



**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA MONASTIC
INFLUENCERS IN CHINA AND THAILAND**



YU FA

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN GLOBAL BUDDHISM
INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE INNOVATION AND CULTURE
RAJAMANGALA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY KRUNGTHAP
ACADEMIC YEAR 2023
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of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

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ABSTRACT

Rapid advancements in media technology have reshaped how religious teachings are shared and consumed. Following modern trends, Buddhist monks increasingly turn to social media platforms like Weibo in China and Facebook in Thailand to preach and connect. Some have even amassed millions of followers, becoming notable influencers. While past studies have touched upon monks' growing presence on social media, their specific behaviors on these platforms remain underexplored. This study delves into the social media practices of Buddhist monks in China, which houses 80% of the global Buddhist population, and Thailand, where 93%-94% of its citizens follow Theravada Buddhism. Using mixed methods of both quantitative and qualitative, like participant observation and content analysis, the researcher analyzed and compared the content and strategies employed by prominent monk influencers on these platforms. Our findings suggest that while monks from both countries effectively use social media to spread Buddhist teachings, their methods differ based on cultural, political, and societal contexts. Common themes emerged, such as the interpretation of Buddhist principles and day-to-day life guidance. Social media has broadened the reach of Buddhist teachings, breaking geographical barriers and challenging traditional religious hierarchies. This study illuminates the shifting landscape of religious communication in today's digital age, offering insights into how Buddhism adapts to and leverages new media for outreach.

Keywords: Buddhism, social media, monk influencers, comparative study, China, Thailand, religious communication

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Lastly, I express my gratitude for the blessings of the Buddhist community and Sangha and all the pioneers in Buddhist studies who came before me. They have served as my source of enlightenment and guidance, setting an example and providing inspiration. Their immeasurable merits and wisdom have benefited sentient beings and left a priceless legacy for future generations.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who have supported me. May all sentient beings find guidance and empowerment through the Dharma, be liberated from suffering, and attain the ultimate realization of Buddhahood.

Yu FA

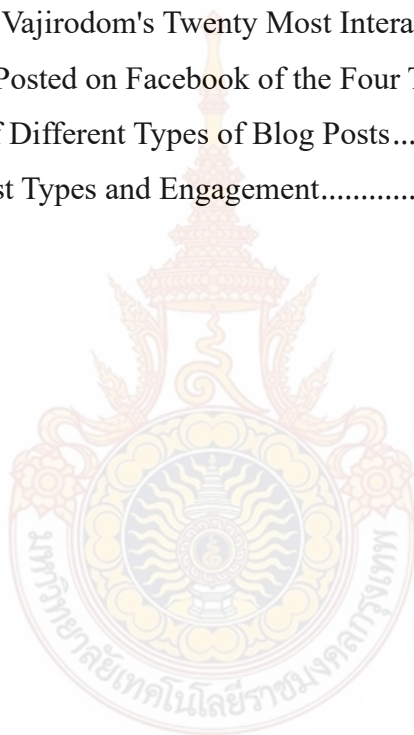
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Information technology, especially the combination of Internet technology and the need for mass information dissemination, has created an unprecedented new media era. From the point of view of this article, the prosperity of social media is the core performance of the new media era. Compared with the traditional social mass media, including newspapers, radio, and television, whose content is generated and provided by media editors, the emerging social media is significantly different. Antony Mayfield is an American scholar who defined social media as "a series of online media that gives people the ability to communicate and share content" based on participation, openness, communication, dialogue, community, and connectivity features. Social media has allowed people to create and share content effortlessly. It has also changed the way people interact with each other by allowing them to participate in real-time information exchange.¹

Social media presents in various forms, is easy to spread, and is more likely to form interest-based communities spontaneously, which is widely loved by young people. Popular social media sites include TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, represented by international short videos, while TikTok, Kuaishou, WeChat, and Sina Weibo are present in China. These social media have become the most important means of mass communication, especially among young people. This year's Oxford Dictionary launched its annual vocabulary, Goblin Model. In the writer's opinion, the popularity of social media is similar to it. The new generation of young people choose a passive way of confrontation to express themselves against authority. The decentralization of social media also meets these needs very well.

The development of social media has brought about profound changes in the field of mass communication. Traditional media has evident timeliness and content

¹ OBAR, Jonathan A., Wildman, Steve. *Social media definition and the governance challenge: An introduction to the special issue* (London: Telecommunications Policy, 2015), 745–750.

richness shortcomings compared to social media. Of course, the depth and authority of traditional media are incomparable to social media. However, in the increasingly fast-paced era of fragmented reading, the advantages of traditional media are somewhat lonely. The younger generation relies heavily on social media for information access and self-expression. Moreover, that is a real problem: it creates generations of people who do not know how to open a book or know the difference between opinion and knowledge about information and fake news.

In the new media era, Buddhism is inevitably faced with the problem of how to deal with the spread of social media. There are already many monasteries in economically developed areas, and the younger generation of Buddhist monks, active or passive, have become online celebrities on social media. The existence of well-known Buddhist monks in social media must also impact the image of Buddhism. However, the presentation and consequences of this influence are not necessarily controllable or positive.

In Thailand, the world's largest and most important Buddhist country, Buddhist monks' use of social media is influenced by official policies, the general public, Buddhist traditions, and Buddhist groups. China is a secular country where communist thought occupies the mainstream. Buddhism is more restricted by policies and the general public here, and the influence of Buddhism itself has been significantly weakened. These are two completely different social environments, even at both ends of the spectrum. Over the past two decades, famous monks such as Master Yancan, Master Haitao, and Master Wudan have emerged online in China. There are also celebrities in Thailand who have received much attention on social media, such as Phra Maha Paiwan Warawanno, Phra Maha Sompong Talaputto, Phra W. Wachiramethi, Phra Sakda Suntharo, Phra Ajahn Jayasaro, Phra Payom Kalayano.

1.2 Research Problems

China and Thailand are essential inheritance countries of Buddhist culture, with a long history of Buddhism and rich Buddhist resources. Famous monks on social media in China and Thailand have their characteristics and styles, and they face different opportunities and challenges. However, no single study has paid attention to

the role and significance of social media in contemporary society by comparatively analyzing the influence of famous monks on social media in China and Thailand. In general, previous studies have focused more on either Buddhism as a whole or the study of the phenomenon of monastic places. It may be that the phenomenon of monastic celebrity in social media is a perspective that has not been given much attention by scholars and masters within the Church, both in China and abroad. The academic community may also have concerns about the unintentional offense of Buddhist doctrine and precepts in the research, resulting in the practice and results of research on the phenomenon of monastic celebrity in social media, which is relatively not abundant.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims:

1. To analyze how monks use social media, including the topics and types of content posted;
2. To analyze the way monks create a social media presence, including frequency of content posted and interactivity;
3. To comparatively analyze the role of monastic influencers on social media in China and Thailand.

1.4 Research Questions

Because social media plays an increasingly important role in today's society, monks, as a special social group, also use this platform to spread Buddhist culture and values. China and Thailand are both big Buddhist countries, but their monks may have different performances and influence on social media, which deserves our discussion and analysis. This study explores the similarities and differences in the influence of famous monks on social media in China and Thailand and the cultural, social and religious factors behind them. By comparing the influence of famous monks on social media in China and Thailand, this research aims to address the following inquiries:

1. How do famous monks on Chinese social media use media resources to spread Buddhist teachings and values?

2. How do famous monks on Thai social media communicate themselves and influence their audiences?

3. What cultural, social, and religious factors have influenced the formation and development of the influence of famous monks on Chinese and Thai social media?

4. What are the similarities and differences between Chinese and Thai monks' social media influencers?

1.5 Research Methods

Selection of research methods: This research will use a mixed method: quantitative and qualitative content analysis will be applied to analyze the famous influencer monks on social media in China and Thailand.

Quantitative methods include using social media analysis tools to collect and count the social media data of the research object, such as the number of fans, likes, comments, reposts, and viewing time. This research mainly includes the following:

- To identify the representative famous monks in China and Thailand on specific social media, such as Weibo, WeChat, Facebook, and YouTube, through network search and literature review, and collect Their basic information, such as name, age, time of becoming a monk, monastery, sect, educational background.

- The entire content posted by the most representative Chinese monks on Weibo within a specified time is collected by a web crawler. The obtained information is summarized and analyzed, and the most popular published content is thematically summarized, coded, and organized.

- Web crawlers collect all the content posted by the most representative Thai monks on Facebook within a specified time. The information obtained was summarised and analyzed, and the most popular postings were thematically summarised, coded, and organized.

- Through content analysis and comparative methods, the most famous monks on Chinese and Thai social media are quantitatively and qualitatively compared and analyzed, such as interaction, dissemination, recognition, and analysis of the factors and mechanisms of the formation and development of their influence from multiple perspectives, including cultural, social and religious.

1.6 Research Scope

The specific scope of this research is as follows:

Research Object: There are many different types and styles of monks on social media in the two countries, and they may have different religious backgrounds, education levels, communication purposes, and audiences². These monks have many fans and followers on social media, and their words and deeds have also been widely watched and discussed. This study will select four representative famous monks from China and Thailand's social media as the research objects and screen and evaluate them according to the number of fans, interaction frequency, content quality, and other indicators. Specific research objects will be identified during the literature review and data collection process.

Research Platform: This study chooses the most popular and influential social media platforms in China and Thailand as the research platforms³, mainly including Weibo in China and Facebook in Thailand. These platforms cover Internet users of different ages, genders, education, and regions in China. Thailand⁴ is also the main channel through which monks spread Buddhist culture and values.

Research Duration: This study selected content posted by specific social media accounts from January 2017 to December 2019 to serve as the study sample.

Given the significant differences in the content posted on social media accounts after the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, the writer believes that this content does not represent monks' typical use of social media. These changes in content essentially render it no longer of research value. Therefore, the period before the outbreak has been chosen as the timeframe for this study. In the writer's opinion, social media usage during this period more accurately represents the typical behavioral patterns of monks. It provides a more stable and representative foundation for understanding how they engage in religious and social communication through these platforms.

² CHEN Zhiqiang, *Comparison of Chinese and Thai Buddhist Culture Research* (Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University, 2018).

³ ZHANG Xiaomei, "Comparative analysis of social media in China and Thailand", *Southeast Asia Vertical and Horizontal*, no. 2 (2019): 67–72.

⁴ LIN Xiaoxia and WANG Xiaoling, "Analysis of the Differences in Social Media User Behaviors in China and Thailand and Their Influencing Factors", *Asia Pacific Economy*, no. 11 (2019): 71–76.

Research Method: This study adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, using content analysis, discourse analysis, network analysis, and other techniques to compare and analyze the similarities and differences of the influence of famous monks on social media in China and Thailand, as well as the cultural, social and religious factors behind them. This research will answer research questions from the following four aspects and adopt different research methods for each aspect:

- Monk characteristics: analyze the basic information of famous monks on Chinese and Thai social media, such as age, time of initiation, status, and position, as well as their activity, number of fans, number of followers, and other indicators on different platforms. This study will use content analysis to describe and compare the characteristics of monks by collecting and collating their data and data published on social media.

- Monk communication: analyze how famous monks on Chinese and Thai social media use media resources to spread Buddhist teachings and values, such as how often they use different forms of text, images, and videos, as well as the theme of their content and the effectiveness of their communication.

- Monk influence: analyze the impact of famous monks on Chinese and Thai social media on their audience, such as what kind of interaction, comments, and retweets. This study will use network analysis to collect and calculate the relevant indicators of monks on social media, such as likes, comments, retweets, attention, and influence, to quantify and compare their influence⁵.

- Monk factor: analyze what cultural, social, and religious factors have influenced the formation and development of the influence of famous monks on Chinese and Thai social media, such as their historical background, political environment, economic conditions, national characteristics, religious traditions, and other factors. This study will use qualitative analysis to explore and compare the relationship between monks' influence and these factors by collecting and interpreting monks' comments on social media and related literature and materials.

⁵ LIU Lihua and ZHANG Liping, "Research on the Evaluation of Weibo Celebrity influence based on Social Network Analysis", *Information Theory and practice*, no. 39 (2016):97-101.

1.7 Significance of Research

The purpose of this study is to explore the comparative analysis of the influence of famous monks on Chinese and Thai social media, select famous monks who are representative of specific social media in China and Thailand as the research object, and analyze their social media strategies, audience feedback, and social impact. This study has the following significance:

First, from a cultural perspective, it reveals Buddhist culture's performance and communication characteristics in China and Thailand on social media. This paper discusses the value and significance of Buddhist culture in contemporary society.

Second, from the perspective of communication, analyze the communication strategies and effects of monks in China and Thailand on social media and explore the roles and responsibilities of monks as public figures in social media.

Third, from a social perspective, investigate the social influence and social responsibility of monks in China and Thailand on social media and explore how monks promote social harmony and public welfare on social media.

There are significant differences in the social background and the development of Buddhism between China and Thailand. By combining the evolution process of the emergence and growth of monks and celebrities in the social media of China and Thailand, this paper tries to reveal the influence of social media monks and celebrities on the development of Buddhism in modern society and the public to explore the law of the new media era. Try to provide meaningful communication countermeasures for developing the Buddhist new media era.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Media of Buddhist Communication

It has been 1,700 years since Gautama Siddhartha taught the Dharma to the five bhikkhus, the first turning of the wheel of Dharma in history. In the early spread of Buddhism, there were no written classics, and it all depended on the word of mouth of the monks. This way of relying heavily on personal memory will inevitably cause many problems. The most obvious is the errors and omissions in memorizing and reciting scriptures-even the birth of the sect Buddhism is related to this. With the development of the times, on the one hand, there is a need for the spread of Buddhism, and on the other hand, it is the discovery and invention of media communication technology. Buddhism has gradually adopted various media technologies to spread Buddhism.

2.1.1 Sutra Written on Palm-leaf

Originally, Buddhist scriptures were transmitted orally from teacher to disciple without being put into writing. It was not until the 1st century BCE, during the Fourth Council, that the scriptures and their commentaries were recorded on palm leaves, resulting in the extensive Tripitaka scriptures. Many of these palm-leaf manuscripts, known as "Pattra" or "Bhurja Pattra," were brought by monks from India and Sri Lanka to various regions in Central Asia, China, and Southeast Asia. These manuscripts have been preserved to this day, playing a significant role in disseminating and developing Buddhism and Buddhist culture.

"Pattra" or "Bhurja Pattra" refers to these palm leaves. "Pattra" is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word "pattra," which means leaf or written document. Initially, it referred to a specific plant known as *Laurus Oassia*, but it later became a general term for tree leaves or leaves used for writing. Hence, "Bhurja Pattra" scriptures are texts written on palm leaves. In countries like India, before the introduction of papermaking technology, tree leaves were commonly used as a substitute for paper in writing. Buddhists utilized palm leaves to write Buddhist scriptures and create images of the Buddha. The famous Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang, also known as Tripitaka, brought back 657 scrolls of palm-leaf manuscripts from India. Some of these palm-leaf

manuscripts contain content from non-Buddhist scriptures or ancient Indian Sanskrit literature.

