

Between Self-Branding and Tradition: Multimodal Identity Construction of a Female Vlogger in the Digital Space

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Abstract: This study investigates the multimodal construction of female identity in the short videos of Jiang Xunqian, a prominent Douyin vlogger. Drawing on Feng Dezheng's Multimodal Construction Framework of Female Identity, the analysis examines how evaluative language and visual design collaboratively shape the representation of modern and traditional female traits. The study identifies identity features including charisma, perseverance, courage, skill, erudition, and strength as modern traits, alongside compassion, empathy, timidity, and diligence as traditional traits, with modern traits dominating the construction. Contextual factors are then considered to explain these features. Overall, the study illustrates how female digital creators navigate modern empowerment and traditional cultural norms, constructing a hybrid identity that appeals to diverse audiences while promoting intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: female identity; identity construction; multimodality; appraisal theory

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, Chinese society has undergone profound and extensive transformations, accompanied by a significant evolution in the representation of Chinese women. During the long period of feudal society, women were largely marginalized under the influence of Confucian ideology and other traditional beliefs. Mainstream cultural expectations and evaluations of women were generally conservative and negative. In particular, patriarchal moral codes such as the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" imposed strict constraints on women's behavior, identity, and social value, emphasizing standards such as "female virtue," "female speech," "female appearance," and "female work." These reinforced women's subordinate status and confined them to domestic roles.

In the early 20th century, with the rise of the May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement, Western ideologies, especially feminism, were systematically introduced into Chinese society. Originating in 19th-century France, feminism is a social movement advocating for women's equal rights and autonomy, with the fundamental aim of challenging gender stereotypes and affirming women's independent identity and social value. This ideological shift

profoundly influenced the reshaping of women's images in China.

Against this backdrop, the traditional, singular, and stereotypical moral expectations of women, such as submissiveness, the notion that "ignorance is a woman's virtue," and the glorification of chastity, have been gradually dismantled (Shi, 2018)^[14]. Women have progressively broken free from passive, obedient, and dependent identity frameworks and begun to embody more diverse and positive social images. In the context of the new era, Chinese women increasingly demonstrate qualities such as independence, autonomy, courage, and responsibility. They not only play essential roles within the family but also actively participate in education, the economy, politics, and cultural fields, confidently expressing themselves and shaping their identities. The transformation of women's images in China is not only a reflection of the country's overall modernization process but also a concrete manifestation of Chinese culture's continuous integration and renewal in the context of globalization.

Therefore, the image of Chinese women has always been in a state of dynamic transformation. It is constantly reconstructed in response to shifting social contexts, cultural environments, and personal choices. From a constructivist perspective, identity is a dynamic and context-dependent social practice (Grad & Rojo, 2008)^[5]. Individuals actively engage in the construction of identity through language, behavior, and media representation across different situations. Meanwhile, the rapid development of the internet and social media has further expanded the space for women's identity construction and image expression. Short video platforms such as Douyin, with their decentralized, personalized, and highly efficient communication mechanisms, have broken the traditional, one-dimensional portrayal of women in mainstream media and offered new possibilities for female self-expression. Among them, female vloggers, as active content creators and identity presenters, are reshaping the image of Chinese women by documenting daily life, sharing personal experiences, and promoting cultural elements. Their content reflects a more diverse and authentic representation of women, distinct from traditional stereotypes, and reveals the evolving identity awareness and cultural expression of a new generation of Chinese women in the digital space.

To further understand the construction of female identity in digital spaces, this study takes the short videos of Jiang Xunqian, a highly influential female vlogger on the Douyin platform, as the research object. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, which emphasizes that identity is constructed through the deployment of linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic resources, this study adopts Feng Dezheng's (Feng, 2020) model of multimodal construction of female identity^[4]. It systematically analyzes the interaction of various semiotic resources in Jiang Xunqian's videos, including language and images, in order to explore the specific ways in which female images are constructed and the underlying meanings they convey (Feng, 2021)^[15].

Specifically, this study addresses the following three core research questions:

- (1) What kind of female image has Jiang Xunqian constructed in the digital space?
- (2) How is this female image constructed through multimodal resources?
- (3) What contextual factors contribute to the formation of such a female image?

