# Master Intercultural Communication

# Master Thesis

# Exploring and Adapting Identities: Chinese Students in the Netherlands on TikTok

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**Abstract:**

This thesis explores how Chinese students living in the Netherlands navigate and adapt their identities on TikTok, drawing on the theoretical framework of tactics of intersubjectivity proposed by Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 2005). As digital connectivity and cultural fluidity shape contemporary experiences, platforms like TikTok provide a virtual space for these students to engage with their heritage while integrating into a multicultural society. The study investigates the transition from Douyin to TikTok, highlighting the role of social media in identity negotiation amidst globalized media and localized experiences. Through qualitative group interviews, the research captures the multifaceted perspectives of four Chinese students studying in the Netherlands with different content preferences and usage habits, uncovering themes of content adaptation, subcultural connection, and TikTok as an assimilation tool. The findings contribute to the field of intercultural communication by illustrating the complex interplay between digital platforms, cultural identity, and social interaction, offering insights into contemporary identity formation and cultural belonging in the digital age.

# 1. Introduction:

In an era defined by digital connectivity and cultural fluidity, the exploration and adaptation of identity among Chinese youth living in the Netherlands can be explored through the dynamic landscape of social media platforms. Central to this phenomenon is the transition from the mobile application Douyin in China to its global counterpart TikTok, where individuals negotiate their cultural identities amidst the interplay of globalized media and localized experiences. Douyin and TikTok stand as emblematic symbols of the digital age, heralding a new era of short-form video content and globalized cultural exchange. These platforms have transcended geographical boundaries, attracting diverse user bases and fostering vibrant communities. For Chinese youth living in the Netherlands, Douyin and TikTok serve as virtual canvases where they can engage with their heritage culture while navigating the complexities of cultural integration and online self positioning. This thesis embarks on a journey to understand how Chinese youth in the Netherlands navigate and adapt their identities within the digital realm, focusing on the transformative journey from Douyin to TikTok.

The research background contextualizes the study within broader discussions of social media, cultural identity, and diaspora experiences. Douyin and TikTok emerge as central platforms through which Chinese youth globally engage with digital content and community interactions. With their billion+ combined user bases and innovative features, these platforms serve as virtual spaces where individuals can share, discover, and participate in a diverse array of cultural expressions, which resonate deeply with the experiences and aspirations of Chinese youth in the diaspora. Unlike other social media platforms, TikTok's emphasis on short-form video content, creative editing tools, and algorithm-driven content discovery fosters a sense of playfulness, experimentation, and inclusivity. In addition, TikTok, as the international version of Douyin, is easy to accept in terms of interaction mode and familiarity for Chinese youth who live overseas. For Chinese youth living in the Netherlands, Douyin and TikTok offer not only avenues for cultural preservation and expression but

also platforms for navigating the complexities of identity within a multicultural context. They also serve as a digital canvas where they can seamlessly blend elements of their Chinese heritage with their experiences in a multicultural society, fostering a sense of cultural continuity and connection.

Central to this investigation is the theoretical framework of tactics of intersubjectivity proposed by Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 2005). This framework provides a nuanced lens through which to understand how individuals strategically construct and negotiate their identities within social interactions. The three pairs of tactics—adequation and distinction, authentication and denaturalization, and authorization and illegitimation—illuminate the dynamic nature of identity work and its manifestation within the digital realm. By applying this framework to the study of Chinese youth in the Netherlands on TikTok, we aim to unravel the complex strategies employed by individuals in shaping their online identities and negotiating cultural belonging.

Methodologically, this thesis employs a qualitative approach, utilizing group interview as the primary method of data collection. Group interviews offer a dynamic and interactive setting conducive to exploring the multifaceted experiences and perspectives of participants. There are four participants involved in the group interview including the researcher. Through in-depth discussions, participants are encouraged to share their insights, reflect on their experiences, and engage in collective sense-making processes. The selection of participants comprises Chinese youth studying in an intercultural communication program, ensuring diverse perspectives and rich insights into the intersection of cultural identity and digital media usage. The data collection process involved audio-recording the group interview and taking detailed field notes to capture both verbal and non-verbal cues. This multi-faceted approach facilitated a rich understanding of participants' responses, group dynamics, and emergent themes. Following data collection, rigorous analysis of the transcripts was conducted to identify patterns, themes, and insights related to participants' experiences of identity exploration and adaptation on TikTok.