The Bayeux Sutra is the scriptures engraved or written on the leaves of Bedoruo (Pattra in Sanskrit) with an iron pen. The Bayeux Sutra originated from ancient India and has more than 2,500 years of history. Before papermaking technology was introduced to India, India and other countries used leaves instead of paper for writing. Bayeux Sutra is named after this. Buddhists also use bay leaves to write Buddhist classics and paint Buddha statues. The 657 volumes of Buddhist scriptures, which were brought back from India by the "Tang Monk"⁶ Xuanzang Tripitaka Master, are Bayeux Sutras. There is also a part of the Bayeux Sutra that contains heretic scriptures or ancient Indian Sanskrit literature.

There are many records about the Bayeux Sutra in ancient Buddhist literature. Here is an excerpt of each description of the Bayeux Sutra in different categories, such as sutras, laws, historical biography, and miscellaneous notes.

Volume 51 of the *Buddhist Practice Collection Sutra*⁷ says: "At that time, the heavenly king, knowing the meaning of the Tathagata, went to the place of the Buddha with a pen and ink and many leaves."⁸

Volume 48 of *Vinaya of the Fundamentals of Everything*⁹: "When Mrs Cangrong read Buddhist scriptures at night and had to copy them, she told the minister: 'The birch bark and shell leaves are bright, and the ink lamps are bright. If one wants to

⁶ Master Xuanzang was a famous eminent monk in the Tang Dynasty. He was honored as "Master Sanzang" and later known as "Tang Monk". This name is because he lived in the Tang Dynasty, so he was called "Tang Seng".

⁷ "Buddhist Practice Collection" (《佛本行集经》, Sanskrit name: Abhiniṣkramaṇa sūtra), there are a total of sixty volumes. Also known as "The Bank's Collection of Classics". It was translated by Jana Horita in the seventh to eleventh years (587-591) of Kaihuang in the Sui Dynasty. Included in the third volume of the original part of "Taisho Canon".

⁸ Volume 51 of "Buddhist Practice Collection Sutra": "From time to time, Bishamon Heaven went not far from the Buddha. At that time, the heavenly king knew the meaning of the Tathagata, and went to the place of the Buddha with a pen and ink and a dharani leaf. At that time, the World Honored One wrote a book with his own hands. And King Bai said: "The child born to him is my breath. May there be no doubt about it." (CBETA 2022.Q4, T03, no. 190, pp. 888c27-889a1) "

⁹ The *Vinaya of the Roots* (《根本说一切有部毘奈耶》, Sanskrit: Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayapiṭaka) refers to the Vinaya of the Roots. Compared with other Vinayas, the Vinaya of the Roots contains richer Jatakas, metaphors, and karmic stories. Only some fragments and some intact scriptures of its Sanskrit version remain. The Chinese translation was presided over by Yijing, and was translated in the Tang Dynasty, but many parts of "Vinaya Stories" were lost, and "Vinaya Shangfen" was not a complete translation. There are nearly 200 volumes of existing translations. The Tibetan translation was presided over by Jinamitra and was translated around the 8th and 9th centuries. It is relatively complete and has become the only Vinaya upheld by Tibetan Buddhism.

buy it cheaply, buy more."¹⁰

Volume 3 of *The Biography of Master Sanzang of Daci'en Temple in the Tang Dynasty*¹¹: "Ananda rose by order... After two or three months of safe residence, the collection of Sanzang was completed, and the book leaves were circulated everywhere. The saints said: "We have collected. Therefore, the name is reported to Buddha, and today I hear it, and it is very powerful."¹²

DUAN Chengshi¹³ in the Tang Dynasty's notes, *Youyang Zazu*¹⁴ has a detailed description of Bayeux:

*Bedo*¹⁵ came out of Magadha. It is six or seven feet long and never withers through winter. There are three kinds of this tree: one is the Dora Boli Chabedo, the other is the Dora Boli Chabedo, and the third is the Buva Licha Dorotara. Write the leaf part, take the same color, and take the skin to write it. Beduo is Sanskrit, and Chinese is translated as leaf. Bedouin forks and leaves are also in Chinese. The Western region's scriptures use these three kinds of

¹⁰ Volume 48: "When Mrs. Shi Yanrong read the Buddhist scriptures at night and had to copy them, she told the minister: "The birch bark and shellfish pens and ink lamps are bright, so you need to enter more cheaply." (CBETA 2022.Q4, T23, no. 1442, p. 892a16-18)

¹¹ "The Biography of Master Tripitaka of Daci'en Temple in the Tang Dynasty" (《大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳》), referred to as Biography of Ci'en for short, is a biography of Xuanzang, which records Xuanzang's life story in detail. Written by Xuanzang's disciple Huili (after 664), it was completed in the fourth year of Wuzhou Chuigong (688). The book consists of ten volumes. The first five volumes mainly describe Xuanzang's journey to the west, and the last five volumes are about Xuanzang's translation of Buddhist scriptures after returning to China.

¹² Volume 3 of "Biography of Master Sanzang of Daci'en Temple of Great Tang Dynasty": "Ananda rose up by order, and after paying homage to Buddha Parinirvana Mountain, he sat up and recited the scriptures, and all the people recorded them casually. After recording, he ordered Upali to recite Vina Yazang is all precepts. After reciting, Kasyapa recites Abhidhamma Zang himself, which is all discussions. After two or three months of living in peace and collecting the Tripitaka, the shell leaves of the book will be circulated everywhere. All the sages said: "I have gathered here to repay the Buddha's grace. I heard it today, and it is very powerful." The great Kasyapa monk is the top one, because he is called the top one." (CBETA 2022.Q4, T50, no. 2053, p. 238a24-b2)

¹³ DUAN Chengshi (803-863), courtesy name Kegou. A native of Zouping in the late Tang Dynasty, a famous novelist of fantasy in the Tang Dynasty. He was born in the nineteenth year of Zhenyuan (803 A.D.) of Emperor Dezong of Tang Dynasty and died in the fourth year of Xiantong (863 A.D.) of Emperor Yizong. His father, Duan Wenchang, was a prime minister. He was granted the title of Duke of Zouping County, and he was famous for his poems and poems. In the poetry circle, he is as famous as Li Shangyin and Wen Tingyun. Duan Chengshi believed in Buddhism and read scriptures, drank wine, composed poems and sang harmony to relieve his worries, and his poems often revealed negative emotions that transcended the world.

¹⁴ *The Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang* (Chinese: 酉陽雜俎) is a book written by Duan Chengshi in the 9th century. It focuses on miscellany of Chinese and foreign legends and hearsay, reports on natural phenomena, short anecdotes, and tales of the wondrous and mundane, as well as notes on such topics as medicinal herbs and tattoos.

¹⁵ In Chinese "贝多".

*skin leaves. If they can be protected, it will take five or six hundred years.*¹⁶

In India, the early manuscripts of the Bayeux have all but been lost. It is also quite rare in China. Very few Bayeux Sutras circulated in other places in China, such as the Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an, Mount Emei, Putuo Mountain, and the National Museum of China. Bayeux Sutras has been designated as a national first-class cultural relic.

2.1.2 Printing

"The woodblock printing originated in the Sui Dynasty, practiced in the Tang Dynasty, expanded in the Five Dynasties, and was proficient in the Song Dynasty."¹⁷ This is an overview of the development of woodblock printing from ancient to modern times. Xiang Da¹⁸ said in *Tang Dynasty Publications*¹⁹ that "the origin of Chinese printing is closely related to Buddhism". Both historical records and the discovery of natural objects prove that Buddhist monks contributed to the invention and development of printing.

The Tang Dynasty was one of the most prosperous periods of Chinese Buddhism. For example, the eminent monk Xuanzang's journey to the west and Jianzhen's to the east are famous Dharma-spreading events worldwide. During this period, there were many temples and monks in various places. The prosperous situation of Buddhism naturally produced a significant demand for Buddhist scriptures and statues. However, the traditional handwritten scriptures are too slow to be copied in batches. In this context, many Buddhist prints and the world's earliest prints appeared.

The early Buddhist prints were engraving Buddha statues on woodblocks for mass printing. At the end of the Tang Dynasty, Feng Zhi²⁰ recorded in *Yunxian Sanlu*

¹⁶ "Selected Collection of Ancient and Modern Books (Part 1)" Volume 106: 《古今图书集成选辑(上)》卷 106 : 「贝多出摩伽陀国长六七丈经冬不彫其叶可写字贝多婆力叉此翻树叶也经字大如小赤豆旁行蠕蠕如虫多不识其为何经也外以二木片夹之其木如杉而纹细致可爱南都诸寺中仅有此经而已记又言此贝叶经保护可六七百年」 (CBETA 2022.Q4, B15 , no. 88, p. 530a7-11)

¹⁷ (Ming) HU Yinglin, "Shaoshishanfang Collection", Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2009:4.

¹⁸ XIANG Da (February 19, 1900-November 24, 1966), courtesy name Jueming, Bieshu Fanghui, Buddha Yashe, male, native of Xupu, Hunan. Chinese modern historian, Dunhuang scholar, Chinese and foreign transportation historian, bibliographer, translator.

¹⁹ XIANG Da, "Tang Dynasty Published Books", *Chang'an and Western Civilization in the Tang Dynasty* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1957), 123-124.

²⁰ FENG Zhi, a native of the Tang Dynasty. The year of birth and death is unknown, but he was alive around the time of Emperor Zhaozong of Tang Dynasty. He once used different books in his family's

that after the nineteenth year of Zhenguan (AD 645), "Xuanzang printed the statue of Samantabhadra on Huifeng paper and gave it to four people, and every year there was nothing left."²¹ This is the earliest record of Buddhist printing. The printed matter is only a Buddha statue, and many prints are made yearly, but it is a pity that it has not been handed down.



Figure 1: The Tang Dynasty Printed "Miaofa Lotus Sutra" Discovered in Turpan, Xinjiang, China in 1906

In 1906, in Turpan, Xinjiang, China, a printed volume of the Tang Dynasty, *the Lotus Sutra*²² was found. At first, it was collected by Wang Shunan, the chief envoy of Xinjiang, and later bought by the Japanese Zhong Cunbuzhe. This sutra is printed on yellow paper, bound on a scroll, and has 19 characters per line. The scriptures use characters from Wu Zetian's period, so it is inferred that it is a printed matter from Wu

collection to write ten volumes of "Miscellaneous Notes of Yunxian". "Summary of the General Catalog of Siku Quanshu" believes that this book was forged by Wang Zhi, a Song Dynasty man, and Feng Zhi is no one, it is only a pen name. There is also a book "Southern Fireworks".

²¹ "Selected Collection of Ancient and Modern Books (Part 1)" Volume 93: 《古今圖書集成選輯（上）》卷 93：「雲仙雜記元奘以回鋒紙印普賢像施於四眾每歲五馱無餘」（CBETA 2022.Q4, B15, no. 88, p. 398c15-16)

²² *The Lotus Sūtra* (Chinese: 妙法蓮華經, romanized: Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtram, lit. 'Sūtra on the White Lotus of the True Dharma') is one of the most influential and venerated Buddhist Mahāyāna sūtras. It is the main scripture on which the Tiantai, Tendai, Cheontae, and Nichiren schools of Buddhism were established. It is also influential for other East Asian Buddhist schools, such as Zen. According to the British Buddhologist Paul Williams, "For many Buddhists in East Asia since early times, the Lotus Sūtra contains the final teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha—complete and sufficient for salvation." The American Buddhologist Donald S. Lopez Jr. writes that the Lotus Sūtra "is arguably the most famous of all Buddhist texts," presenting "a radical re-vision of both the Buddhist path and of the person of the Buddha."

Zetian's period (684-705 AD). It is existing in the Calligraphy Museum in Tokyo, Japan.



Figure 2: Early Tang Prints Extant in Gyeongju Museum, South Korea

Buddhist monks have made great contributions to the invention, development, and promotion of printing. The earliest surviving woodblock prints are all Buddhist scriptures. For example, in 1966, the engraved scripture *the Great Dharani Sutra of Pure Light Without Dirt*²³ was discovered in South Korea during Wu Zetian in the Tang Dynasty. According to the research of printing historians, the printing date should be between 704 and 751 AD, and it was a printed matter of Chang'an in the Tang Dynasty. Another real object is the scripture "Diamond Sutra", printed in the ninth year of Tang Xiantong (868 AD). It is also recorded that Xuanzang printed a large number of Buddha statues. Buddhist prints also accounted for a large proportion of the printing of the Five Dynasties. The most popular is a single-page print of Buddha statues above and below, such as the Statue of Bishamon King and the *Statue of Guanyin Bodhisattva*.

Although we cannot conclude that Buddhist monks invented printing, one thing is sure: after the invention of printing, Buddhist circles were the first to use this technology actively. These treasures from ancient times prove one thing - Buddhism actively adopts new media and technologies when propagating the Dharma and self-propagates.

The discovery of electromagnetic waves and the invention and broad application of radio technology in the 19th and 20th centuries profoundly changed the

²³ *The Great Dharani Sutra of Pure Light Without Dirt* (Chinese: 《无垢净光大陀罗尼经》), is a Buddhist scripture. In 1966, during the restoration of the Sakyamuni Pagoda at Bulguksa Temple in Gyeongju City, the former capital of the Silla Dynasty (668-735), a silk scroll was found in a square hole in the upper part of the center of the two-story pagoda. Wrapped 8 cm long, 4 cm diameter Buddhist scripture scroll.

world, especially in communication and media, radio, television, Internet, and multimedia, based on these. In the era of "great changes unseen in a thousand years"²⁴, Buddhism stumbled and finally gradually adapted to the ever-changing new technologies and eras. During the spread of Buddhism in the 20th century, inspired by society, media technologies such as radio and television had to be used actively or passively to convey Buddhist teachings and values and to convey Buddhist information to a wider audience.

2.1.3 Radio and Television

The discovery of electromagnetic waves and the invention and widespread use of radio technology in the 19th and 20th centuries have profoundly changed the world. Communication and media, radio, television, internet, multimedia, are all based on this. In an era of "unprecedented changes in the millennium," Buddhism has stumbled and fallen, eventually adapting to the new technologies and times that are changing rapidly.

During its dissemination in the 20th century, society inspired Buddhism, either actively or passively, to adopt media technologies such as radio and television to convey Buddhist teachings and values and to communicate the Buddhist message to a wider audience.

Radio programs: Buddhist radio programs may include Buddhist music, stories, and lectures. These programs can be broadcast through radio stations or disseminated through online channels such as webcasts. As early as the 1930s, the Buddhist community in Shanghai began to use radio stations to produce and broadcast Buddhist programs, including sermons, chanting, and music, which attracted many listeners.

Television programs: Buddhist television programs can include Buddhist culture, Buddhist teachings, Buddhist history, Buddhist practice methods, and other content. These programs can be broadcast through television stations or distributed through online channels such as online video platforms.

Influenced by different legal and regulatory policies, there is hardly any helpful exploration in this area in mainland China. However, Buddhist TV and TV

²⁴ It turned out that Li Hongzhang once commented that the era he lived in was China's "great change unseen in three thousand years". He believes that the changes that China is facing unseen in three thousand years refer to the situation that China is constantly facing internal and external troubles and political and cultural impacts.

programs have flourished in Taiwan and Hong Kong. In October 2002, Fo Guang TV was renamed Earth TV, and in 2007, Fo Guang TV changed its position from a purely religious station to a public service TV station.