By addressing these questions, this study seeks to reveal the dynamic logic of female identity construction on short video platforms and to further enrich the understanding of Chinese female identity and cultural expression in the context of digital media.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, with the rapid development of digital media technologies, academic interest in the construction of female identity and image has been continuously growing. Existing studies in this field mainly focus on the socio-cultural construction of female identity and image and the application of multimodal discourse analysis in identity studies.

First, in terms of the socio-cultural construction of female identity and image, scholars have widely examined the historical evolution of female images and their representations within specific cultural contexts. Many studies emphasize that female identity is not a static or fixed social role but is constantly reshaped through the interaction of social

background, cultural beliefs, and power relations (Butler, 1990; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005)[1, 2]. For example, Hou and Ni (2024) studied the construction of female images in rural films since the reform and opening-up and revealed that women's images have undergone significant growth and transformation, evolving from marginalized objects to protagonists on the social stage^[8]. However, most existing studies focus on the macro-level socio-cultural context and the image of women in mainstream media, while relatively little attention has been paid to how female individuals actively construct diverse identities within specific digital platforms and contexts.

Second, the application of multimodal discourse analysis in identity research has become a growing focus in recent years. The multimodal discourse theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) provides a systematic framework for understanding the interplay of various semiotic resources^[6], including images, language, sound, and gestures. Building on this foundation, Feng Dezheng (2020) developed a theoretical framework for interpreting the multimodal construction of female identity in online livestreaming contexts, emphasizing the need to examine the construction and representation of female identity in digital spaces from a multimodal perspective^[4]. This has further expanded the application of multimodal theory in gender and identity research.

However, despite the proposal of this theoretical framework, its application in empirical research remains relatively limited. In particular, within the context of Chinese short video platforms, few scholars have systematically applied Feng Dezheng's framework to analyze how individual female vloggers dynamically construct their identities through the use of multimodal resources.

Therefore, this study takes Jiang Xunqian, a highly influential female vlogger on the Douyin platform, as research subject. Drawing on the theoretical perspective of multimodal discourse analysis and incorporating Feng Dezheng's multimodal construction framework for female identity, this study aims to address the above-mentioned research gap and contribute to a more comprehensive empirical understanding of female identity construction in China's digital spaces.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data

The data for this study consist of five short videos published by the Douyin vlogger Jiang Xunqian, which are currently the most-liked videos on her account. The total duration of these videos is 39 minutes and 44 seconds. The selected videos primarily focus on the themes of learning, practicing, and promoting traditional Chinese culture, with particular emphasis on intangible cultural heritage. Jiang Xunqian is a well-known cultural content creator on Douyin and a recognized seventh-generation inheritor of the Que Shan Tie Hua project, which is listed as a national intangible cultural heritage of China. Her video content centers on showcasing and popularizing traditional Chinese cultural practices. As of July 1, 2025, her Douyin account has amassed over 22.37 million followers and more than 250 million likes, reflecting her significant influence and wide audience reach on the platform.

The rationale for selecting these five most-liked videos as the research data is twofold. First, as the most popular content on Jiang Xunqian's account, these videos represent the clearest and most widely disseminated expressions of her constructed identity and public image. Second, the cultural orientation and popularity of these videos provide an ideal context for exploring how female identity is constructed and performed through multimodal resources within the framework of promoting traditional culture on digital platforms.

3.2. Analytical Framework

This study investigates how the female vlogger constructs her identity using linguistic and visual resources. Identity is conceptualized as a set of evaluative attributes that are realized through different semiotic resources on the one hand, and shaped by the broader socio-cultural context on the other. Therefore, identity should be interpreted based on the systematic analysis of multimodal texts (Feng, 2022)^[4,5].

This study adopts the Multimodal Construction Framework of Female Identity proposed by Feng Dezheng (2022)^[4] as

its analytical foundation (see Figure 1). This framework is developed based on the attitude system within appraisal theory proposed by Martin and White (2005)^[7], as well as Feng's (2016) previous research on identity construction^[3].

A central feature of this framework is its distinction between two primary modes of identity construction: evaluative language and video design. Evaluative language refers to the ways in which female vloggers construct their identities through spoken language resources in videos. It includes both explicit and implicit evaluation. Explicit evaluation is typically realized through the use of attitudinal vocabulary and metaphorical expressions that directly convey identity-related meanings.