Through the analysis of the data, three prominent themes emerged: changes in content preferences, multicultural integration, and self-conscious positioning. These themes encapsulate the multifaceted ways in which Chinese youth in the Netherlands engage with and adapt their identities on TikTok, navigating a complex interplay of cultural influences, personal preferences, and digital affordances. By delving into these themes, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how individuals negotiate their identities within the digital realm and the implications for cultural belonging and social integration. It is specifically tied to the field of intercultural communication by investigating how cultural contact plays out in the digital realm, a less explored context within the field.

In summary, this thesis offers a deep exploration of the experiences and strategies employed by Chinese youth in the Netherlands as they navigate their identities on TikTok. By drawing on theoretical frameworks, qualitative methodologies, and rich empirical data, this study sheds light on the dynamic interplay between digital platforms, cultural identity, and social interaction, contributing to ongoing discussions on identity formation in the digital age.

## 2. Research Background:

### 2.1. Douyin and TikTok:

The emergence of Douyin and TikTok as influential short-form video platforms has transformed the landscape of social media globally (Wang, 2020). Douyin, originating in China in 2016, quickly became a cultural phenomenon, capturing the attention and creativity of Chinese users with its innovative format. The platform allows users to create and share short videos, typically ranging from 15 to 60 seconds in length. What distinguishes Douyin from other social media platforms is its emphasis on user-generated content and its algorithm-driven feed, which is tailored to each user's interests and preferences (Chen, et al. 2019). Douyin's "For You" page (FYP), the platform's main feed, is curated based on a user's interactions, preferences, and past viewing history. This algorithmic approach ensures that users are exposed to content that is relevant and engaging to

them, fostering a highly personalized user experience. Additionally, it serves as a virtual space where users engage in a myriad of activities, from entertainment and self-expression to social commentary and cultural exchange. Through the creation and consumption of short video content, users can actively participate in the construction and dissemination of cultural narratives, reinforcing or challenging existing social norms and values (Lu & Lu, 2019), which contributes to the platform's vibrant and dynamic community. This sense of community and interactivity also fosters a sense of belonging and connection, further enhancing the appeal of Douyin as a social media platform. This format and features contribute to its widespread popularity and influence, enabling users to express themselves creatively, connect with others, and discover new content in a fun and engaging manner (Qian, 2018).

Its international counterpart, TikTok, launched in 2018 and carried the same format and concept beyond China's borders. Due to the lack of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook that primarily focus on short videos in overseas markets, TikTok rapidly gained widespread popularity among diverse audiences (Sun, et al. 2020). Despite sharing the same parent company, TikTok and Douyin exhibit nuanced differences in content, culture, and usage patterns, underscoring the adaptability of social media to diverse sociocultural contexts. Both platforms serve as hubs for short-form video content, allowing users to create, share, and engage with a wide range of multimedia content. However, the ways in which users generate and interact with content on TikTok and Douyin reflect the distinct sociocultural landscapes in which they operate.

On Douyin, Chinese users are deeply immersed in a cultural setting (Lu & Lu, 2019) that is influenced by local traditions, language, and societal norms. Content on Douyin often reflects popular trends, memes, and cultural references specific to Chinese society. In addition, Douyin is a social media platform that is independent of international social media and is only used in China. This also results in its content being deeply embedded in the Chinese cultural framework. For example, dance challenges set to Chinese pop music or comedic sketches featuring Chinese humor

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are prevalent on the platform. Additionally, Douyin is known for its sophisticated editing tools and visual effects, allowing users to create polished and professional-looking content. This emphasis on visual aesthetics aligns with broader cultural values of presentation and appearance in Chinese society.