As Tzu-Chi's charitable efforts have reached 128 countries, the station has also strived for internationalization by adding English-subtitled programs and translating many programs into Japanese, Spanish, Indonesian, Thai, Burmese, and Vietnamese. It has also increased cooperation and communication with international platforms, including Crossing TV in the U.S., Phoenix.com in China, KTSF in San Francisco, Line, and Yahoo. In addition, we have increased our cooperation and communication with international platforms, including Crossing TV in the United States, Phoenix.com in China, KTSF in San Francisco, Line, and Yahoo.

When DAIAI was established in 1998, Ven. Zen Yen said, "DAIAI TV is not only a media, but also a platform to spread the Dharma, and with the development of communication technology, to spread the Dharma with technology." This passage is not only the purpose of DAIAI TV but also the attitude that Buddhism should hold in the new era towards new media such as television, radio, and even the Internet.

Buddhist films: Buddhist films can be disseminated through cinemas and TV stations to convey Buddhist teachings and values to a wider audience. *The Thousand-Year Bodhi Road*²⁵ (aka China's Famous Monasteries and Monks) is the first high-definition large-scale documentary on Buddhist history and culture in mainland China and the first large-scale high-definition TV documentary officially approved by the central government to show the original historical aspects of Chinese Buddhism in 2000 years in an all-round way and to spread the culture and ideas mainly of Buddhism. Because of the official level of support, "The Thousand-Year Bodhi Road" was filmed by CCTV, involving 98 cities, 227 monasteries, 5851 books and documents, 580,000 kilometers of Buddha's light, and 140,000 minutes of high-definition video records. It is the highest-level and most successful Buddhist documentary in recent years and has had a tremendous positive effect on disseminating the image of Buddhism.

In recent years, numerous films and TV series on Buddhist themes with

²⁵ "The Thousand-Year Bodhi Road"(Chinese: 《千年菩提路》), is a documentary on Buddhism in mainland China. The film selects 32 Buddhist temples and their representative eminent monks, and tells the development of Buddhism from ancient India to China. The documentary was produced by Beijing Jiayuanhai Culture Media Co., Ltd., with Zhou Bing as the chief director.

high artistic standards, social influence, and conformity to basic historical facts have also been produced with the financial support of the Buddhist community. For example, *The Buddha*²⁶ aired in India in 2013, and *The Great Tang Xuanzang*²⁷ was filmed in mainland China in 2016. In addition, Taiwan has produced many films and TV dramas with different Buddhist themes and genres, as well as Peranakan plays, which have significantly impacted the Chinese Buddhist community.

In conclusion, media technologies such as radio and television can be used to spread Buddhist teachings and values and convey the message of Buddhism to a broader audience. These media technologies can help Buddhism spread more widely and deeply so that more people can understand and accept Buddhism.

2.2 New Media / Social Media and Its Revolutionary Impact in Modern Communication

In the 1960s, the need for computer networking emerged with the development of computers. This was the genesis of computer networking technology. By the 1990s, the international Internet had taken the world by storm, with email, WWW, instant messaging, multimedia, and many other new technologies rooted in computer and network technology making rapid strides in changing the face of the world. The rise of websites, blogs, streaming media, short videos, and, most importantly, social media has profoundly changed how the world spreads information.

The Internet has greatly shortened the spatial distance between people and reduced the time cost of information dissemination. New media technology has further enriched the form of information dissemination on the Internet and improved the efficiency of information transmission.

The rapid development of digital and network technology has given birth to new media. Since the birth of new media, it has surprised everyone with its

²⁶ The Indian TV series "*Buddha*" is a historical drama produced by B.K. Modi and sponsored by Spice Global. Co-produced by Zee TV and Indian Television, the drama premiered on September 8, 2013.

²⁷ The movie "*Great Tang Xuanzang*" is a historical drama film directed by Huo Jianqi and starring Huang Xiaoming and others. The film tells the legendary story of Xuanzang, an eminent monk in the Tang Dynasty, who went to Tianzhu to learn Buddhist scriptures for 19 years without fear of hardships and obstacles.

astonishing development speed and scale, especially posing a serious challenge to traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television. At present, new media is rapidly infiltrating many fields of human society, such as politics, economy, thought, and culture, with an irresistible momentum, not only changing the form of social communication but also affecting people's way of life and thinking.

In such an era, the time needed for information dissemination to achieve global coverage has increased from several years of extreme speed to nearly instantaneous effect. The rise of social media has, in turn, changed the original ownership of the information dissemination discourse. Information dissemination has changed from traditional intense centers to distributed information networks. This change has positive implications - it gives the traditionally silenced general public a chance to make their voices heard. Still, it also brings the problem of difficulty in distinguishing the authenticity of the information.

2.2.1 Concept and Definition of New Media

Where did the concept of new media come from? This goes back more than 40 years. In a product development plan, the term New Media was proposed in 1967 by P. Goldmark, director of the Institute of Technology of the Columbia Broadcasting Network (CBS). In this product plan for developing electronic video recording (EVR), Goldmark called electronic video new media, and the term "new media" was born.

Various research institutions, organizations, experts, scholars, and media practitioners related to communication and journalism have defined the concept of "new media" from their different fields and perspectives. In the beginning, the definition of "new media" was very brief: UNESCO defined "new media as network media"²⁸; the American magazine *ONLINE* defined new media as "Communications for all, by all"²⁹.

It was not until the birth of Web 2.0 that revolutionary changes occurred in the way and scope of information dissemination. This change in the dissemination ecology brought the human information society into the era of "self-media", which produced the real "new media". New media is based on computer technology,

²⁸ TAO Dan and ZHANG Haoda, *New Media and Network Communication* (Beijing: Science Press, 2001), 3.

²⁹ KUANG Wenbo, *Public opinion based on the new media* (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2014), 5.

communication technology, digital broadcasting, and other technologies, such as the Internet, wireless communication networks, digital broadcasting TV networks, satellites, channels, media with computers, TVs, mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), video music players (MP4), and other devices as terminals. It can realize personalized, interactive, and subdivided communication methods, and some new media are spreading. In terms of attributes, it can achieve precise delivery and point-to-point dissemination, such as new media blogs and electronic magazines.

Professor Huang Shengmin from the Communication University of China believes that the essential elements of new media are based on the three infinities constructed by the network and digital technology - unlimited demand, unlimited transmission, and unlimited production. The resulting profit chain promotes the media industry to enter a state of complete competition.³⁰ Therefore, new media is a variety of media based on digital and network technology. Technology is the most fundamental manifestation of "new" and will be reflected in the form; for example, the Internet is a new media form, but electronic newspapers and mobile TV are the integration of media forms achieved through technological innovation based on old media.

Professor Xiong Chengyu from the School of Journalism and Communication of Tsinghua University pointed out that today's new media is a form of media produced and influenced by computer information processing technology, including network media and other digital media forms. The so-called new media, or digital media and network media, is the sum of media that is based on computer information processing technology and the Internet and plays a role in communication in addition to the functions of traditional media such as newspapers, radio stations, and television, it also has interactive, instant, extended and integrated new features.³¹ Internet users are not only information receivers but also information providers and publishers. Therefore, network media is no longer limited to mass media but has gradually transformed into an all-round and three-dimensional new media form that integrates mass communication, organizational communication, and interpersonal

³⁰ HUANG Shengmin and LIU Xiao, "Media Evolution Driven by Technology, Data, and Intelligence", *News and Writing*, no. 7 (2018).

³¹ XIONG Chengyu and LIAO Yiwen, "New Media - The Sword of Damocles in the Iraq War", *China Reporter*, no. 5 (2005).

communication.

In addition to technical elements, Professor Jiang Hong and Xu Jian of Shanghai Jiaotong University defined new media in 2006 from both connotation and extension. They believe that, in terms of connotation, new media refers to the social information dissemination field under the background of significant progress in world science and technology in the late 20th century, which is based on digital technology and can greatly expand the dissemination of information and speed of dissemination. Accelerated, greatly enriched transmission methods and new media that are entirely different from traditional media; in terms of extension, new media includes optical fiber cable communication networks, cable TV networks, Teletext television, electronic computer communication networks, and large computer database communication systems, satellite live TV system, Internet, mobile phone text messages, multimedia information interactive platform, multimedia technology broadcasting network.³²

It is just that professional organizations and scholars hold their own opinions on "new media", and some practitioners in the media industry have also expressed their different views on "new media" based on their practices:

Sun Media, founder of Hongyan Capital Investment Group Wu Zheng, believes that dispelling power is the first characteristic of new media compared to old media. This dissolving power can manifest as dissolving boundaries between traditional media (newspapers, radio, television, communications), between countries, communities, and industries, and between information recipients, borders, and more. Therefore, the new media that Wu Zheng believes is a media that surpasses the breadth of television media and the depth of print media. Previously, no media had the power; from a narrow perspective, new media is interactive digital composite media.³³

In terms of understanding the characteristics of new media, Kuang Wenbo made a more detailed analysis of the connotation and extension of new media in the article "Analysis of the Concept of "New Media". He pointed out that digitization and interactivity are the essential characteristics of new media.³⁴ Professor Peng Lan

³² JIANG Hong and XU Jian, *Introduction to New Media* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, April 1, 2006).

³³ DAI Wei, "The Helplessness of Communication in the New Media Environment", *Radio TV Journal*, (August 2017).

³⁴ KUANG Wenbo, "Analysis of the Concept of New Media", *Chinese Journal of Journalism &*

pointed out that the main characteristics of new media are digitization, integration, interaction, and networking, which further complement the characteristics of new media.³⁵ Generally speaking, the academic circles have reached a consensus on the characteristics of "digitalization" and "interactivity" of new media.

2.2.2 New Media Builds a Networked Society

New media represented by the Internet reconstructs all aspects of social life in all dimensions and redefines people's lives. Scholars have noticed the social impact of new media in terms of time and space and put forward the concept of a "sense of tension in time and space". The "quick change" of new media technology has caused the decentralization of communication and the fracture of time and space; the "absence of presence" in the context of mobile Internet further breaks the daily time and space sequence; the "interface" and "interface" that terminal carriers rely on Space-time habits that limit information reception.

Some researchers believe that the three major technologies of "mobile Internet", "smart portable terminal", and "cloud computing" will change the structure and mode of information exchange and make public information provision, social relationship management, and social structure evolution. Revolutionary change. The impact of the three major technologies on the physical structure and social effects of communication is manifested in four characteristics: the physical structure of information collection and distribution is characterized by "network integration"; the basic unit is characterized by "micro-communication"; social energy aggregation is characterized by "pan-connected" " is described; the creative mode is characterized by "big collaboration".

2.2.3 Forming a New Relationship Between Media Transmission and Reception

Chen Lidan pointed out in the article "Reconstructing the Relationship between Media and Users" that the impact of new media on traditional media is most profoundly manifested in the relationship between media and users.³⁶ The recipients of

Communication, (June 2008).

³⁵ PENG Lan, "Three Clues to Define the Concept of New Media", *Journalism Communication*, (March 2016).

³⁶ CHEN Lidan and SHI Yiqi, "Reconstructing the relationship between media and users—Internet thinking experience of international media peers", *Journalism and Mass Communication Monthly*,

conventional media are called "audience". The media has always occupied the initiative in the relationship with the audience. The audience can only wait and accept the news released by the media in a certain order and choose in a limited time and space; the management of the media is the way to attract the audience as much as possible through careful planning. Let us think about the media with Internet thinking. The positions of the media and the audience will be reversed, and the "audience" will become a "user" who puts forward various information requests. They no longer actively seek news reports but ask the media to push them to do what they want. All kinds of information are needed, including news, but not just news. In the era of social media, information recipients are no longer passive audiences but become networked users who actively participate in the interaction. The development of the concept from the audience to the networked user reflects the changes in the relationship between people and people and between people and the media under the new digital media, thus forming a new audience research orientation and theoretical paradigm.

In the face of the emerging Internet media, how the audience uses and is affected has become the main topic researchers care about. Audience acceptance research is also widely used in new media research, especially the research perspective emphasizing that audiences actively accept information, use, and perceive media. The research path is mainly to excavate the profound theoretical implications from the theoretical perspectives of use and perception, choice and contact, interpersonal interaction, and social interaction, and gradually pay attention to issues such as identity, social identity, loneliness, and empowerment of new media audiences. Enriching existing communication theories also promotes new media research and theoretical construction. Some scholars have turned the perspective of audience research to the study of the weak. Research on network technology empowerment pays more attention to the current situation and the effect of weak people using new media. Some scholars have found that the Internet is a simple tool and life companion for migrant workers. They have not realized other functions of the Internet, such as empowerment, building professional contacts, and providing occupational, professional, and technical information.

The research on the weak and the empowerment of new media should not stop at the technical imagination and pan-politicized elaboration but should adhere to the practice path and situational orientation and draw on the ideological resources of relational sociology. Some scholars have put forward fan-type audience research. The researchers point out that fans are a constructed group identity, which is often a new cultural identity formed by group members beyond the meaning of traditional class. The desire for self-identity is also a metaphor for fans' pursuit of social identity. However, fans will encounter the conflict between "self" and "other". As long as the context of the conflict is changed from the imaginary community of fans to the actual social position to which individual fans belong, this conflict will soon disappear because stars and fans belong to different social classes. Fans gathered through celebrities have formed explanatory communities with subcultural Internet characteristics. However, this kind of aggregation is only superficial, which does not mean equality in the true sense. Under the operation of ideology and consumerism, the style and shared identity created by fan audiences are finally alienated into profit-oriented commodities, and their proud subjectivity is invisible.

2.2.4 A New Mode of Communication

In the era of mass communication, the dissemination of information appears in a linear order. Harold Lasswell's 5W model³⁷ defines mass communication's research scope and basic content, namely disseminator research, content research, media research, recipient research, and effect research, which has a vast influence. Some scholars pointed out that network communication broke the unity of the 5W linear communication model, but network communication research failed to break the normative nature of the 5W research paradigm.

Based on the original traditional communication mode, many Chinese scholars have discussed the changes in the communication mode in the Internet age. For example, Peng Lan proposed three links of network information dissemination: information release, information flow, and information circulation, and suggested three modes of information release: linear, queue, and hierarchical.³⁸ Chen Lidan believes

³⁷ Harold Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication", 1948.

³⁸ PENG Lan, *Introduction to Network Communication* (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2017), 7.

Internet communication has wholly subverted the linear mode of mass communication and has become a typical chaotic system of dynamic, open, and nonlinear communication.³⁹ Chen Weixing believes that the key point of network communication lies in aggregating and disseminating personalized information. This change challenges the original linear, interactive, circular, and communication modes. An intelligent information filtering system has been established between the transmitter and receiver, which can change over time. From simple spam removal to keyword search in search engines to personalized recommendation systems, the maturity of network personal filtering technology has changed the information transmission mode in the new media environment, and a customized information recommendation dissemination model has emerged.⁴⁰ Kou Zixia, Zhang Jinhai Social media subverted the traditional mode of information dissemination and reconstructed the mode of communication in the digital age from media organizations, media users, and media production. From the media to form an interactive information platform, from disseminating content to the dissemination mechanism for users to create and share information, from passive audiences to active users who participate in the interaction, and from fragmented dissemination to re-aggregation of audiences, a series of changes require socialization. Communication in the media environment must be based on user participation, instant interaction, and information sharing.⁴¹ Yu Guoming believes that social media takes people as the primary communication body and implements "Humanode" communication. Every network user is a "node" of dissemination. At the same time, as disseminators, receivers, and re-disseminators of information, they have equal status and can easily switch roles.⁴²

Dai Yumei believes that self-media, as an instant information network of "node sharing", embodies the core function of instant information release and acquisition under the "latent communication" and interprets the "core-edge"

³⁹ CHEN Lidan, *Public Opinion-Research on Public Opinion Orientation* (Beijing: China Radio and Television Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ CHEN Weixing, *Network Communication and Social Development* (Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, 2001).