For instance, words such as professional, brave, or humorous, as well as metaphors like as meticulous as a craftsman or as resilient as bamboo, can explicitly project certain identity traits. In contrast, implicit evaluation operates through less overt linguistic means, such as narrating events that evoke particular attitudes or employing verbal behaviors that indirectly reflect identity positions shaped by specific social roles. This form of evaluation subtly shapes audience perceptions without the need for direct attitudinal claims.

The second dimension, video design, focuses on the visual and performative resources vloggers utilize to construct identity. According to Feng (2022)^[4], video design includes two key components: role design and livestream design. Role design encompasses the vlogger's use of visual elements such as gestures, movements, and the organization of visual processes in the video, drawing on the multimodal discourse framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)^[6]. Livestream design, on the other hand, involves interactive features unique to online platforms, such as real-time comment overlays (commonly known as danmu) and audience reward mechanisms.

Given that the data for this study consist of pre-recorded short videos rather than livestream content, the present analysis focuses on the role design dimension of video design, excluding elements specific to live broadcasting.

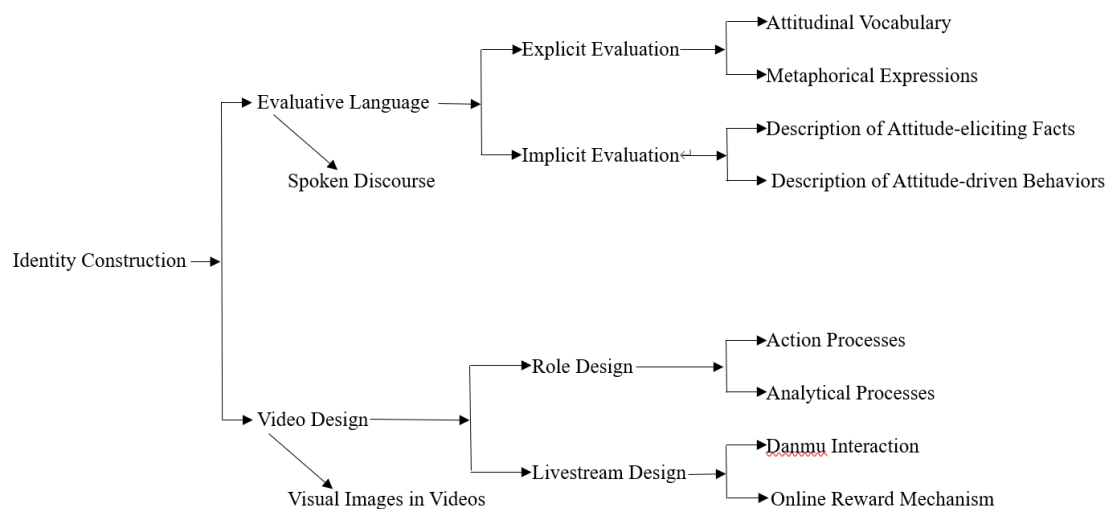


Figure 1. Multimodal Construction of Female Identity

3.2. Analytical Tools and Procedures

The present study employs ELAN 6.9 (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator) as the primary analytical tool. ELAN is annotation software that allows researchers to create, edit, visualize, and search annotations for video and audio data. Its capability to simultaneously process multiple semiotic modes makes it particularly suitable for research based on multimodal discourse analysis.

The analytical procedures for this study are as follows. First, the five most-liked short videos were downloaded directly from Jiang Xunqian's official Douyin account^[9-13]. These videos were then imported into the ELAN software for systematic annotation. Based on the Multimodal Construction Framework of Female Identity introduced in Section 3.2, the videos were manually annotated along two dimensions: spoken discourse, focusing on evaluative language, and visual

resources, focusing on role design within the videos. Finally, the annotated data were exported from ELAN for further qualitative analysis and interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

In the following section, the three research questions put forward in the introduction will be addressed. Firstly, the data will be presented to provide a clear overview of the linguistic and visual resources identified in the selected videos. Subsequently, a detailed analysis will be conducted to reveal the type of female identity Jiang Xunqian constructs through her short video content, as well as how this identity is constructed through the interplay of evaluative language and visual design. Finally, the contextual factors justifying such identity will be explored.