In contrast, TikTok is a platform that caters to a global audience, attracting users from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Although it shares many features with Douyin, such as the ability to create and share short videos, TikTok's content is more diverse and cosmopolitan. As the international version of Douyin, TikTok transcends national borders to provide a global platform for creativity and self-expression. It welcomes users from diverse cultural backgrounds, each contributing to the platform's vibrant tapestry of content. Different from Douyin, which caters to a Chinese domestic cultural background, TikTok is a melting pot where users from different parts of the world come together to share and remix cultural expressions (Zeng, et al. 2021). Regardless of your culture, race, belief, or sexual orientation, you can find content from the same community and find resonance on TikTok. Thus, TikTok offers a more globalized and cosmopolitan experience, reflecting the platform's international user base and cultural diversity. On TikTok, users engage with a wide range of content, including lip-syncing videos, dance challenges, comedic skits, and knowledge sharing. For the young TikTok users, In Shutsko's research, categories related to fun and self-presentation were found to be their main viewing trends (Shutsko, 2020).

**2.2. Algorithmic Recommendation:**

TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system also further amplifies certain cultural tropes and trends, shaping users' perceptions of what constitutes popular culture and influencing their self-conceptualization (Purnama & Asdlori, 2023). Integral to TikTok's success is its algorithm, which curates content tailored to individual users' preferences (Zhao, 2021). TikTok's algorithm is designed to intuitively understand and cater to users' preferences, ensuring that users encounter a diverse array of content, and exposing them to various cultural expressions. The algorithm takes

into account user interactions, preferences, and trends, creating a personalized user experience that contributes to the platform's dynamic and inclusive nature (Karizat, et al. 2021). This algorithmic approach is central to TikTok's unique ability to curate an ever-refreshing stream of content that resonates with individual users, which means TikTok's algorithm also plays a crucial role in facilitating an intercultural dynamic, where users from different parts of the world can share, remix, and appreciate diverse cultural expressions. It acts as a bridge, connecting users with content that aligns with their cultural background while also exposing them to a melting pot of global influences (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). This attribute makes TikTok algorithm recommendations a great opportunity for research within intercultural communication, because we can see how people react to different cultural content with different attitude in the digital sphere. By surfacing content from a wide range of creators and cultural contexts, the algorithm facilitates connections between users with shared interests and experiences, regardless of geographical boundaries (Zhao, 2021). As Chinese in the Netherlands navigate the transition from Douyin to TikTok, the algorithm becomes a guiding force in their exploration of identity. The content that appears on their FYP reflects a blend of their cultural roots and the broader international context and provides them with opportunities to connect with others who share similar cultural backgrounds or experiences of cultural adaptation.

TikTok's algorithm-driven content discovery fosters a unique environment for intercultural exchange, allowing users to engage with a wide array of cultural expressions and narratives. The interplay between TikTok's algorithmic recommendations and intercultural communication underscores the platform's role in facilitating cultural adaptation and identity exploration. This dynamic highlights the importance of digital spaces in contemporary identity formation and cultural interaction. The experiences of Chinese youth in the Netherlands on TikTok reflect broader trends in how social media platforms influence cultural exchange and identity negotiation. The ability of these platforms to tailor content through algorithmic recommendations presents a unique

opportunity to study intercultural communication in digital spaces, providing insights into how young individuals navigate their dual identities and engage with multiple cultural contexts.

## 2.3. Adaptation of Digital Intercultural Communication:

Intercultural communication and adaptation between Eastern and Western cultures have been subjects of extensive scholarly research, typically focusing on face-to-face interactions. Studies often examine how individuals from Asian cultures, adjust to Western environments, highlighting the complexities of language barriers, cultural shock, and acculturation processes. For instance, Berry's acculturation model (1997) identifies strategies like assimilation and integration, providing a framework for understanding diverse approaches to cultural adaptation. However, much of this research is limited to offline interactions in physical spaces like schools and workplaces, overlooking the significant role of digital platforms in contemporary intercultural communication. Social media now offers new avenues for individuals to explore and express their identities, connect with diverse cultures, and navigate their place in a globalized world.

This thesis addresses the underexplored area of digital intercultural communication by examining how Chinese youth in the Netherlands use Douyin and TikTok to explore and adapt their identities. Unlike traditional studies that focus on physical cultural contact, this research highlights the dynamic nature of identity formation in digital spaces. TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system curates content based on user interests, exposing them to diverse cultural expressions and facilitating intercultural communication beyond offline experiences. The significance of this research lies in showcasing how different youth with varying goals, future plans, and identities experience adaptation differently. By focusing on the digital realm, this study challenges traditional notions of intercultural contact and adaptation, demonstrating the complex, context-dependent nature of these processes. This research underscores the need to consider digital interactions as a crucial aspect of intercultural communication, expanding the scope of the field to include the influence of digital media on contemporary cultural experiences and identities.