⁴¹ KOU Zixia and ZHANG Jinhai, "Analysis of Internet Interactive Information Platform Marketing Communication", *Press Circles*, (no. 6-7, 2010).

⁴² YU Guoming, "Transformation of government role and action logic under the background of the rise of social media", *Journalism Review*, (no. 4, 2012): 3-8.

information dissemination of self-media characterized by aggregation. We believe that self-media communication under this mode has the advantages of a "weak connection" between nodes and "circle-oriented" information, which reflects the nesting and connection of user groups in the "circle-oriented" dissemination of information, which accelerates the communication of self-media root cause.⁴³ Peng Lan believes that the dissemination mode of network information has experienced three stages of development: the first stage is the "mass portal" dissemination mode with the website as the core; the "request" communication mode; the third stage is the "personal portal" communication mode with social relations as the communication channel. The personal portal weakens the central position of the public portal, and each individual becomes their communication center. This seems to be a process of decentralization of communication, but at the same time, it will also lead to a new center of discourse power. The interpersonal communication network has become the "infrastructure" of mass communication.⁴⁴ Each node plays the dual role of disseminator and receiver of information simultaneously, and the social relationship of nodes (using the concept of sociology, it is a "social network") has become a channel for information flow. This also means that in such a communication mode, the quantity and quality of relationship channels directly affect the breadth of information flow. The competition among communicators has begun to scramble for user "relationships".

2.2.5 The Scope of Application of Mass Communication Theory

Many studies try to challenge some theories formed in the era of mass communication by analyzing various characteristics of network communication. For example, challenge the "gatekeeper" theory, agenda-setting theory, "silent spiral" Lu Lun, "knowledge gap" theory, and so on. Take the theory of agenda setting as an example. Many people take it for granted that free will and massive amounts of online information will make agenda-setting impossible. However, some studies have pointed out that the Internet media is still accepting the information forced by the traditional media, resulting in the passive status of the audience not being fundamentally changed.

⁴³ DAI Yumei, "Communication Interpretation of We Media", Journalism Communication, May 2011.

⁴⁴ PENG Lan, "From 'Public Portal' to 'Personal Portal': A Key Transform of the Information Spread Model on Internet", *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication*, (no. 9, October 2012): 7. DOI: CNKI:SUN:GJXW.0.2012-10-004.

It is still subject to the agenda set by conventional information sources. Some scholars have also proposed that in the new media environment, break through the single research direction centered on media agenda setting and include the role of individuals and communities using new media on the media agenda as the research focus. Also, some researchers pointed out that the "spiral of silence" phenomenon has not disappeared from the Internet, but its manifestation has changed.

However, some scholars hold the opposite view. ZHOU Honggang believes that the influence of the Internet on public opinion is increasing, and the anonymity of the Internet eliminates the mechanism of public opinion formation described by the "Spiral of Silence" theory.⁴⁵ People can rationally discuss an important event on an online forum. This kind of discussion will eventually maintain the diversity of public opinion through the spread of the influence of the Internet and the personal influence of netizens, and silence will no longer spread. Many scholars have conducted dialectical thinking on the "anti-silence spiral" phenomenon in the current new media context. Meng Wei believes that it is necessary not only to see the role played by the "anti-silence spiral" in the formation of public opinion but also to realize that the development of the "anti-silence spiral" does not mean the complete demise of the "silence spiral". Under these conditions, the "Spiral of Silence" can still play a powerful role, and the "Spiral of Silence" and "Anti-Silence Spiral" are contradictory coexistence in the new media communication environment.⁴⁶ Some scholars also believe that in the later period of Web 2.0, the rapid development of social media has brought new forms of expression to the "Spiral of Silence", and these new phenomena are related to both the interpersonal communication characteristics of social media and the social environment in which they live. In terms of gatekeeper theory, Yin Jun believes that self-media communication presents the attributes of multiple gatekeeping behaviors, and individuals, micro-organizations, traditional media, and governments all play the role of gatekeepers.

The innovation diffusion theory has been applied in the study of communication in the context of new media. Domestic research mainly focuses on the

⁴⁵ ZHOU Honggang, "The Changes of the 'Spiral of Silence' Theory in the Social Media Era", *News Research* (no. 6, 2017): 7-10.

⁴⁶ MENG Wei, "Reflections on the 'Anti-Silence Spiral' Phenomenon in the Context of New Media", *China Radio & TV Academic Journal*, (no. 8, 2014): 48-49.

digital divide brought about by the access and use of digital technologies (Internet, mobile phones). It explores what kind of social results will be brought about by the relationship between new information and communication technologies and knowledge distribution. Some scholars also innovatively tried to link the impact of the digital technology access and use gap on people's knowledge gap and proposed that new media technology has become a variable that significantly affects and shapes the knowledge gap. The knowledge gap can be regarded as the third gap.

Some scholars have paid attention to the changes in secondary communication theory in the context of new media. It is believed that social media has changed the assumption basis for the existence of the "secondary information dissemination" model at a specific level. In social media, the audience is no longer just a passive recipient of information, and it is usually difficult for a single person or social media to monopolize information to achieve one-way communication with the audience. More importantly, the role of opinion leaders as "middlemen" is being blurred and weakened, and even the premise of their existence is being lost. Although traditional opinion leaders face a weakened situation in the social media environment, opinion leaders as a concept are not dying out but can be endowed with new meanings and display new dimensions of expression in communication. Opinion leaders in communication theory are intermediaries between mass media and ordinary audiences. Still, some "opinion leaders" on the Internet have already played the same role as mass media, becoming the leaders of information dissemination rather than simply the "intermediary".

2.3 Buddhist Adoption of New Media

In the early days of Buddhism, it was usually taught by word of mouth and preached without words, and there was no systematic paradigm for a long time. Even until the first gathering, Buddhism appeared in relatively fixed scriptures, which allowed Buddhism to spread through the media in the later period. With the invention of paper making and movable type printing, Buddhist teachings have been copied, written, printed on shellfish and paper, or spread more widely in the form of sculptures and murals. In China, with the combination of Buddhism and local culture, there have

been more Chinese ways of communication, such as the opera "Mu Lian to Save the Mother" and many Buddhist Praise sutras. This was the primary way Buddhism spread in medieval times. Since modern times, in addition to publishing and printing, based on the development of audio-visual and communication technology, broadcasting has also become an essential means of communication in the traditional media era before the emergence of Internet technology.

New media, relative to traditional media such as newspapers, outdoor, radio, and TV, refers to the media forms that emerge under new technology support systems, such as digital magazines, digital radio, cell phone SMS, mobile TV, internet, digital TV, and so on. The new media era, which the academic community has not fully defined, refers in this paper to the era when digital media is prevalent, and more specifically refers to the new generation with social media as the core of communication after the development of Internet technology. In this paper, the new media era refers mainly to about thirty years since the 1990s - when the widespread use of the Internet and new media technologies profoundly and acceleratedly changed the world.

In today's globalization and digital age, social media has become an essential platform for people to obtain information, exchange opinions, and express emotions. Social media not only affects people's lifestyles but also changes people's values and beliefs. Almost all individuals, organizations, and groups have found online and social media voice channels. Everyone must take advantage of this avenue to not be destroyed by the tides of the times. Buddhism is equally unavoidable. In this context, some famous monks have also started using social media to spread Buddhist teachings and wisdom, attracting many fans and followers.

In China, numerous monasteries and priests scramble to open websites and create APP accounts online to better communicate with themselves and their groups. Buddhism has gained a certain voice on the Internet, too. Among the more influential Ven.s, such as Ven. Yancan, who Chinese officials officially recognize as the number one Buddhist vlogger⁴⁷, Ven. Xuecheng, former president of the Buddhist Association of China, operates microblogs in multiple languages and monasteries that consciously

⁴⁷ In 2018 the Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China organized a training session for representatives of individuals or groups in the national religious community who have greater influence on the Internet, and Ven. Yancan was the only individual in the Buddhist community who was directly invited by the Central Propaganda Department.

manage and run their online and offline images, such as Hangzhou Lingyin Temple and Shanghai Jade Buddha Temple. While expanding their influence on the Internet, these monasteries and priests have inevitably changed Buddhism's overall image and communication. However, this change may not be all that we expected. This is, of course, one of the implications of this paper's research.

Buddhist websites, blogs, social media, and other online platforms can be used to spread Buddhist teachings and values and convey the message of Buddhism to a broader audience. In the early stages, Dharma teachers did not have a clear concept of this concept, and the methods used were not unlike traditional media. However, Buddhism has its characteristics that place certain demands on communication methods.

Concerning the overall sorting out of the relationship between Buddhism and new media, such literature is relatively abundant. For example, Social media and the practice of lay Buddhists in contemporary China⁴⁸ by Feng Jihai explores the impact of the new media era on the way Buddhist groups interact with their followers; The Weakening and New Changes of Classical Communication Theory in the Context of Internet Information⁴⁹ co-authored by Zhou Dayong and Wang Xiuyan proposes that Internet information dissemination has given rise to the weakening and new changes of classical communication theory, and classical communication theory gradually fails in the new media era, which warns about the contemporary communication of Buddhism from the side.

Significantly, Buddhism, the Internet, and Digital Media—the Pixel in the Lotus⁵⁰ were edited by Gregory Price Grieve and Daniel Veidlinger. The book is a representative work of such research in systematically sorting out the relationship between Buddhism and new media. The authors systematically "consider the ways Buddhism plays a role and is present in digital media through a variety of methods including concrete case studies, ethnographic research, and content analysis, as well as interviews with practitioners and cyber-communities" to explore the "development,

⁴⁸ FENG Jihai, "Social Media and Contemporary Chinese Lay Buddhists' Practice", *Journalism*, (no.12, 2019): 58-71.

⁴⁹ ZHOU Dayong and WANG Xiuyan, "Weakening and New Changes of Classical Communication Theory in the Context of Internet Information", *Library Studies*, (no.18, 2016): 93~97.

⁵⁰ Gregory Price Grieve and Daniel Veidlinger, *Buddhism, the Internet, and Digital Media—the Pixel in the Lotus* (London: Routledge, 2015).

proliferation, and perception"⁵¹ of Buddhism in the virtual world and social media how it works and has an impact, and provides precious insights.

Studies on Buddhism adopting new media technologies for its own and cultural communication are vibrant and constitute the bulk of the literature on Buddhist communication in the new media era. Huang Ke and Li Bo⁵², PhD students in communication at the Communication University of China, co-authored *The New Media Landscape of Contemporary Buddhist Communication*⁵³, which focuses on the use of new media technology in Buddhism as a whole; Li Hongyan and Du Chaofan, Xi'an University of Technology, discuss the phenomenon of "circling" of online communication of Buddhist culture explores the problem of how to break down the class barriers caused by identity, information, socialization, and discourse power of different social classes in the process of Buddhist communication; Chen Li, Nanchang Normal College, wrote in her article, *The development of Buddhism's Sinicization in the new media era - Taking the Use of New Media in Buddhist Monasteries as an example*⁵⁴, the principles, bases, and practices of Buddhism in practicing the ideology of "earthly Buddhism" by using virtual network space to spread information in a more grounded way are systematically reviewed. It is also suggested that the free and open nature of the new media platform and the different communication subjects and purposes of communication have made Buddhist culture take on complex forms of communication.

However, starting from the title of this paper, the perspective of the monastic celebrity phenomenon in social media, the literature and studies exploring the spread of Buddhism in the new media era, there are only a few articles when searching well-known academic literature databases such as China Knowledge Network, World Wide Web database. Among them are Li Qiu-Chen of the School of Communication, Nanjing Arts College, Jiangsu Province, and *The Communication of Buddhism in the*

⁵¹ Gregory Price Grieve and Daniel Veidlinge, *Buddhism, the Internet, and Digital Media*.

⁵² HUANG Ke and LI Bo, "The New Media Landscape of Contemporary Buddhist Communication", *Modern Communication* (no.2, 2011): 159~160.

⁵³ LI Hongyan and DU Chaofan, "A trial of the phenomenon of "circling" of Buddhist culture online communication", *Journal of Baoji College of Arts and Science (Social Science Edition)*, (no.3, 2019): 56~61.

⁵⁴ CHEN Li, "The Development of Buddhism's Sinicization in the New Media Era - Taking the Use of New Media in Buddhist Monasteries as an Example", *The Journal of Nanchang Normal College (Social Science)*, (no.4, 2021): 137~140.

New Media Era - Taking the Phenomenon of Ven. Yancan Going Viral as an Example⁵⁵, Fan Wenxu, a master's student at Chongqing University, A Preliminary Exploration of the Weibo Communication of Contemporary Buddhist Culture - Taking Ven. Yancan's Weibo, for example,⁵⁶ is focused on Ven. Yancan, the once most well-known celebrity monk on Chinese social media, analyses the process and reasons for this monk's fame and its revelations for Buddhism's communication in the new media era. In addition, Ren Yaxian's a Preliminary Exploration of the Characteristics and Effectiveness of Contemporary Buddhist Weibo Communication Model: An Analysis of Ven. Xuecheng's Weibo Content, an example from Sichuan University's Institute of Taoism and Religious Culture, explores opinion-leading monastic celebrities' characteristics and communication effects when adopting social media for self-expression.

2.4 Religious Communication

Religion is a vital force that maintains human society and is essential to personal growth and social development. However, this role can not be determined to be positive or negative for different individuals.⁵⁷ Religion is transmitted through interpersonal, intergenerational, and intergroup interactions. It can be between family members, within a social organization, or between countries or ethnic groups.⁵⁸

The factors that identify or differentiate members of social organizations may be ethnicity, tradition, ethics, and values. However, it is also possible, even very likely, that a factor is religion. Religion brings people together or divides them into groups through interpersonal communication. This kind of interpersonal communication is also an essential way of religious communication.

Religion has used different methods and media of communication in various periods of history. This has changed with the development of the times and

⁵⁵ LI Qiuchen, "Buddhism in the New Media Era: The Popularity of Ven. Yancan as an Example", *Western Radio and Television*, (no.8, 2013):34-37.

⁵⁶ FAN Wenxu, "A Preliminary Exploration of the Weibo Communication of Contemporary Buddhist Culture--Taking Ven. Yancan's Weibo as an Example", *News World* (no.7, 2015): 267~268.

⁵⁷ Peter. O. Ottuh and Mary O. Jemegbe, "Communication in Religion and Its Integrative Implications for Society", *Pinisi Discretion Review* (vol. 4, no. 1, September, 2020):1-10.