4.1. General Findings

Through annotation of the video data, it was found that Jiang Xunqian's identity features can be categorized into two types: characteristics of the modern female identity and characteristics of the traditional female identity. The distribution and construction of these identity features are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Distribution and Construction of the Two Types of Identity Features

Categories Implicit Evaluation		Evaluative Language	Video Design	Total
		Role Design		
Characteristics of the Modern Female Image	Charisma	4	12	16
	Childishness	-	5	7
	Perseverance	14	13	27
	Strength	6	7	13
	Courage	11	16	27
	Erudition	18	-	18
	Skill	5	27	32
Characteristics of the Traditional Female Image	Timidity	6	6	12
	thoughtfulness	22	11	33
	Empathy	-	8	8
	Diligence	-	12	12

As shown in the table, identity features associated with the modern female image (140 instances, 66.7%) account for the majority of the overall occurrences. Within this category, the most prominent features are Skill (32 instances), Perseverance and Courage (27 instances each), indicating that competence and courage are central to the construction of Jiang's modern female identity. In contrast, the traditional female image accounts for 65 instances (33.3%), with Thoughtfulness (33 instances) being the most frequently observed feature, highlighting Jiang's attentiveness and concern for others' needs.

These findings suggest that while Jiang Xunqian actively constructs a modern female identity characterized by independence, knowledge, and resilience, she simultaneously incorporates traditional feminine traits, resulting in a hybrid and dynamic identity that reflects both cultural continuity and change. The following section provides a detailed analysis, with specific examples of how Jiang Xunqian constructs these identity features^[9-13].

4.2. Characteristics of the Modern Female Image

As revealed by the data, the characteristics of the contemporary Chinese female image constructed by Jiang Xunqian

include charisma, childishness, perseverance, strength, courage, erudition, and skill.

4.2.1. Charisma

The term charisma refers to an individual's ability to naturally attract attention, evoke admiration, and exert influence over others through personal charm, confidence, and presence. In the context of digital media, a charisma identity often manifests through self-assured speech, confident physical presentation, and a sense of authenticity that resonates with the audience^[4,5].

In Jiang's short video content, the construction of a charismatic female identity is achieved through the coordinated use of implicit evaluative discourse and video design. An example is shown below:

Excerpt 1.

之前有 3 亿人看过了打铁花的视频。

[More than 300 million people have watched the video of Da Tiehua.] (January 7, 2024)



Figure 2. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, January 7, 2024

In Excerpt 1, Jiang uses a numerical reference to not only highlight her impressive online visibility but also reinforce her image as a culturally influential figure with significant public recognition. Accompanying this voice-over is a visual scene (see **Figure 2**) showing Jiang surrounded by a large crowd of enthusiastic spectators following her live performance of the traditional craft Da Tiehua (a Chinese intangible cultural heritage). The dense crowd, with many individuals raising their phones to take photos and videos, creates a strength visual representation of Jiang's personal charisma, widespread popularity, and social influence.

4.2.2. Childishness

The term childishness in this study refers to identity features that convey innocence, playfulness, and a sense of youthful naivety. Rather than implying immaturity in a negative sense, childishness highlights light-hearted, spontaneous behaviors that evoke a childlike simplicity and liveliness in one's self-presentation. In Jiang Xunqian's videos, this identity feature is constructed purely through action processes in visual resources, without the involvement of evaluative language. In one of the selected videos documenting her experience of learning Xiangxi Gan Shi (a traditional folk practice from western

Hunan), a particular scene captures Jiang engaging in a playful interaction with a young boy who is also learning the same tradition (see **Figure 3**). As shown in the screenshot, both individuals are wearing traditional bamboo hats and pressing their heads together in a lighthearted, childlike manner, which constitutes an action process. This playful behavior, coupled with casual body language and a relaxed rural environment, visually conveys a sense of innocence, curiosity, and youthful vitality.



Figure 3. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, November 15, 2024

4.2.3. Perseverance

Perseverance refers to the quality of demonstrating resilience, determination, and an unwillingness to give up when facing physical or psychological challenges. It reflects a modern female identity characterized by endurance and inner strength. The example below illustrates how the identity feature of perseverance is constructed through both implicit evaluative language and action processes in video design.

Excerpt 2:

再来。

[Try again] (November 15, 2024)



Figure 4. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, November 15, 2024

In this part of the video, Jiang participates in a physically demanding training process for Xiangxi Gan Shi, attempting to carry a set of water jars weighing a total of 120 jin (approximately 60 kilograms). After a failed initial attempt, Jiang demonstrates resilience and determination by uttering the phrase “Try again” (see Excerpt 2), signaling her refusal to give up. The accompanying visual shows her resolutely lifting the bamboo pole with the heavy jars once more, with her posture and facial expression reflecting physical strain yet unwavering persistence (see **Figure 4**). Through this combination of verbal self-encouragement and visually embodied effort, Jiang constructs a persevering female identity aligned with strength, endurance, and commitment to mastering traditional cultural practices.