## 2.4. Chinese Youth in the Netherlands:

Chinese youth, both within China and abroad, have increasingly turned to digital platforms as avenues for creative expression, social interaction, and cultural exchange (Fu, 2018). The allure of platforms like TikTok lies in their ability to transcend geographical boundaries, facilitate instantaneous communication, and provide a stage for individuals to showcase their talents and perspectives to a global audience (Sima & Pugsley, 2010). For Chinese youth living in the Netherlands, TikTok offers a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between their Chinese heritage and their experiences in a multicultural society. According to Erudera's Dutch higher education data as of 2022, there are 5,610 Chinese students in the Netherlands, ranking fourth among all foreign students (Erudera, 2023). The large number of Chinese students also shows that the Netherlands has a strong appealing influence for the Chinese youth. As they navigate the complexities of acculturation, language acquisition, or cultural adaptation, these young individuals seek out spaces where they can express their multifaceted identities authentically while forging connections with both their heritage culture and the local Dutch community.

So, why do Chinese youth living in the Netherlands choose TikTok as the platform to explore and adapt their identities? The answer lies in the high recognition of Douyin on China's social media landscape, which has indeed made TikTok a more accessible and familiar platform for many Chinese individuals living overseas. As these individuals transition to TikTok, they enter into a space where the familiarity of Douyin converges with the diversity of TikTok's global community. This convergence highlights the transformative power of social media platforms, which transcend mere communication tools to become integral spaces for cultural negotiation, self-expression, and the formation of nuanced and dynamic identities. With this transition, critical questions arise regarding how individuals navigate their identities, adapt to an intercultural digital environment, and contribute to the ongoing evolution of cultural expressions in the digital age (Marino, 2015).

## 3. Theoretical Framework:

To understand how young Chinese people living in the Netherlands explore and adapt their identity on TikTok, it is important to understand that their identity building on online social media is a dynamic process influenced by many factors, such as self-positioning with a Chinese cultural background, integration of local life in Western cultural environments such as the Netherlands, and the influence of preferences from special subcultures. The interaction of many factors has led to changes in the recognition of identity among young Chinese people living in the Netherlands on TikTok. We can refer to the theories of tactics of intersubjectivity and enculturation. Tactics of intersubjectivity is used to describe how and why social identity is created through language and symbols with dynamic construction and overlap (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, 2005). Enculturation involves the process of learning and adapting to the cultural norms and practices of a new society (Jackson, 2018).

### 3.1. Tactics of Intersubjectivity:

Tactics of intersubjectivity, proposed by Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 2005), provide a nuanced framework for understanding how individuals strategically construct and express their identities within social interactions. These tactics encompass a range of semiotic processes through which individuals negotiate their cultural identities, reflecting the dynamic and context-dependent nature of identity work. Within the context of social media platforms, the application of tactics of intersubjectivity offers valuable insights into the ways in which Chinese youth in the Netherlands navigate their identities within the digital realm. These tactics encompass three pairs: adequation and distinction, authentication and denaturalization, and authorization and illegitimation, each highlighting different aspects of identity work. I will further explain each pair below.

**Adequation and Distinction:**

The first pair of tactics, adequation and distinction, highlights the ways in which individuals seek to align themselves with certain social categories while simultaneously distinguishing themselves from others. On TikTok, Chinese users may strategically align themselves with cultural symbols,

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references, and communities that resonate with their Chinese cultural heritage while also carving out a unique niche within the platform. This could involve engaging in content that celebrates their Chinese identity, such as sharing traditional recipes, language lessons, or cultural celebrations, while also showcasing their individuality through creative expression and personal storytelling. By aligning themselves with specific cultural markers while also asserting their distinctiveness, users engage in a complex process of identity negotiation that reflects their dual cultural identities as Chinese individuals living in the Netherlands.