⁵⁸ Duke, E. O. & Okafor, J. O. , *Poverty Alleviation Policies of Selected Churches in Anambra State, Nigeria*, *Human Theory and Praxis*, (vol. 3, no.1, 2020): 40-52.

changes in form. Taking Islam as an example, to spread, the Prophet Muhammad successively adopted three methods of propaganda: First, the Prophet alone invited people to convert to Islam in the first three years. This invitation is made through personal communication and face-to-face interaction.⁵⁹ Second, the Prophet analyzed specific groups of people in Mecca, and the Prophet spoke to them using different methods of communication. For example, his communication with the tribal chief⁶⁰ differs from his relationship with the people⁶¹. Third, in Medina, after the Prophet established the government and organization, the Prophet communicated with government members and believers through letters. This example is an illustration of the growing spread of religion.

Traditionally, the religious transmission may be mainly through on-site sermons, hospital sermons, letter and printed matter sermons, sacrifices, festivals, and religious ceremonies. The continuous development of new technologies has made telephone preaching, radio preaching, e-mail preaching, and new media preaching more and more critical in spiritual communication; leaving aside the discussion of these specific media, religious communication can use rituals, music, language, writing, and other forms of self-propagation. These different forms played different roles in the process of spiritual transmission.

⁵⁹ Carey, J., *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston, MA: Unwin, 1985).

⁶⁰ Grillo, L. S., *African Religions. Microsoft Encarta 2009 [DVD]* (Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2009)

⁶¹ Alviry, M. (2007). Baqer[ol].Olum.<http://www.presentationmagazine.com/the-mehrabian-myth-898.htm>

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Literature on Content Analysis and Its Application

Content analysis can be both a quantitative and qualitative research method that belongs to a category of documentary research methods—initially focused on newspapers in textual form, content analysis has been widely used in social science research. The scope of application of content analysis is relatively broad, and its research is also uncountable. This article will only summarize some of the better-known studies and their results.

The content analysis method fully adopts the scientific research method, from the research purpose to the research theory to the research hypothesis. Finally, the whole application process is scientific and rigorous regarding the research results. The method focuses on both quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis of the data.

Regarding research and application value, the content analysis method shows strong vitality. It can be used to study any document or documented communication event and, therefore, has a wide range of applications, from business to social services, from marketing and media research to ethnography and culture, sociology and political science, psycho-cognitive sciences, and many other research fields.

In the China Knowledge Network (CNN) search, the time limit is 2016.12-2020.12 in the past five years. The number of documents appearing more than twice in the full-text accurate search by "content analysis method" is 3,906. From the trend of the year of publication, it is estimated that the number of documents will increase from 74 in 2016 to 1,557 in 2020, which is about a 20-fold increase. From the trend of publication year, from 74 articles in 2016 to an estimated 1,557 articles in 2020, the number of articles has increased about 20 times.

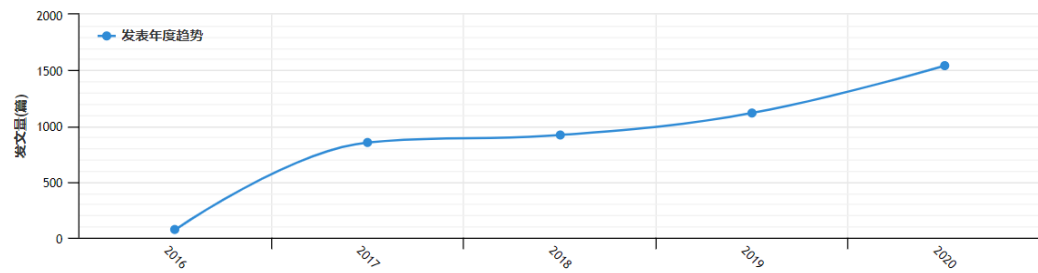


Image Intercept Source: China Knowledge Network <https://www.cnki.net/>

The top thirty themes related to content analysis research methodology, research review, policy research, online text, and tourism image research have many documents.

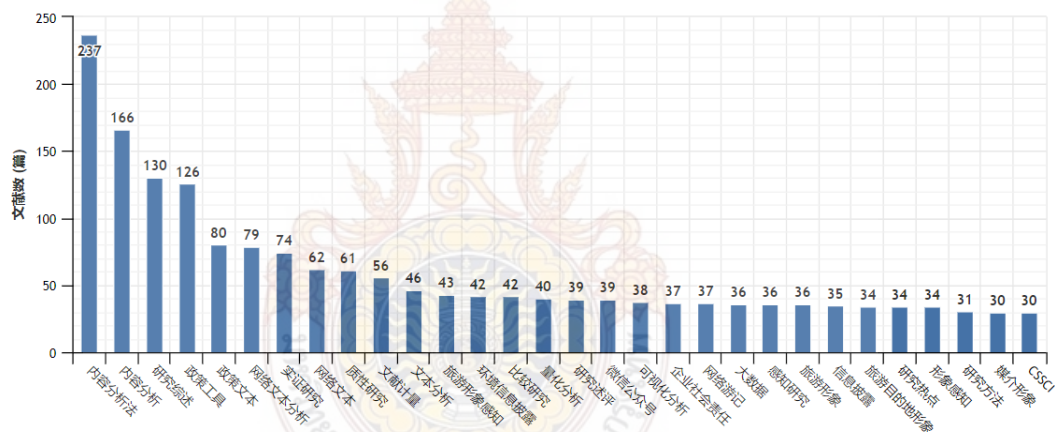


Image Intercept Source: China Knowledge Network <https://www.cnki.net/>

Regarding research disciplines, the amount of literature in social sciences is the highest, with higher numbers in librarianship, journalism and communication, tourism, education, political science, psychological cognition, and other disciplines.

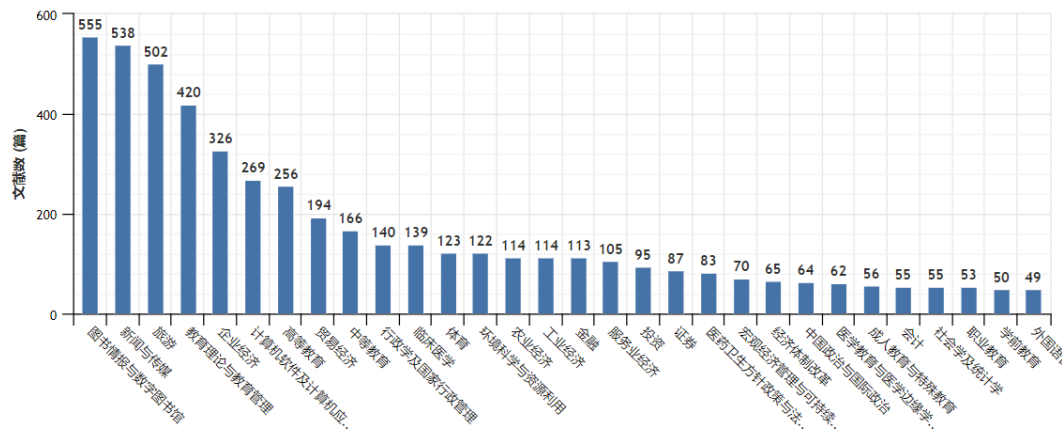


Image Intercept Source: China Knowledge Network <https://www.cnki.net/>

3.1.1 Meaning of Content Analysis Method

The content analysis method is a research method that describes and analyzes the explicit content of various forms of information dissemination objectively, systematically, and quantitatively, and what the researcher analyses is the external, indicated content rather than the more profound interpretation of the content, which consists of five main steps, i.e., selecting the unit of analysis, sampling, coding statistics, analyzing data, and reporting the results of the study. Content analysis is a non-intrusive research method that does not interfere with the object of study to affect the results. Still, it is limited to the study of recorded information, and data validity has some problems.

Content analysis was born as a formal research method during World War II, proposed by Bernard Berelson in his book *Content Analysis: A Tool for Communication Research*.⁶² In his 1952 book *Content Analysis in Communication Research*, Bernard Berelson offered the most authoritative definition of the content analysis method: content analysis is a research method that provides an objective, systematic, and quantitative description of explicit communication content. With this definition, content analysis becomes an independent quantitative research method and reflects the difference between discourse analysis methods such as rhetoric and semantics: the former emphasizes quantification and objectivity. It advocates the

⁶² Berelson Bernard. *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. (Glencoe Ill: Free Press. 1952)

analysis of literal content, while the latter emphasizes comprehension and does not exclude the analysis of the meanings behind the symbols. Bernard Berelson also discusses the most critical steps of the research methods of sampling, coding, and statistics in his book, of the most important steps. Beginning with this book, the content analysis approach to communication matured. It became one of the most essential measures in the social sciences, and Bernard Berelson, along with Harold Lasswell, is seen as a pioneer of the content analysis approach.

In addition to these two founders of the content analysis method, numerous communication scholars have conducted extensive research. In her book, Professor Bu Wei discusses the goals and values of content analysis methods and presents her proposal of three goals for content analysis and three forms of content analysis methods.⁶³

Chen Weijun, in *Comparison Between Bibliometric Method and Content Analysis Method*, compares the many differences between bibliometric method and content analysis method in terms of research object, methodological basis, and application scope.⁶⁴

Zhou Liming and Qiu Junping's *On the Web-based Content Analysis* proposes that web content analysis should have two meanings: one is to analyze the web content, and the other is to study content analysis based on the web technology and web environment. Based on this conceptual analysis, the article analyzes the research objectives, characteristics, and advantages of web-based content analysis, its integration and complementary relationship with webometrics, and the application of web content analysis in web measurement.⁶⁵

In addition to this, there are numerous habits studied below:

James C. Ward, Amy L O, “*The internet as information minefield, an analysis of the source and content of brand information yielded by net searches*”, *Journal of Business Research*, (No.56 (11), 2003):907-914.

Bos Wilfried, Tarnai Christian, “*Content analysis in empirical social*

⁶³ BU Wei, “*A Test of Content Analysis Methods*”, *International Journalism*, (No.4, 1997)

⁶⁴ CHEN Weijun, “*Comparison Between Bibliometric Method and Content Analysis Method*”, *Information Science*, (No. 8, 2001): 884-886.

⁶⁵ ZHOU Liming, QIU Junping, “*Web-based content analysis method*”, *Journal of Intelligence Journal of The Chinese Society for Scientific and Technical Information*, (No.24(5), 2005):594-599.

research”, *International Journal of Educational Research*, 1999(1).

Nitish Singh, Hisako Matsuo, “Measuring cultural adaptation in the web: a content analytic study of U.S. and Japanese web sites”, *Journal of Business Research*, (No.57 (8), 2004):864- 872.

WU Shizhong, “An outline of content analysis methodology”, *Information and Documentation Services*, (No.2, 1991):37-39,47.

ZHAO Rongying & ZOU Fei, "Exploring the Basic Theoretical Issues in the Discipline of Content Analysis Law On the Disciplinary Foundation of Content Analysis", *Library and Information Service*, (No.6,2005):14-18, 23.

SUN Ruiying, “The study of content analysis method on network data”, *Researches In Library Science*, (No. 5, 2005):35-39.

3.1.2 Application of Content Analysis Methodology

QIU Junping and others from Wuhan University point out that the application of the content analysis method in natural and social sciences is discussed in detail. Three application models in the content analysis method are discussed, i.e., the system analysis model, the indicator analysis model, and the linguistic analysis model. The problems in applying the content analysis method are analyzed with examples.⁶⁶

As far as the nature of the research material is concerned, it can be applied to any form of material, i.e., it can be used to both textual record form type of material and non-textual record form type of material (e.g., broadcasting and speech recordings, TV programs, video recordings of actions and gestures);

In terms of the source of the research material, it can either analyze many existing materials used for other purposes (e.g., student textbooks, diaries, homework assignments), or it can collect relevant materials (e.g., interview transcripts, observation records, sentence-completion tests) specifically for a particular research purpose and then critically analyze them; in terms of the focus of the analysis, it can either focus on the content of the material, the structure of the material, or both; in terms of the analysis, it can either focus on the content of the material, the structure of the material, or the structure of the material, or both. The focus of analysis can be either on the content of the material, on the structure of the material, or both.

⁶⁶ QIU Junping, YU Yisheng and ZOU Fei, “Application Research of Content Analysis Method”, *Journal of Intelligence*, (No.8, 2005):11-13.

Although the scope of application of the content analysis method is relatively broad, the content suitable for it should generally have the characteristics of being able to be operated repeatedly, being experienced by people's senses, having obvious significance, and being directly understandable. Usually, the content analysis method is not suitable for those who do not have such characteristics. Usually, it is not appropriate to use content analysis to study potential and deep content that does not have such characteristics. Otherwise, it is difficult to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the results.

According to ZHU Liangbing and JI Xiyu, content analysis is a semi-quantitative analytical method between quantitative and qualitative research, and it can find research ideas and effects that are difficult to achieve by purely qualitative and quantitative methods. From the perspective of the process of scientific understanding, any research or analysis generally begins with the study of the qualitative differences of things. Then, it goes on to study their quantitative provisions, and based on quantitative analysis, it makes a final qualitative analysis to arrive at a more reliable analysis.⁶⁷

3.1.3 Challenges of Content Analysis Method in the New Media Era

As a research method of quantitative analysis, the content analysis method relies heavily on literature, which is not only significant in quantity but also requires accurate and reliable sources. Although the development of computer tools has reduced the burden of statistical work to a certain extent, the "information explosion" in the new media era has posed significant challenges to identifying and categorizing information sources.

Information in the new media era is not limited to text but to pictures, videos, audio, and hyperlinks. The meaning of information is also unclear, and the actual intention and emotion are often hidden behind the text. Therefore, content analysis work must be combined with automated means such as web mining, semantic network analysis, and even deep learning.

In the era of new media, it is challenging to select samples of online information as "random sampling", and there may be defects in the selection of time

⁶⁷ ZHU Liangbing, JI Xiyu, "Content Analysis Method and Its Application in Network Information Analysis", *China Information Review*, (Vol. 11,2005): 38-40.

frame, affecting the samples' representativeness. In addition, the reliability and validity of content analysis also depend on whether the category construction of the study is reasonable, and the category division must follow exhaustiveness and mutual exclusivity, which requires a high level of sample selection and information processing.

The content analysis method in the new media era emphasizes systematic and repeatable analyses. It interprets the content, draws in-depth inferences and insights, mines the value, and draws the meaning of the text, which has a higher application value and a more comprehensive range of application fields. In the future, the gradual promotion of AI technology may bring a new change to the content analysis method.

3.2 Research Design

Construction of the Research Framework:

This study aims to develop a research framework grounded in the Cultural Adaptation Theory, Social Influence Theory, and Religious Communication Theory. It will analyze how renowned monks on Chinese and Thai social media platforms adapt and optimize their communication methods and content based on varying cultural, social, and religious backgrounds. Furthermore, it will assess the impacts they have on their audiences and the significance and value of these impacts. This study will reference the works of Kim⁶⁸, Cialdini⁶⁹, and Hoover⁷⁰ to support and elucidate the research framework:

Analysis of Research Cases:

This research will scrutinize each case based on the research framework, comparing their communication behaviors and effects on social media. It will highlight the similarities and differences in their influence from cultural, societal, and religious perspectives. The study will delve into the communication content and strategies of these subjects on specific social media platforms and their impact on their audience. The aim is to understand how they adjust to different cultural environments, leverage

⁶⁸ Kim, Y. Y. *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. (Sage. 2001).

⁶⁹ Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J.. *Social Influence: Compliance and Conformity. Annual Review of Psychology*, (2004) 55, 591-621.

⁷⁰ Hoover, S. M., & Clark, L. S.. *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*. (NY: Columbia University Press. 2002)

social influence to attract and persuade audiences, and convey Buddhist teachings and values.