4.2.4. Strength

Strength refers to both physical strength and inner resilience when facing demanding tasks. It reflects a female identity that challenges conventional notions of physical fragility often associated with women. This identity feature is illustrated through both verbal and visual resources. The off-screen voice of her mentor explicitly states: “Each jar weighs 40 jin, the three together are 120 jin,” which functions as an implicit evaluation by describing attitude-eliciting facts (see Excerpt 3). This numerical detail not only highlights the significant physical challenge she undertakes but also enhances the audience’s perception of her physical capability.

Excerpt 3:

这三个缸，一个缸 40 斤，三个缸就有 120 斤。

[Each jar weighs 40 jin, the three together are 120 jin.] (November 15, 2024)



Figure 5. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian’s Video, November 15, 2024

In the visual resources, Jiang Xunqian is seen carrying three large water jars weighing a total of 120 jin, which constitutes an action process (see **Figure 5**). The visual composition, showing Jiang steadily carrying the heavy load in a determined posture, further reinforces the strength identity feature. Through this combination of verbal explanation and visual portrayal, the video effectively constructs an image of Jiang as a physically strong and capable modern female figure.

4.2.5. Courage

Courage refers to an individual's willingness to face danger, uncertainty, or physically demanding tasks without hesitation, embodying courage in both attitude and action. The presented screenshot exemplifies the construction of Jiang's courage identity through a combination of visual and auditory resources. In the scene, Jiang participates in the traditional practice of Da Tie Hua (striking molten iron flowers), which involves propelling molten iron heated to 1600 degrees Celsius into the air using a wooden stick.

The off-screen narration explicitly describes this dangerous process: "Molten iron at 1600 degrees Celsius is hurled into the sky, filling the air with dazzling sparks and scattering golden brilliance across the ground" (see Excerpt 4). Simultaneously, the video shows Jiang personally engaging in the performance, striking the molten iron under conditions that clearly involve significant risk of burns or injury (see **Figure 6**). By actively participating in such a high-risk traditional craft, Jiang not only demonstrates physical courage but also projects a fearless, determined image to the audience. Through this multimodal representation, the video constructs courage as a key component of Jiang's modern female identity.

Excerpt 4:

将 1600 度的铁水打向高空，华为漫天华彩，遍地生金。

[Molten iron at 1600 degrees Celsius is hurled into the sky, filling the air with dazzling sparks and scattering golden brilliance across the ground.] (June 14, 2024)



Figure 6. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, June 14, 2024

4.2.6. Erudition

Erudition refers to the construction of an intellectual, knowledgeable, and culturally literate female identity. In's videos, this identity feature is constructed entirely through linguistic resources, without reliance on visual design. Specifically, it is realized through implicit evaluation and the description of attitude-eliciting facts. In the video, Jiang remarks: "I thought of Gu Cheng's poem--The dark night has given me dark eyes, but I use them to seek the light" (see Excerpt 5). This statement occurs during her winter trip to Changchun, where she participates in the traditional practice of ice sculpting. Despite the harsh, freezing environment, Jiang expresses admiration for the way people turn adversity into beauty by creating exquisite ice sculptures--metaphorically described as flowers blooming in bitter cold. Through

this culturally loaded quotation and reflective commentary, she implicitly constructs an image of herself as intellectually cultivated and emotionally perceptive, reinforcing the erudition identity trait.

Excerpt 5:

我想到了顾城的那首诗，黑夜给了我黑色的眼睛，我却用它来寻找光明。

[I thought of Gu Cheng's poem--The dark night has given me dark eyes, but I use them to seek the light.] (February 6, 2024)



Figure 7. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, February 6, 2024

4.2.7. Skill

Skill refers to an identity feature highlighting technical competence, craftsmanship, and mastery of specific abilities, particularly in the context of traditional cultural practices. In Jiang's videos, the construction of a skill identity is achieved through both implicit evaluation and visual resources. From the perspective of implicit evaluation, Jiang states: "I used a single block of ice to carve a giant Loong" (see Excerpt 6). This statement, though factual, implicitly signals her high level of technical ability and artistic confidence, as carving such a complex and symbolic figure from ice requires considerable skill and experience.