**Authentication and Denaturalization:**

The second pair of tactics, authentication and denaturalization, centers on the ways in which individuals authenticate their identities through acts of cultural performance and resistance. On TikTok, Chinese users may engage in acts of cultural performance by sharing authentic glimpses of their everyday lives, cultural practices, and community traditions. This could involve sharing personal anecdotes, family stories, or experiences of cultural adaptation in the Netherlands, thereby authenticating their identities as members of the Chinese diaspora. Conversely, users may also engage in acts of denaturalization by challenging dominant cultural narratives, stereotypes, or expectations. This could involve critiquing Eurocentric beauty standards, challenging Orientalist portrayals of Chinese culture, or subverting mainstream cultural norms through acts of humor, satire, or parody. Through these acts of authentication and denaturalization, users actively shape and negotiate their identities on TikTok, asserting their cultural authenticity while also challenging dominant cultural narratives and representations.

**Authorization and Illegitimation:**

The third pair of tactics, authorization and illegitimation, explores the ways in which individuals seek to legitimize or delegitimize their identities within social interactions. Although somewhat similar to the previous pair, this pair has to do with the act of aligning with or challenging certain tropes through invoking structures of institutionalized power and authorit. On TikTok, Chinese

users may seek authorization by aligning themselves with dominant and accepted cultural norms, values, and ideologies, thereby gaining recognition and acceptance within the broader online community. This could involve conforming to mainstream cultural trends, participating in popular challenges or memes, or aligning their content with the platform's algorithmic preferences. Conversely, users may engage in acts of illegitimation by challenging dominant cultural hierarchies, power structures, or ideologies. This could involve critiquing cultural appropriation, challenging stereotypes, or advocating for social justice and equality. Through these acts of authorization and illegitimation, users negotiate their identities on TikTok, asserting their cultural legitimacy while also challenging dominant cultural norms and representations.

As Chinese individuals in the Netherlands engage in the dynamic and evolving digital space of TikTok, the theory offers a lens to examine the strategic choices made by users in constructing and expressing their identities. By focusing on the relational dimensions of identity work, the tactics of intersubjectivity framework ensure a nuanced exploration of the interplay between cultural assimilation, authenticity, and the negotiation of legitimacy (Baran, 2018), providing a robust foundation for analyzing the diverse ways in which Chinese individuals navigate and articulate their dual identities on TikTok in the Dutch or European context. Especially with the rapid development of Internet social media, people who are new to a different cultural context could have more and more opportunities to participate in the process of intercultural communication, which makes it easier for them to form a dual cultural perception (Benet-Martínez, 2002). Through tactics of intersubjectivity, by examining the interplay of these tactics within the context of TikTok content creation, we can uncover the dynamic processes through which Chinese youth users actively participate in shaping, negotiating, and expressing their dual identities, shedding light on the complex interrelation between cultural assimilation and the preservation of cultural distinctiveness in the digital age.

**3.2. Enculturation:**

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Enculturation theory is a useful addition to tactics of intersubjectivity theory as it focuses on how individuals learn and adapt to the cultural norms of a new society. According to Jackson (2018), enculturation is a process of making sense of a new culture, rooted in anthropological and sociological perspectives, and offers valuable insights into the process by which individuals learn and adapt to the cultural norms and practices of a new society (Jackson, 2018). It posits that cultural learning occurs through a combination of explicit teaching, observation, and participation in cultural activities, shaping individuals' understanding of their social environment and guiding their behaviors and beliefs (Rogoff, 2003). The Chinese youth living in the Netherlands face the challenge of balancing their original cultural identity with the cultural identity of their new environment, enculturation represents a multifaceted journey of navigating the complexities of Dutch culture while preserving their original cultural identity.

The Netherlands, with its rich history, diverse population, and progressive social policies, presents a unique cultural landscape for individuals of Chinese descent. Dutch society values egalitarianism, individualism, and direct communication, contrasting with traditional Chinese cultural values such as collectivism, hierarchy, and indirect communication (Hofstede, 2011). The process of enculturation for Chinese youth in the Netherlands involves navigating these cultural differences, assimilating into Dutch society while maintaining a connection to their Chinese heritage. In the digital age, social media platforms play a pivotal role in the enculturation process, providing individuals with opportunities to engage with and learn about the cultural norms and practices of their new environment. TikTok, with its global reach and diverse user base, serves as a virtual space where individuals can explore and adapt their identities within the context of Dutch culture. Content created and consumed on TikTok reflects the intersection of Chinese and Dutch cultural values (King-O'Riain, 2022), offering insights into the dynamics of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation.

