially in recent years. The Gala has been broadcast to a global audience, featuring performances by international artists and performers. It has been seen to promote Chinese culture and values worldwide and to showcase China's achievements in the arts and entertainment industry. However, the international reception of the Gala has been mixed, with some critics viewing it as a propaganda tool for the Chinese government and others praising it as a celebration of Chinese culture and a way to promote cross-cultural understanding.

## Conclusion

From a postmodern perspective, this research studies the media practice and development history of the Gala in the past 41 years since the reform and opening and finds that in the process of being fully involved in globalization, the Chinese government actively builds a vast social network for online and offline cultural exchanges and through the active media reproduction of the Gala, it implements a process of global Chinesization to the whole world. The media practice of the Gala is a process of reconstructing the Chinese national community and identity in the context of Chinesization. By constructing a shared time

and unity space and anchoring the image presentation and discourse expression of the constituent parts of the "community" within the mainstream ideological categories of "state" and "nation," the Gala rebuilds the community of the Chinese nation. Moreover, the Gala reconstructed the national self-identity by constructing national cultural memories through non-literary and artistic programs and actively reproducing Chinese "nation" and "state" images.

Therefore, the Gala is not only a comprehensive artistic program that Chinese people must watch on traditional New Year's Eve, but it has also become an effective mechanism and tool for the Chinese government to build national identity and unite the diversity of the Chinese nation. Especially in the context of increasing global mobility and challenges in the construction of national identity and community, the Gala has united the Chinese people all over the world to the greatest extent through active media transnational communication and cultural export, creating a good development environment for the international and domestic development of the Chinese government. The significance of the Spring Festival Gala as a new folk custom lies in this.

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