In terms of visual resources, the video presents a close-up shot of Jiang carving the dragon's head with a spade, meticulously refining the intricate details of the sculpture (see **Figure 8**). The lifelike appearance of the dragon, combined with Jiang's focused posture and deliberate movements, reinforces the perception of her as a highly skilled practitioner. Through this interplay of language and imagery, the video effectively constructs skill as a key dimension of Jiang's modern female identity, merging technical expertise with cultural artistry.

Excerpt 6:

我用一块冰雕出了一条巨龙。

[I used a single block of ice to carve a giant Loong.] (February 6, 2024)



Figure 8. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, February 6, 2024

4.3. Characteristics of the Traditional Female Image

This section focuses on how Jiang Xunqian constructs identity features associated with the traditional female image, specifically timidity, thoughtfulness, empathy, and diligence. Through detailed analysis of her language use and visual presentation, this section reveals how these traits are multimodally constructed in her videos.

4.3.1. Timidity

Timidity refers to an identity trait that reflects fearfulness, caution, or psychological vulnerability when confronted with unknown or potentially frightening situations. This feature contrasts with more dominant or fearless female identity representations, highlighting emotional sensitivity and human vulnerability. In Jiang Xunqian's videos, the timidity identity is constructed through both implicit evaluation and visual resources. In one scene, Jiang and her mentor visit a mountain cave traditionally used for storing corpses. Upon reaching the entrance, Jiang takes a brief glance inside, immediately retreats, and expresses her fear by saying, "It's so dark in there" (see Excerpt 7). Linguistically, this utterance conveys her sense of insecurity and discomfort, serving as an implicit evaluation of her emotional state. Simultaneously, the visual design reinforces this identity feature, capturing an action process in which Jiang physically runs out of the frame, visually amplifying her hesitation and fear (see **Figure 9**). The combination of language and visual cues effectively constructs Jiang's timidity identity, adding complexity to her overall representation.

This seemingly contradictory presentation of both courage and timidity reflects the complexity and fluidity of Jiang's identity construction. Rather than portraying a fixed, one-dimensional image, her videos reveal a nuanced female identity that simultaneously embodies courage in the face of challenges and vulnerability in unfamiliar or intimidating situations. This coexistence of traits highlights the dynamic, context-dependent nature of identity in digital spaces.

Excerpt 7:

这里好黑呀。

[It's so dark in there.] (November 15, 2024)



Figure 9. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, November 15, 2024

4.3.2. Thoughtfulness

Thoughtfulness refers to an identity trait that emphasizes attentiveness, warmth, and concern for the well-being of others. It reflects an individual's willingness to provide emotional or physical comfort, especially when others may be exposed to discomfort or hardship.

In Jiang's videos, the thoughtfulness identity is constructed through both implicit evaluation and visual resources. In one scene, a large group of fans gathers outdoors in the freezing winter to watch Jiang's Da Tie Hua performance. To ensure the fans' comfort, Jiang thoughtfully prepares and distributes hot soy milk, accompanied by a voiceover stating: "On such a cold day, let's give the fans a cup of hot soy milk to warm them up" (see Excerpt 8). The verbal description of attitude-eliciting facts implicitly highlights Jiang's consideration and sense of responsibility toward her audience. Meanwhile, the visual element presents an action process of Jiang personally handing out the soy milk, reinforcing her caring and approachable image (see Figure 10). The interplay of linguistic and visual resources effectively constructs a thoughtful female identity, projecting Jiang as both a cultural performer and a figure attentive to the emotional and physical needs of those around her.

Excerpt 8:

这么冷的天，先给粉丝冲杯热豆浆暖暖身子。

[On such a cold day, let's give the fans a cup of hot soy milk to warm them up.] (January 7, 2024)



Figure 10. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, January 7, 2024

4.3.3. Empathy

Empathy refers to an identity trait characterized by the ability to emotionally resonate with others' experiences, demonstrating sensitivity and emotional responsiveness. An empathic individual can understand, share, and visibly react to the emotions conveyed by others.