Research Design:

Research Subjects: This study will focus on prominent monks on specific social media platforms in China and Thailand. For Weibo in China, the subjects are Ven. Yancan, Ven. Jiqun, Ven. Wudan, and Ven. Yongxin. For Facebook in Thailand, the subjects include Phra Methee Vajirodom, Phra Sakda, Phra Thep Patcharayanmuni, and Phrakhru Baidika Suphot Suwachano.

Research Steps:

1. Begin with a network search and literature review to collect basic information about prominent monks on Chinese and Thai social media. This step will involve creating a database that includes details like name, age, time spent as a monk, monastery, denomination, educational background, social media account, fan count, and post count.

2. Utilize content analysis to compare how these monks use media resources on Chinese and Thai social media. This step will examine publishing frequency, content type, topic selection, language style, and audio-visual effects. From this, we will deduce their communication strategies and features.

By employing methods such as literature analysis, case analysis, and comparative analysis, this study will evaluate the factors and mechanisms driving the influence of these prominent monks on Chinese and Thai social media. These analyses will be done from cultural, societal, and religious viewpoints, and the study will provide relevant recommendations and insights.

3.3 Social Media Content Analysis

Internet technology is advancing so rapidly that it might undergo a revolution in just a few short years. The same can be said for social media, a burgeoning sector within the internet realm. Social media has progressed from BBS and online communities in the 1970s to blogs, microblogs, personal web pages, and the prevailing trend: short videos. This industry has transformed hand in hand with the evolution of the internet, mobile internet, multimedia, and 5G technology. However, due to the

writer's constraints, primarily the challenge of collecting and analyzing video content, social media research concentrates on.

To be more specific, short blogs are the primary focus of our research. Given the differing scenarios in China and Thailand, their social media landscapes vary significantly. Sina Weibo has firmly established its dominance in China, much like Meta's Facebook in Thailand.

This research is planned to employ a data crawler tool. For the Chinese segment, gather data from Sina Weibo users, capturing fields such as ID, nickname, fan count, follower count, tweet count, tweet content, retweet count, comment count, like count, posting time, source, and whether the content is original or a retweet. For the Thai segment, the data collection will be similar but focused on Facebook.

It is worth noting that the tools utilized to harvest data from microblogs and Facebook are the standard and international versions of the Octoparse data collection platform, respectively.

The research process is as follows:

1. Select content posted by specific social media accounts from January 2017 to December 2019 to serve as the study sample.
2. Based on the nature of the posted content, establish a content analysis coding table. This process will include dimensions such as content type (like Buddhist teachings, insights into life, social commentary, and cultural outreach), topic selection (covering areas like Buddhist history, art, science, and ethics), language style (whether it is formal, informal, comedic, or severe), and audio-visual elements (including pictures, videos, audio, and text).
3. The selected samples will undergo content analysis coding. The results will then be statistically and comparatively analyzed to discern similarities and differences in the media resource utilization by prominent monks on Chinese and Thai social media. This step will help to extract their unique communication strategies and traits.

3.4 Sampling

The objects of the study were selected slightly differently from those of

China and Thailand. Weibo provides a function to find users by advocacy category, so it is very convenient to find the most famous Buddhist Dharma masters on it. The four most popular Dharma teachers were selected for Chinese study in this way. The differences in their social media styles and identities were also considered. They are Ven. Yancan, Ven. Jiqun, Ven. Wudan and Ven. Yongxin.

The four Chinese Ven. Masters are strongly personalized to each other. Ven. Yancan is an enthusiastic participant in social causes and social activities and the most recognizable Chinese Buddhist Internet celebrity with wide social recognition and even official accreditation. In addition, Ven. Jiqun focuses on preaching and propagating the Dharma in reality and on the Internet, Ven. Wudan is a writer of literary works who owns a small monastery and Ven. Yongxin is the abbot of the Shaolin Temple, which is world-renowned for its martial arts. With their distinctive personalities, all of them have a certain influence on Chinese social networks.

The Thai study subjects were influenced by a Thai report published on the website of Thai National Television entitled *Revealing the top 10 "monks", celebrities who teach Dharma, beloved by social media*⁷¹. The story, published on September 6, 2021, briefly describes the top ten monks in Thailand who are the most influential on social media. Four of them were selected for this study. Phra Methee Vajirodom, Phra Sakda, Phra Thep Patcharayanmuni, Phrakhru Baidika Suphot Suwachano.

Phra Methee Vajirodom is considered the most recognizable Thai monk on Facebook, as shown in this report by Thai state television. It should be noted that ไพรวัลย์วรรณบุตร (3.27 million followers), พงศกร จันทร์แก้ว (หนังแรมโบ้ ศ.สุวรรณศิลป์, 510 thousand followers), is no longer a monk. เพจเฟซบุ๊ก (823,590 followers) is private and no longer available to the public. As a result, these three equally famous monk accounts have been excluded from the study.

3.5 Case Studies

Here are the specific steps for the operation:

⁷¹ Thai title "เปิด 10 อันดับ "พระสงฆ์" สายเซเลบสอนธรรมะขวัญใจชาวโซเชียล", 06 กันยายน 2564, <https://www.nationtv.tv/news/378838071>

Based on the study's objectives and questions, devise a model to assess the influence of prominent monks on Chinese and Thai social media. This model includes attention, participation, dissemination, recognition, and trust. We have identified several specific metrics within each dimension, categorized by their data sources and calculation methods.

Gather data associated with renowned monks on Chinese and Thai social media platforms using web crawling technology. This step will encompass metrics like fan count, likes, comments, retweets, favorites, and read counts from platforms such as Weibo (for China) and Facebook/Twitter (for Thailand). Once collected, the data will undergo cleaning, preprocessing, and normalization to ensure they are fit for subsequent analysis.

Using the Weighted Average Method (WAM), I will compute influence scores for each monk across all dimensions and in general. This step will allow us to rank them and produce an influence hierarchy of these monks on Chinese and Thai social media.

Employ correlation, cluster, and factor analysis to investigate the relationships between the dimensions and metrics. Additionally, variances in influence between different monks were identified.

Finally, by utilizing literature reviews, case studies, and comparative analyses, dissect the factors and mechanisms that shape the influence of these monks on Chinese and Thai social media. This examination will encompass cultural, societal, and religious perspectives, leading to our recommendations and insights.

CHAPTER IV

RESULT ANALYSIS

Several concepts in this chapter need clarification. Here are their definitions:

Likes: These typically signify basic content approval by a user and are considered the most fundamental engagement metric.

Retweets suggest that a user wants their followers or friends to view the content, facilitating its spread and propagation.

Comments show a user's desire to engage with the content or other users. Given the time and effort involved, comments may reflect a higher engagement.

Considering the engagement levels described and the study's objective, weights need to be reassigned to these metrics. This reassignment will allow a more precise representation of the content's "popularity" shared by research participants. The weighting in this study is defined as:

$$\text{Interaction} = \text{Likes} + (\text{Retweets} \times 2) + (\text{Comments} \times 3)$$

$$\text{Interaction} = \text{Likes} + (\text{Retweets} \times 2) + (\text{Comments} \times 3)$$

A higher interaction value suggests greater popularity. However, it is worth noting that this metric measures attention rather than genuine appeal or quality. Additionally, it is essential to mention that this study's data collection period spans from January 1, 2017, to December 31, 2019.

4.1 Content Topics by Chinese Media Monastic Influencers on Weibo

Chinese and Thai mages have distinctly different styles of social networking. This differentiation or individualization is even more pronounced when it comes to individuals specifically, so it is difficult to make an obvious generalization in one or two words. For now, the study only attempts to categorize the content participants posted broadly. Specifically, the content of their postings can still be classified into the broad categories of Buddhist teachings, practices, moral codes, and

secular topics.



Figure 3: Weibo Profile of Yanqun, Jiqun, Wudan, Yongxin

4.1.1 Most Famous Chinese Monks on Social Media

Let us start with an introduction to Ven. Yanqun. Yanqun is the most famous person on Chinese social networks. Ven. Yanqun is the vice president of the Hebei Provincial Buddhist Association, the president of the Cangzhou City Buddhist Association, and the abbot of the Shuiyue Temple and several other temples in Cangzhou City. According to public internet information, Ven. Yanqun was born in 1962 and keenly advocates social welfare activities.

On January 6, 2010, Ven. Yanqun registered to open a Sina microblog. He has 41.81 million followers and 62,090 tweets - two terrifying numbers, the former illustrating his enormous influence on the Chinese Internet, the latter reflecting his dedication and diligence in running a social network. Because it is difficult to process

such a massive amount of posted information, this study limits the time frame of data collection to January 2017 to December 2019.

During this period, Ven. Yancan posted a total of 10,297 messages on a variety of Buddhist, Chicken Soup for the Soul, moral codes, and secular topics. Twenty of the most popular ones, with topics, are listed below:

Table 1: Ven. Yancan's Twenty Most Interactive Tweets⁷²

No.	Thematic	Release Date	Interaction
1	Interaction	Jan-31-2019	176242
2	Mundane Subject	Jan-29-2016	91320
3	Interaction	Jan-27-2019	86141
4	Buddhism Topics	Mar-26-2016	76687
5	Interaction	Feb-01-2019	53159
6	Interaction	Apr-09-2016	50963
7	Buddhism Topics	May-13-2016	40372
8	Interaction	Jan-01-2016	39224
9	Buddhism Topics	Aug-31-2016	38962
10	Interaction	Feb-01-2016	33781
11	Interaction	Feb-01-2017	33001
12	Interaction	Mar-22-2016	27944
13	Buddhism Topics	Jul-12-2016	24529
14	Buddhism Topics	Aug-28-2019	24067
15	Buddhism Topics	Jul-22-2016	23468
16	Buddhism Topics	Oct-19-2016	22491
17	Interaction	Jun-05-2016	22028
18	Buddhism Topics	Feb-17-2016	21915

⁷² A complete table containing the top 100 most popular blog posts is in Appendix I.

19	Insights or Teachings	Apr-06-2016	21827
20	Interaction	Dec-18-2019	21601

Based on the table, Ven. Yancan posts content that leans more toward secular topics. Of his ten most interactive blog posts, only three were related to Buddhism - or celebrating the birthdays of three bodhisattvas. All the other blog posts were on secular topics—most of Ven. Yancan's blog posts are of this style.

4.1.2 The Other Three Chinese Monks

The second person introduced is Ven. Jiqun. According to his Chinese Facebook page, he "graduated from the Chinese Academy of Buddhism in 1984, is a 10th generation practitioner of the Taoist school, an honorary Doctor of Letters from the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, and an invited researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences"⁷³. He pays great attention to using the Internet for Dharma propagation. He has created his website and posts on the Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo. He has also opened accounts on overseas social media platforms such as Facebook (in English and Chinese), Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, LinkedIn, and even YouTube, TikTok, and other social media platforms under the name "Master Jiqun" in Chinese or English. Platform accounts, and also released his Gmail email address to the public.

It is possible that Ven. Jiqun does not consider LinkedIn suitable for Dharma propagation, and he abandoned this platform. Ven. Jiqun's management of Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter is also not ideal, but he still insists on updating these accounts. Ven. Jiqun's operation of the Weibo and Facebook platforms has been very successful, posting essentially the same content in a very high frequency of his writings, reflections, life lessons, and blessings. His content should be run by a team of professionals, often with beautifully processed images, and posted as often as once a day.

⁷³ Ven. Jiqun's Chinese Facebook page, [https:// www.facebook.com/jiqunfashi/](https://www.facebook.com/jiqunfashi/)

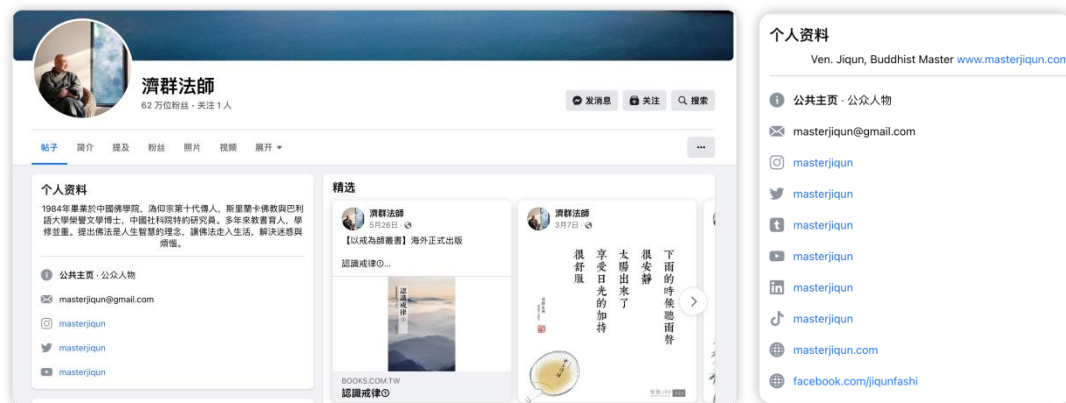


Figure 4: Ven. Jiqun's Facebook Page and Profile

Ven. Jiqun's social media accounts are positioned to post all sorts of spiritual insights and Buddhist teachings, so the theme of his postings is text. On top of his microblog, the text is the centerpiece and pictures and videos mostly accompany the text. Even the use of text alone can meet his positioning needs. Therefore, the proportion of pure text content on Ven. Jiqun's Weibo reaches 33.81%, the highest among the four.

Table 2: Ven. Jiqun's Main Social Media Accounts

No.	Platform	Created	Followers	Readership	Uploaded
1	Weibo	Sep-04-2009	1.12million	15.53million	7818
2	Facebook (Chinese&English)	Dec-21-2012	620 thousand	—	—
		Dec-22-2012	1.54 million	—	—
3	Twitter	Dec-2012	135	—	—
4	Instagram	Jul-2019	352	—	763
5	YouTube	Oct-22-2016	1040	99,048	1416
7	TikTok	—	21	—	87

The second introduction is Ven. Wudan is a Venerable with whom the writer is familiar in reality. Wudan is a young man of the 1990s with multiple identities: a

monk, a writer, a temple abbot, a dharma teacher, and an enthusiast of Zen tea culture. He specializes in reinterpreting ancient Chinese classic literature from a monk's perspective, combining the teachings of Chinese Buddhism with local Chinese culture. As a result, he has become a well-known monk writer. As a young generation, he is also very good at promoting himself through the Internet and social networks. The theme of his microblog, which focuses on sharing his daily life, shares his life and practice in the monastery and when he goes out.



Figure 5: Ven. Wudan's Major Works

The fourth Ven. is Ven. Yongxin, the Abbot of the Shaolin Temple, is one of the most famous temples in China. Ven. Yongxin and his Shaolin Temple were the first religious group in China to reach out to and use the Internet to promote and propagate the Dharma. In the 1990s, the Internet began to spread in China, and the general public had never seen a computer or the Internet. At this time, Shaolin Temple had already launched its website.

Because of the enormous influence of the Shaolin Temple, Ven. Yongxin was also a Buddhist celebrity on the Internet in China, and his every move was followed. However, in the early days, he spread himself more through Shaolin Temple's platforms and channels and did not open his account. Along with the expansion of his influence, he was also riddled with controversies and negative news.