One aspect of enculturation involves language engagement and cultural exploration. TikTok provides Chinese youth in the Netherlands with a platform to engage with Dutch language content, facilitating language learning, cultural exploration, and interactions with the local culture (Oyserman, 2017). Through interactions with Dutch-style creators and exposure to Dutch cultural references and idiomatic expressions, TikTok users are able to gain insights into the nuances of the Dutch language and communication styles. Moreover, TikTok serves as a space for cultural exploration, allowing users to discover and participate in Dutch cultural practices, traditions, and trends. It enables Chinese individuals in the Netherlands to engage with Dutch users, forging connections and building relationships across cultural boundaries (Pachucki & Breiger, 2010).

## 4. Methodology:

I have decided to use a qualitative research methodology for our study by conducting group interviews. This approach will be instrumental in helping us to gain a better understanding of how Chinese TikTok users adapt to TikTok in general and Dutch content online in particular and how they experience and perceive things in relation to one another (Dörnyei, 2007). This methodology allows us to conduct a thorough and in-depth exploration of our research question, which is focused on identifying how Chinese youth in the Netherlands adapt and explore their identity on TikTok. By conducting group interviews, we can encourage participants to share and build upon one another's responses, thus promoting a dynamic discussion that captures a wide range of viewpoints and experiences. Additionally, the open setting of the group interview methodology will enable us to explore the personal experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by users in expressing their identities on the platform.

Regarding why I opted for a group interview instead of an individual interview, the sought after participants were Chinese youth residing in the Netherlands who have experience in using Douyin and TikTok, and preferably have created video content and gained in-depth user experience on both platforms. However, after conducting my search, it became apparent that finding people

who meet all these criteria was challenging. Therefore, after careful consideration, I have decided to abandon the individual interview plan and use group interviews to collect data that combines various experiences, thoughts, and encourage participants to build on each other (Frey & Fontana, 1991). In addition, group interviews as a method offer a unique opportunity to foster a natural and dynamic flow of conversation among participants, as opposed to traditional one-on-one interviews. They create a relaxed and open environment where participants can engage in collective dialogue, share their perspectives, and build upon each other's experiences, while reducing the feeling of being 'observed' as they better mimic everyday life conversations (Rabiee, 2004). Moreover, given that participants may vary in their levels of familiarity with Douyin and TikTok, as well as their cultural backgrounds and experiences, the group format allows for a rich exchange of ideas and insights. Through collaborative sense-making and mutual exploration, participants can collectively reflect on their experiences, complement each other's views, and contribute to a deeper understanding of how social media platforms shape identity among Chinese youth in the Netherlands.

## 4.1. Participant Selection:

Participant selection for this research is pivotal as it aims to offer nuanced insights into the identity navigation of Chinese youth in the Netherlands through TikTok. To ensure comprehensive exploration, we focused on four individuals deeply entrenched in both Douyin and TikTok communities. These participants were chosen for their active involvement in the cultural discourse on TikTok and their ability to bridge Chinese and Dutch influences. By examining the experiences of these individuals, we can gain a better understanding of identity negotiation, cultural integration, and intercultural expression within the TikTok ecosystem.

The selected participants met specific criteria to ensure the depth and relevance of their insights, which are:

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- Users selected for the interview must have a significant presence on Douyin or TikTok, characterized by consistent exposure to the content, and active engagement with the platform.

- The selected users demonstrate a strong interest in different content including Dutch and Chinese

- The selected users must demonstrate their coordination and preference between Chinese culture and Dutch culture, and be able to show expressions of the interaction with two cultures.