In Jiang's videos, the empathy identity is constructed entirely through visual resources. In one scene, Jiang attends a stage play centered on the traditional Xiangxi Gan Shi. Deeply moved by the emotional narrative and the struggles of the characters, she visibly expresses her engagement, shedding tears and wiping them away--a visual action process that conveys her profound emotional connection with the performance (see **Figure 11**). Through this scene, Jiang is positioned as an emotionally responsive and compassionate figure, reinforcing the empathic dimension of her identity. This construction humanizes her public image and reflects an important facet of the traditional female identity--emotional sensitivity and the capacity for deep interpersonal resonance.



Figure 11. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, November 15, 2024

4.3.4. Diligence

Diligence refers to an identity trait highlighting diligence, perseverance, and willingness to engage in physically demanding tasks. In Jiang Xunqian's videos, this identity is constructed entirely through visual resources. In one video, Jiang undergoes training to master the traditional Xiangxi Gan Shi but struggles to carry the 120-jin water jars required for the practice. Her mentor instructs her to work alongside local villagers in agricultural labor to build physical endurance. The scene shows Jiang carrying a large bundle of firewood on her back, walking with visible effort ahead of her mentor and an elderly woman, who walk side by side empty-handed (see **Figure 12**). This action process foregrounds Jiang's active participation in physically strenuous labor and highlights her willingness to engage in repetitive, exhausting tasks to overcome physical limitations.



Figure 12. Screenshot from Jiang Xunqian's Video, November 15, 2024

5. Contextual Considerations

The coexistence of both modern and traditional female identity traits in Jiang Xunqian's self-presentation reflects a complex negotiation between evolving gender ideologies and enduring cultural expectations in contemporary Chinese society. On one hand, Jiang's identity construction includes modern characteristics such as skill, charisma, and courage, which align with contemporary discourses emphasizing women's independence, competence, and agency in public and professional domains. These attributes reflect broader socio-economic transformations in China, where increased female participation in education, labor, and digital entrepreneurship has reshaped traditional gender roles and legitimized more empowered and diversified forms of female subjectivity.

On the other hand, Jiang also exhibits traditional traits such as thoughtfulness, which resonate with long-standing Confucian ideals that valorize female gentleness, emotional labor, and familial responsibility. This duality in her representation can be understood as strategic hybridity, allowing her to appeal to a wide audience across generational and ideological lines while maintaining cultural authenticity, especially in the context of promoting intangible cultural heritage.

It is worth noting that modern traits constitute a more significant portion of the identity construction, accounting for 66.7% of the total, suggesting a conscious shift toward progressive, self-determined female images. This tendency can be attributed to multiple contextual factors. Firstly, the platform economy and algorithmic logic of Douyin reward content that aligns with narratives of individual effort, strength, and uniqueness, thus encouraging creators to emphasize traits such as courage and perseverance. Secondly, the state's promotion of cultural confidence and female empowerment creates a discursive space where female figures like Jiang can perform agency while still aligning with dominant values. Lastly, audience expectations in the digital age, particularly among younger viewers, increasingly favor representations of women who embody both traditional cultural roots and modern subject positions.

Together, these factors suggest that Jiang's identity performance is not a spontaneous or purely personal expression, but a situated practice shaped by intersecting social, technological, and ideological forces.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the multimodal construction of female identity in the short videos of Jiang Xunqian, a prominent Douyin vlogger, through the lens of Feng Dezheng's framework for analyzing multimodal identity construction in contemporary China. Drawing on both evaluative language and video design, the analysis identified a range of identity

traits, including modern features such as perseverance, charisma, courage, strength, erudition, diligence, and empathy, as well as traditional traits such as thoughtfulness and timidity. Among these, modern traits accounted for 66.7%, revealing a noticeable shift toward contemporary, self-determined expressions of womanhood.

The findings suggest that Jiang Xunqian's identity is shaped not only by personal positioning but also by broader contextual factors, including platform algorithms, audience expectations, national discourses on cultural revival, and evolving gender ideologies in post-reform China. Her hybrid identity illustrates how female digital creators actively navigate between cultural continuity and transformation, strategically blending modern empowerment with traditional virtues to appeal to diverse audiences.

By integrating multimodal discourse analysis with a gendered lens, this study contributes to the literature on digital self-presentation, female identity, and online cultural production in China. It also demonstrates the applicability of Feng Dezheng's framework to short video platforms, expanding its relevance beyond livestreaming contexts.

However, the study is not without limitations. It focused on a single case and a limited number of videos, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research could incorporate comparative studies across platforms, genres, or creator types to gain a more comprehensive understanding of female identity.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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