As the abbot of a large monastery, it was inevitable that he would speak out for his monastery and Buddhism. He started as a lowly monk and worked his way up

to become the president of the Buddhist Association in his province of Henan, where he also served as vice president of the Chinese Buddhist Association. The political position did not completely cover up many conflicts. He has been forced to step into the spotlight at times because of disputes between the monastery and the local government, because of public statements by his disciples, and so on.

At this point, he probably realized that he needed a new channel to spread himself and improve his image. It was not until March 2018 that he opened a personal account on Sina Weibo. He was the latest of the four to open a Weibo account and the one with the lowest number of posts. In his account, he usually posts Buddhist-related teachings and Zen stories, ethical guidelines, and news about his famous monastery. Overall, his tweets fall into the category of bland monk accounts with little personality. Nevertheless, because of the vast influence he and his monastery have, his account still boasts a whopping 827,000 followers.

His most popular thread, a cultivation epiphany posted in March 2018, has 9,713 interactions. His blog posts are far more interactive than Ven. Yancan.

Table 3: Information posted on Weibo of the four Chinese Monks

Monk		Yancan	Jiqun	Wudan	Yongxin
Created		Jan-06-2010	Sep-01-2009	Feb-09-2011	Mar-20-2018
Followers		41.81 million	1.12 million	4.01million	8.27million
Total Uploaded		62090	7,818	6123	3326
Posts Read		1770 million	155.28million	235.46million	82.15million
Uploaded ⁷⁴		10296	2189	3410	1236
Photos	Number	7509	1396	2953	1097
	Per cent	72.93%	63.77%	86.60%	88.75%
Videos	Number	1568	1396	211	42
	Per cent	15.23%	63.77%	6.19%	3.40%

⁷⁴ Number of blog posts published during the specified time period, from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019.

Texts	Number	1217	740	245	97
	Per cent	11.82%	33.81%	7.18%	7.85%

4.2 Content Topics by Thai Media Monastic Influencers on Facebook

4.2.1 Most Popular Thai Dharma Masters on Social Media

"Phra Methree Vajirodom" or "V. Vajiramedhi", Assistant Abbot of Wat Phra Singh, Chiang Rai Province, President of the Vimutthayalai Foundation and Director of the Vimuttayaalai Institute, who are considered to be the leading monks of Thailand. It was found that the Facebook page "[Phra Methi Vajirodom-V. Vajiramedhi](#)", which was created on November 11, 2009, has as many as 6.01 million people liking the page and 6.11 million people following it.

Phra Methree Vajirodom's twenty most popular Facebook entries are all in the video category. The topics of these videos range from his reflections on life, time, and practice to recordings of his participation in charity and giving events, previews of Buddhist prayer events, and more. Overall, 75% of the content he posts falls into the Buddhist-related category.

Table 4: Phra Methree Vajirodom's Twenty Most Interactive Tweets

No.	Thematic	Release Date	Interaction
1	Documentary	Oct-01-2017	418559
2	Commandments	Mar-01-2018	367925
3	Commandments	Dec-16-2017	312954
4	Buddhism Related	Sep-17-2019	133596
5	Charity	Dec-24-2017	114875
6	Charity	Sep-23-2019	108749
7	Prayer	Dec-29-2017	106067
8	Buddhism Related	Jun-26-2018	90608

9	Enlightenment or Teaching	Feb-05-2017	83353
10	Charity	Dec-25-2017	79605
11	Charity	Dec-26-2019	79194
12	Enlightenment or Teaching	Aug-22-2017	76792
13	Enlightenment or Teaching	Sep-12-2019	75596
14	Enlightenment or Teaching	Oct-11-2019	62478
15	Enlightenment or Teaching	Nov-03-2019	62376
16	Enlightenment or Teaching	Jun-15-2019	58263
17	Buddhism Related	Jun-29-2018	56562
18	Enlightenment or Teaching	Mar-23-2017	54818
19	Enlightenment or Teaching	Jun-10-2019	54738
20	Enlightenment or Teaching	Jan-01-2017	53588

4.2.2 The Other Three Famous Thai Masters

"Phrakhru Sangkharak Sakda Suntharo" or "Phra Sakda" of Wat Rai Pa Thammaphimuk, Trat Province, is a famous preacher who has been well-known for a long time. The Facebook page "[Phra Sakda Suntharo](#)", created on November 17, 2014, has over 3.50 million followers.

"Phra Thep Patcharayanmuni" or "Phra Achan Chayasaro" of Ban Rai To Si Monastery, a foreign monk who came to be ordained in Buddhism with "Luang Pu Cha" of Wat Nong Pa Pong in 1980.

A gentle style of preaching resulted in a large number of disciples. The Facebook page "Dhamma by Phra Ajahn Jayasaro" was created on December 28, 2012, and there are 250 thousand people who click to follow it.

"Phrakhru Baidika Suphot Suwachano" or "Luang Phi Doraemon" of Wat Khao Noi, Rayong Province, Phra Sai Rapper is very famous for singing chants in a new style, "Rap + Lae" style, including making stickers "Sobong Racing Thailand" until it creates color for teenagers who turn to temples in this era.

The Facebook page "Sathu Sodhom Luang Phi Doraemon" was created on

18 July 2017 and has 410 thousand followers. As for the YouTube channel "Sathu Sodchot", made on October 13, 2011, it has 321 thousand followers and 535 videos uploaded.

Table 5: Information posted on Facebook of the four Thai Monks

Monk		Vajirodom	Sakda	Chayasaro	Suwachano
Created		Nov-11-2009	Nov-17-2014	Dec-28-2012	Oct-13-2011
Followers		6.11 million	3.50 million	250 thousand	410 thousand
Uploaded		2304	1917	1107	70
Photos	Number	2169	1832	1102	30
	Per cent	94.14%	95.57%	99.55%	42.86%
Videos	Number	153	67	4	38
	Per cent	6.64%	3.50%	0.36%	54.29%
Texts	Number	125	76	5	2
	Per cent	5.43%	3.96%	0.45%	2.85%

4.3 Comparison of Content Topics Posted by Monks

The significant differences between the social reality, cultural background, and political systems of China and Thailand can also be reflected in the use of social media by monks in the two countries. We can compare and contrast the themes of the content posted by monks in the two countries from the following perspectives.

Against the backdrop of an increasingly secularised civilized world, Thailand has remained relatively Buddhist, making it the most significant Buddhist country in the world. The country as a whole is more tolerant of Buddhism than China. The dominant ideology in China is very different from that of Thailand. China is a secularised country where atheism reigns as the absolute ideological rule - though, of course, it is no longer secular in the universal sense of the word as opposed to theocratic.

In such an environment of policy regulation and public opinion, the space

for monks to speak on social networks is somewhat limited. Strongly religious themes can lead to more censorship. Monks carefully explore the boundaries of their speeches and inevitably post less Buddhist-colored content.

In addition, Buddhism's qualities in both China and Thailand may also be playing an influential role. It is well known that Thai Buddhism belongs to the Southern Theravada Pali language family of Buddhism, while China belongs to the Chinese Sanskrit language family of Buddhism. The precepts observed by the bhikkhus of the two countries are also vastly different. In addition to the common precepts of bhikkhus, Chinese Buddhism emphasizes the so-called Bodhisattva precepts. This precept allows the bhikkhus of Chinese Buddhism to propagate the Dharma in any way they see fit and to transform all beings. This precept, coupled with the influence of traditional Chinese culture on Han Buddhism, also further diluted the role of the precepts. This precept has also led to a lack of sacredness and transcendence among the monks of Chinese Buddhism as compared to Southern Buddhism. The difficulties encountered by Chinese Buddhism in the last hundred years have also further magnified the inadequacy of Chinese Buddhist monks.

The 100 most interactive blog posts of Ven. Yancan and Phra Methee Vajirodom⁷⁵, who have the largest number of followers in both countries, were used for the comparison analysis, respectively. Blog posts were comparatively analyzed. Among the top 100 blog posts, Ven. Yancan, a Chinese monk, posted non-Buddhist, non-moral missionary secular topics in 53% of the posts, compared to only 31% of the Thai monks. The secular topics are further categorized into public charity (including donation, culture, and education), social interaction, and other secular topics. This data is shown in the chart below.

⁷⁵ See Appendices I and II for detailed data sources.

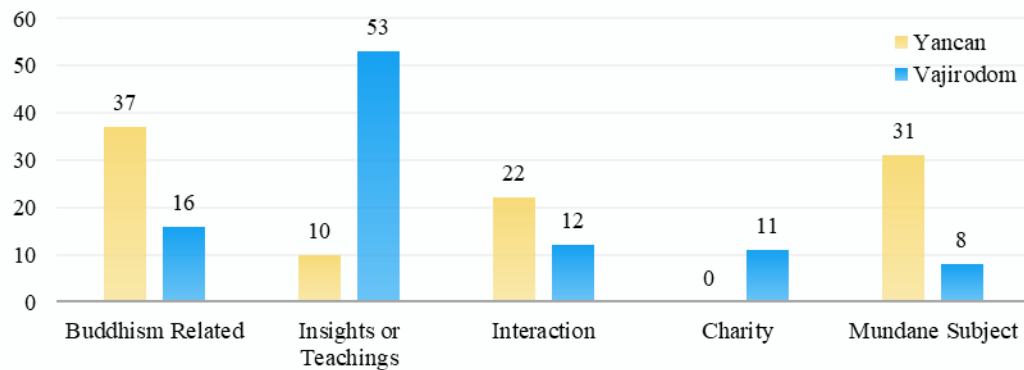


Figure 6: Top 100 Blog Posts Topic Comparison between Yancan and Vajirodom

Ven. Yancan is very special in that he approximates a social activist rather than a traditional Buddhist monk. However, he is the most recognizable social media celebrity among Buddhist monks in China. It is worth pondering why such an atypical monk would receive the highest attention on the Chinese Internet. Of course, there are apparent personal differences in the exact proportion of content posted by Chinese Venerables—for example, Ven. Jiqun's content focuses on Buddhist teachings and reflections on spiritual practice. However, it is also true that Chinese monks are relatively more concerned with secular topics.

4.4 Interactions: Frequency and Communicative Strategies

Chinese monks invested more effort in social networks, which can be concluded from their massive volume of messages posted and higher frequency of interactions. Ven. Yancan had the highest frequency of information posting among the four. During the study period, Ven. Yancan posted a total of 10,296 messages, an average of 65.79 messages per week. It may be because this is the primary way in which Ven. Yancan maintains his online following—however, Ven. Yancan does not have the honor of having the most interaction. Thailand's Phra Methee Vajirodom's most popular post had 418,559 interactions. That is 2.37 times the number of interactions of second place Yancan. Especially when one again sees that the number of Yancan followers is a whopping 41.81 million, which is 6.84 times more than Phra Methee Vajirodom (6.11

million), this data seems to indicate the volume and frequency of posting. Even the ultra-high number of followers is only a necessary guarantee for the emergence of popular postings and not necessarily the cause of their success.

Table 6: Frequency of Different Types of Blog Posts

No.	Monk	Total		With Photos		With Videos	
		Amount	Frequency	Amount	Frequency	Amount	Frequency
1	Yancan	10296	65.79	7509	47.98	1568	10.02
2	Jiqun	2189	13.99	1396	8.92	1396	8.92
3	Wudan	3410	21.79	2953	18.87	211	1.35
4	Yongxin ⁷⁶	1236	13.29	1097	11.80	42	0.45
5	Vajirodom	2304	14.72	535	3.41	1438	9.16
6	Sakda	1917	12.25	676	4.32	1194	7.63
7	Chayasaro	1107	7.07	1017	6.50	84	0.54
8	Suwachano	70	0.45	30	0.19	38	0.24

Table 7: Top Blog Post Types and Engagement

No.	Monk	Types and themes of the most interactive articles		Interaction
1	Yancan	With Photos	Spring Festival Blessings	176242
2	Jiqun	With Photos	Bodhisattva's birthday	4226
3	Wudan	With Videos	Spring Festival Blessings	14628
4	Yongxin	With Photos	religious practice	2839
5	Vajirodom	With Videos	Historical Review	418559
6	Sakda	With Videos	religious practice	270899
7	Chayasaro	With Photos	religious practice	18025
8	Suwachano	With Videos	religious practice	1059

⁷⁶ 因永信法师微博账户注册于 2018 年 3 月 20 日，故其频率计算的周期与其他人略有不同。

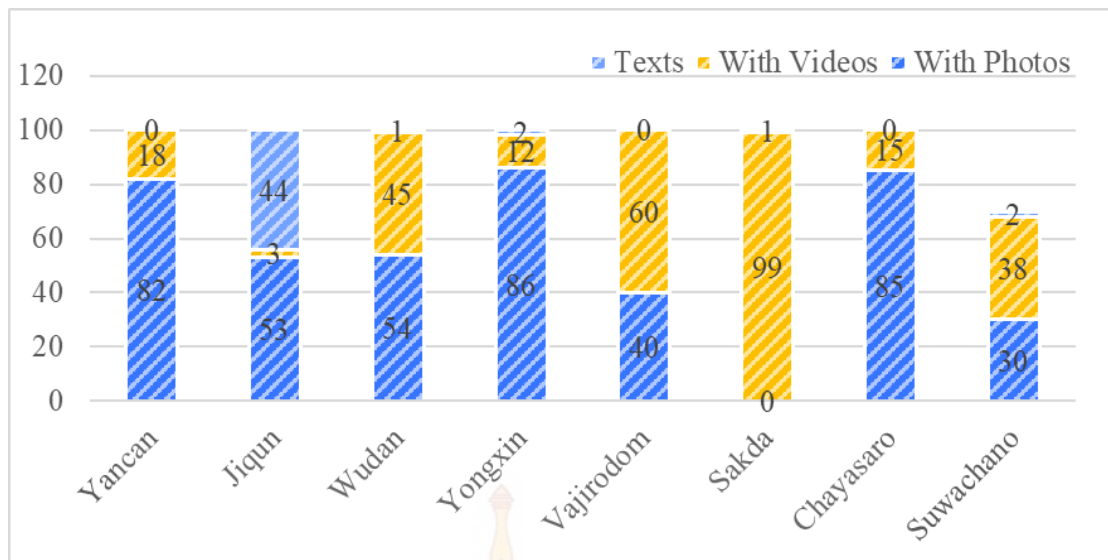


Figure 7: Types of Top 100 Messages in Terms of Interactivity

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, the writer focuses on in-depth data analysis of monk behavior on social media in China and Thailand. Case studies and comparative analyses provide insights into the factors and mechanisms involved in different aspects of culture, society, and religion and offer corresponding recommendations and insights. Here, the key findings of this chapter are reviewed, and further insights are provided.

Far-reaching cultural and religious influences: China and Thailand's cultural and religious contexts provide a framework for understanding the differences in monk behavior on social media. As the world's largest Buddhist country, Thailand has a relatively deep Buddhist tradition. In contrast, China must consider the enormous influence of atheism in contemporary China, in addition to China's diverse religious background, especially where Buddhism co-exists with other faiths. This contextual difference leads to significant differences in monks' behavior and content choices on social media in the two countries.

Significant differences in monks' behavior on social media were found due to the differences in the cultural and religious backgrounds of the two countries. As a Buddhist country, Thailand has monk content on social media that is more inclined toward religious topics, while Chinese monks focus more on secular issues, primarily

represented by Ven. Yancan.