There are four participants in a group interview including researcher, they are all my classmates at the university. The first participant is a 23-year-old female called Zheng. She is a deeply engaged user of both Douyin and TikTok, spending significant time on both platforms consuming content and interacting with videos. Although Zheng does not post content herself, she is actively involved in the TikTok community. Her interests span a wide range of topics, including comedy, queer-related topics, and cultural insights. Zheng grew up in Shanghai and had relatively early exposure to TikTok. Being part of the queer community also made her think more about identity exploration and positioning. The second participant is another 23-year-old female called Xue. She primarily uses Douyin but has also explored TikTok, although she finds it less appealing. Like Zheng, Xue enjoys consuming comedic content and sharing aspects of her daily life, particularly those related to international student experiences. Xue's plan when she came to the Netherlands was mainly to complete a graduate program, and she doesn't intend to stay afterwards. This also made her not think too much about integrating into the local culture of the Netherlands. According to her, this is one of the reasons why she did not continue using TikTok. The third participant is a male aged 33 called Aan. He has been a long-time user of TikTok, actively posting and engaging with content, particularly in the realm of travel. Aan's extensive experience on the platform, coupled with his interest in sharing travel insights and cultural experiences, enriches the diversity of perspectives within the group. In addition, he is in an international relationship with a European girl, which makes him also be interested in understanding European cultures and

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communication styles more for general as well as personal reasons . Social media such as TikTok are a bridge for him to understand and integrate into the local culture. Finally, the researcher, a male aged 26, contributes as both a participant and facilitator, bringing insights from his experience with both Douyin in China and TikTok in the Netherlands. I tried to contribute to the conversation as to make sure it flowed more seamlessly, while also leaving the discussion open for participants without influencing their opinions too much. However, due to my double role as participant and researcher, this was at times tricky and may have influenced the discourse.

### 4.2. Data Collection:

The group interview was conducted at Aan's accommodation, selected for its conducive and informal setting, facilitating open and candid discussion among participants. The chosen location ensured comfort and privacy, allowing for a relaxed atmosphere conducive to sharing personal experiences and insights. Prior to the interview, informed consent was obtained from all participants, outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The interview was facilitated by the researcher, with a total of four participants, including the researcher. In order to build a relaxing and easy-talking environment that can let participants be more talkative and sharable, we prepared some snacks and coffee for the session. during the interview, each participant was given an equal opportunity to express their views and experiences related to using Douyin and TikTok in exploring their identity as Chinese youth living in the Netherlands. While participating in the discussion, the researcher also acted as a moderator and asked prepared questions, while adapting to the flow of conversation. The researcher employed active listening techniques to ensure that all participants' voices were heard and respected throughout the interview process.

Questions were open-ended, allowing participants to freely share their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward using Douyin and TikTok. During the interview, participants engaged in lively discussions, sharing personal anecdotes, reflections, and insights about their experiences with both platforms. The interview questions were carefully crafted to elicit rich and detailed responses, linking back to the theoretical frameworks of enculturation and tactics of intersubjectivity, which were basically expanded from four questions:

- What do you think is the biggest difference between these two platforms?

- When using TikTok, is there any content or experience that challenges your identity?

- How do you feel when you come across Chinese or Dutch cultural content on TikTok or Douyin? Have you felt the influence of Dutch cultural content on TikTok on your self-identity? In what aspects?

- Do you often browse Dutch cultural content or Chinese cultural content? Will you comment on relevant content and in which language?

The interview was audio-recorded to capture the nuances of participants' responses accurately. Additionally, in order to collect the data that audio is not able to catch, detailed field notes were taken by the researcher to document non-verbal cues, group dynamics, and any other relevant observations during the interview. Upon completion of the interview, participants were thanked for their participation and provided with an opportunity to ask questions or clarify any concerns. Since the participants in the group interview were all classmates of the researcher, we also participated in discussions on some other students' thesis topics after the group interview. They were also informed about the next steps in the research process, including data analysis and dissemination of findings.

**4.3. Data Analysis Procedure:**

Data analysis procedure for this study involves a comprehensive approach to uncovering rich insights and relevant information regarding how our interviewed participants in the Netherlands explore and adapt their identity from Douyin to TikTok. After I conducted and recorded the group

interviews, I transcribed the recording and translated and analyzed the audio recordings. Transcription ensures that the qualitative data is readily accessible and facilitates a detailed examination of the participants' responses. Essential and related utterances and interactions within the group interviews were transcribed, capturing the nuances of language, tone, and non-verbal cues (Dörnyei, 2007), providing rich insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants regarding their exploration of identity on Douyin and TikTok.