Differences in social media behaviors: although monks in both countries actively use social media to interact with their followers, their interaction patterns and content strategies differ. For example, Chinese monks are likelier to share content about their daily lives, public service activities, and social interactions. In contrast, Thai monks share more content related to Buddhist teachings and practices by comparing Ven's social media behaviors. Yancan and Phra Methee Vajirodom can draw this conclusion more clearly. In a sense, Ven. Yancan more closely resembles a social activist in monastic garb, while Phra Methee Vajirodom is more in line with the traditional monk image.

Changing Role of Monks: In the modern world, monks are no longer just religious leaders, and their role on social media is changing. Although monks in both countries have many followers on social media, their roles and influence among their followers differ. Ven. Yancan's example illustrates that monks can be social activists, public figures, and internet celebrities. This diversity of roles reflects the new opportunities and challenges that social media offers religious leaders.

Future trends and challenges: As social media and technology popularity evolve, how monks interact with the faithful will continue to grow and change. It will be an ongoing challenge for monks to adapt to these changes while remaining religious. How to better disseminate Buddhism and integrate it into modern society while maintaining a monastic identity and not destroying the image of monks is a question that needs to be considered.

It is believed that in order to better utilize the role of celebrity monks in information dissemination in today's social media environment, we need to pay more attention to the study of user groups to understand their needs and preferences; at the same time, we also need to formulate targeted communication strategies to enhance the dissemination effect of the information; in addition, we should also focus on the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture, to enrich the diversity of the content of social media.

The data analysis in this chapter provides a valuable perspective to help us understand monastic behavior on social media more profoundly and its motivations. As the role of social media in religious communication continues to grow, understanding

these behaviors will have far-reaching implications for future religious research and practice. Overall, these findings provide a unique perspective to help us better understand the roles and challenges of monks in the modern social media environment.



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

This study delves into the distinct behaviors of monks on social media in China and Thailand through comprehensive data analysis. The evolution of traditional Buddhist culture in online communication is undeniable. As internet technology advances, the ways Buddhist culture is transmitted and developed also shift. This evolution encompasses digital preservation and cultural exchange, offering fresh opportunities and challenges for the continuation and growth of Buddhist culture. Moreover, online communication significantly impacts conventional Buddhist culture's methods and target audiences, enhancing the speed of information dissemination and broadening its reach.

There is a noticeable disparity in the influence of renowned monks on Chinese and Thai social media. This disparity is not limited to the magnitude of influence but extends to interaction methods and information dissemination modes. Differences in cultural, religious, and political backgrounds between the two countries likely contribute to this variance. These elements profoundly shape influential monks' behavioral trends and sway on social media.

The intertwining of culture and religion is evident: while both nations have deep-rooted Buddhist traditions, the role of religion in daily life and on social media varies. China's intricate religious landscape and diverse culture make its monks' social media content more varied, whereas Thai monks primarily concentrate on Buddhism's fundamental teachings.

China and Thailand differ significantly in culture, politics, religious influence, and economic progress. Monks from both nations confront various challenges in the public domain of social networks. In China, monks predominantly face pressures from policy regulations and public sentiment. Conversely, in Buddhist-majority Thailand, the government's oversight of Buddhism and public tolerance are more lenient. Monks in Thailand are often more concerned about scrutiny from their monastic peers.

Differences in content strategies are also evident when comparing Ven's online behaviors. Yancan and Phra Methee Vajirodom. Thai monks post content related to Buddhist practices and teachings, while their Chinese counterparts often discuss daily life, cultural events, and social welfare initiatives.

It could be that China's relatively stringent policy regulations combined with lax monastic oversight lead to a more communal online presence for its monks. They venture beyond the conventional monk image because monastic community oversight is mainly ineffective. On the other hand, the strong influence of Thailand's Sangha Council, akin to a Council of Elders, dictates the actions and words of younger monks offline and online, making them appear more traditional and reserved than their Chinese peers.

Regarding online influence, both Ven. Yancan and Phra Methee Vajirodom transcend their roles as religious leaders, taking on broader social and cultural roles on social media. Their active online presence, especially on social media, signifies the rejuvenation of age-old Buddhism in today's era. As younger generations increasingly turn to the internet and social media for information and lessen their visits to monasteries, Buddhism must adapt to maintain its societal role and influence.

In conclusion, this research offers invaluable insights into monks' behavior on social media and the underlying cultural and religious dynamics. While social media grants monks a novel interaction platform, upholding genuine religious tenets and values remains challenging. These insights will be instrumental for forthcoming religious studies and formulating social media strategies.

5.1.1 How Religious Leaders Respond to New Media Technologies

The popularisation and application of new media technologies have profoundly impacted the role and status of religious leaders. The rapid development of new media technologies provides unprecedented communication opportunities for religious leaders but also brings many challenges. On the one hand, social media platforms offer religious leaders a more expansive space for evangelization, allowing them to interact with believers quickly and expand their influence. New media technologies have made the image of religious leaders more transparent, and every word and deed of the leaders may be infinitely magnified, which requires them to pay more attention to their words and deeds. On the other hand, using these platforms also

requires religious leaders to have higher media literacy and public relations skills to deal with possible negative information, questions, and criticism. New media technology has broken the traditional way of information delivery, making it easier for believers to access religious information, which requires religious leaders to pay more attention to timeliness and accuracy in information delivery. Of course, new media technology also provides religious leaders with more opportunities to interact with believers, which requires them to pay more attention to communication and exchange with believers.

In this context, religious leaders need to reposition their roles and positions. They are not only purveyors of spiritual teachings but also guides and companions of believers. They must focus on interaction and communication with believers to build closer relationships. At the same time, they need to keep learning and progressing to adapt to the development and changes of the new media era.

Religious leaders must adopt a proactive attitude in response to these opportunities and challenges. First, they must familiarize themselves with and master new media technologies, such as operating social media platforms, content creation, and crisis management. Second, they must develop a mindset compatible with new media, such as openness, inclusiveness, interactivity, and rapid response. Finally, they also need to establish an organizational structure and management mechanism compatible with new media to ensure that religious teachings can be disseminated sustainably and stably in the new media era.

5.1.2 Monk-Specific Communication Strategies

This paper compares the similarities and differences in the social media practices of Chinese and Thai monk influencers. The findings show that although Chinese and Thai monk influencers generally play an important role in social media, they employ different communication strategies due to differences in cultural, political, and social contexts. The differences in these strategies are manifested in the choice of content, communication methods, and forms of interaction.

First, in terms of content selection, both Chinese and Thai monastic influencers tend to publish content related to Buddhist teachings and practices, such as sutra interpretations and meditation instructions. However, the specific content they post varies due to their audiences' different cultural backgrounds and needs. For

example, Chinese monk-influencers focus more on content about meditation and mindfulness, while Thai monk-influencers focus more on disseminating Buddhist myths and rituals.

Second, Chinese and Thai monastic influencers also show different characteristics regarding transmission methods. Chinese monk-influencers are more inclined to use multimedia communication, such as pictures and videos, while Thai monk-influencers focus more on text and speech. This difference may be related to the audience's media consumption habits in the two countries. It also reflects the monk influencers' mastery of media and usage habits.

In addition, monks in China and Thailand also differ in terms of public service activities. Chinese monks are more inclined to organize large-scale public welfare activities, such as charity auctions and medical clinics. In contrast, Thai monks focus more on daily public welfare activities, such as giving food and providing help to people experiencing poverty. This activity is mainly due to the two countries' different social environments and cultural backgrounds, leading to differences in monks' understanding and practice of public welfare activities.

Finally, Chinese and Thai monastic influencers also differ in terms of interaction. Chinese monk influencers focus more on real-time interactions with their audiences using live streaming and Q&A. In contrast, Thai monk influencers concentrate more on communicating and interacting with their audiences through social media platforms. This difference may be related to the engagement and interaction needs of the audiences in the two countries, and it also reflects the monk influencers' emphasis on and ability to utilize different forms of interaction.

In summary, this paper compares the similarities and differences in the social media practices of Chinese and Thai monk influencers. These similarities and differences reflect the influence of cultural, political, and social contexts on social media communication strategies. Therefore, when utilizing social media for religious communication, the cultural background and needs of the audience should be fully considered when choosing appropriate communication strategies and media forms. At the same time, religious leaders and practitioners should continuously update their communication concepts and techniques to adapt to the changes in the new media era.

5.1.3 Influence Formation and Development

Many factors influence the formation and development of monks' influence in China and Thailand. Firstly, popularizing and applying new media technologies have provided the basic conditions for forming monks' influence. Social media platforms enable monks' voices to spread quickly to a wider audience, thus increasing their visibility and social influence. Second, monks' quality and ability are also key factors of influence. They must possess rich religious knowledge, good media literacy and public relations skills, and the ability to interact and communicate with their audiences. Finally, the social environment and cultural context also impact the formation and development of monks' influence. For example, in a Buddhist country like Thailand, Buddhist culture and values are deeply rooted in people's hearts, so the influence of Thai monks is relatively high.

In summary, new media technologies have profoundly impacted the role and status of religious leaders. In order to cope with these impacts and challenges, religious leaders need to continuously learn and progress to improve their media literacy and public relations skills. At the same time, they need to focus on communicating and exchanging ideas with their followers and building closer relationships. Chinese and Thai monks need to focus more on integrating with local culture in their communication strategies and public service activities to increase their influence and social value.

5.2 Conclusion

Social media has become a crucial platform for disseminating information in the digital age. Monastic influencers play a pivotal role in this evolution. Due to their vast reach and influence, these influencers spread their teachings, bringing the Buddhist message to a broad audience. They have transcended the conventional boundaries of religion, significantly impacting the religious, cultural, social, and technological spheres.

Monk influencers on social media can command audiences ranging from hundreds to thousands. This vast reach allows them to substantially impact society, connecting with followers and offering spiritual guidance. One of their significant

contributions is introducing Buddhist teachings to the younger generation. By leveraging social media, they connect with younger audiences, sharing Buddhist principles, rejuvenating the Buddhist tradition, and making it relevant to today's world.

BRIDGE ROLE AND CULTURAL TRANSMISSION: Monk influencers offer global audiences a unique insight into Buddhist culture and traditions. Their stories and Zen teachings resonate with Buddhists and those curious about Buddhist culture.

Esteemed monks like Ven. Phra Methee Vajirodom and Ven. Jiqun shares classical Buddhist teachings on platforms such as Weibo and Facebook. They merge these teachings with contemporary societal narratives, spanning topics from ancient Buddhist tales to modern life reflections, offering valuable insights to a diverse audience.

Social Responsibility and the Common Good: Many monk influencers use their online presence to champion social causes. They promote the moral values of philanthropy and educate people on life's meaning. For instance, Phra Methee Vajirodom's Facebook page is not just a religious platform but a space for his social activism and charitable efforts, showcasing the leadership roles monks can assume in today's society.

Fusion of Technology and Religion: Monk influencers highlight the harmony between modern tech and age-old religious beliefs. They use live streams, short videos, and other digital formats to present teachings, making them more relatable. Numerous dharma accounts across platforms like Facebook and YouTube reflect this fusion. Many young Dharma masters employ livestreaming for online Dharma sessions, transcending geographical and temporal constraints.

Building Community and Connectivity: Social media enables monk influencers to connect with global followers. They foster online communities, facilitating sharing, learning, and interaction. For example, Phra Methee Vajirodom has created a cross-border faith community through social media. This platform promotes sharing and education and fosters understanding between diverse cultures and backgrounds. Monk influencers actively dispel misconceptions about Buddhism, address criticism, and ardently promote Buddhism's teachings.

Providing Answers to Modern Problems: Amidst the hustle of

contemporary life, many grapple with spiritual dilemmas and stress—influencers like Ven. Yancan and Phra Methee Vajirodom offer invaluable guidance, helping individuals find inner tranquillity and purpose. They also use their platforms to spotlight critical social issues like mental health and addiction and rally support for charitable initiatives, including fundraisers and disaster relief efforts.

In summary, the influence of monk influencers in the digital realm is undeniable. They harness their visibility to promote Buddhist teachings, foster cultural understanding, provide spiritual guidance, and tackle pressing social challenges. Their endeavors highlight the harmonious coexistence of religion, culture, and technology, offering spiritual solace and insights to shape modern society positively. As social media's popularity and influence surge, monks have increasingly harnessed these platforms for teaching and advocacy, encountering several challenges.

Balance between Religion and Secularism: Monks on social media must balance spreading Buddhist teachings and engaging with contemporary society—for instance, Ven. Yancan might grapple with preserving his religious identity while sharing glimpses of his daily life and civic engagements.

Internet Regulation: Governments often regulate social media platforms, potentially restricting monks' online activities. China and Thailand have stringent internet regulations, posing challenges for monks disseminating information.

Information Authenticity and Accuracy: The rapid spread of information on social media can lead to misinformation or misinterpretation. Monks must ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of their shared content, aligning it with Buddhist teachings.

Online Discourse and Controversy: Monks' remarks on open platforms might spark public debates or criticisms. Addressing such feedback while upholding Buddhism's neutrality and tolerance is a challenge.

Boundaries between Influence and Commercialisation: Monks might grapple with commercial opportunities as their follower count grows. Striking a balance between religious purity and potential commercialization is a nuanced challenge.

In conclusion, while social media offers monks a fresh avenue for engagement, it also introduces many challenges. Navigating these challenges will profoundly shape monks' future influence on social media.

5.3 Suggestions

In an era of fast technological growth, the role of new media in religious communication has become critical. Recognizing its great potential, both monks and followers use these spaces to spread the Dharma teachings. However, this new method brings its own set of obstacles and potential pitfalls. To successfully navigate this landscape, the following strategies and guidelines are recommended:

Enhance Education and Training: Many monks find new media unfamiliar. Religious institutions must offer training to help them grasp these platforms' essentials. This strategy will empower them to spread the Dharma more effectively. Embracing the multimedia nature of new media can help disseminate teachings in varied formats like videos, audio, and images, enriching the audience's experience. Moreover, innovative methods, such as online meditation sessions or Buddhist courses, can cater to diverse audience preferences.

Prioritize Clear Content and Strategy: The content shared by monks should be accurate, truthful, and in line with Buddhist teachings, ensuring that followers are not misguided. Tailoring content to different audience groups is crucial, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach and emphasizing content that genuinely addresses practical concerns and uplifts moral and ideological standards.

Bolster Regulation and Management: It is essential to draft clear regulations and management protocols for promoting Dharma through new media. This action involves ensuring the content's authenticity, relevance, and alignment with Buddhist teachings. Proper screening and auditing mechanisms can prevent the spread of misinformation.

Beware of Commercialization: As monks gain popularity, they might face commercial temptations. It is vital to remain grounded and prioritize the purity of Dharma over commercial interests.

Maintain Openness to Feedback: Monks might encounter criticism on open platforms. Addressing these critiques with an open heart, reflecting upon them, and constructively responding can further the wholesome growth of Buddhism.

While new media presents unparalleled opportunities for Dharma propagation, it is essential to approach it with clarity, strategy, and an open heart. By doing so, the teachings of Dharma can truly harness the potential of new media,

positively impacting contemporary society.

Further research can be conducted by comparing monks from different countries. Focusing attention on the effect and feedback of the audience will be another interesting topic of study. Including interviews with the monks will add more qualitative data to the research.



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