During the analysis process, I used the theoretical frameworks of intersubjectivity and enculturation to understand the subtleties of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation in the context of TikTok. I examined how participants articulate and construct their identities within the social media environments of Douyin and TikTok by analyzing their narratives and interactions. Our goal was to identify patterns of identity expression, adaptation, and transformation across the two platforms, and to trace the evolution of participants' identities as they engage with different cultural norms, content genres, and user communities. In addition to using intersubjectivity theory, I also employed the lens of enculturation to examine the process of identity negotiation within the context of cultural adaptation. I explored how participants navigate their dual identities as Chinese youth living in the Netherlands, and how they use their experiences on Douyin and TikTok to negotiate their sense of belonging and cultural identity. I looked at how participants integrate elements of Dutch culture into their online personas, and how they manage cultural differences while engaging with diverse cultural communities on the platforms.

In reference to studies on identity understanding in specific populations on TikTok, Wynne, Wright and Alvermann (2021) conducted research on the impact of gender identity on Gen Z through TikTok. This research requires us to ask relative questions during the data analysis process. I continued to use Wynne's problem standard core and adapt it to the questions criterion aiming to provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamic processes of identity negotiation and cultural

adaptation within the digital space of TikTok (Wynne, Wright & Alvermann, 2021). While analyzing the identity expression of these TikTok users, I asked myself the following questions:

- How do these TikTok users conceive of and express their identity? (e.g. as a social construct? As state of being?)

- What intersectional aspects of identity do they express on TikTok? How do factors such as age, gender, and subculture in their identity expression?

- How do Chinese youth create "gaps" on TikTok that denaturalize both Chinese and Dutch cultural norms? In what ways do they challenge stereotypes and conventional understandings of identity through their content?

- How has the medium of TikTok influenced Chinese youth's exploration and adaptation of identity? What role does TikTok play in shaping their cultural assimilation and cultural distinctiveness?

## 5. Analysis:

Through the analysis of the transcripts of the interview, participants showed interesting answers three trends, which will make up the three subsections in this analysis. They are i) content adaptation, ii) subcultural connection and iii) TikTok as an assimilation tool. In terms of content adaptation, it analyzes participants' content adaptation from Douyin to TikTok, and explores the impact of content changes on participants' online identities through their acceptance of more local and international content on TikTok. In terms of subcultural connection, from the participants' active engagement with different subcultural communities after coming to the Netherlands, I analyzed their use of TikTok as a bridge for intercultural communication and their exploration of identities in multiple cultures. As for TikTok as an assimilation tool, participants expressed during interviews that TikTok plays a strong role in promoting personal cultural identity, whether they want to actively learn the local language, explore the local culture, or as an outsider living in the

Netherlands negotiate their identity in a group, TikTok can achieve the identity interaction they want and discuss it under the content of groups with the same experience.

**5.1. Content Adaptation:**

To facilitate a natural discussion and get to know each other better, I started the interview by asking open-ended questions about the types of videos people like to watch on short video platforms like Douyin or TikTok. All of the participants preferred funny videos. One participant, Aan, noted that most people use their free time to watch videos on these platforms, and Zheng and Xue typically spend one to two hours per day. The production cost of funny videos is low, and they can help people relax, making them the most popular video content among the participants. Everyone agreed with Aan's observation. It's worth mentioning that Xue, a young user who mainly uses Douyin, tried using TikTok for a few days while in the Netherlands, but she did not find the content interesting enough to continue using it. The following excerpt will demonstrate this phenomenon with regard to Xue. It took place after I asked how she feels about TikTok content.

*Excerpt 1.*

*Xue:"At first, TikTok would recommend those Chinese girls dancing or wearing Han suits. They are not attractive to me. Many of them are not as good as those on Douyin..... On TikTok, you can also encounter some funny videos from non-Chinese contexts, and generally, I can't feel the humor. One is a high context culture, and the here is a low context culture, and it's difficult for me to feel that humor."*

It can be seen from Xue's statement that when she first came to the Netherlands, she considered using TikTok as a tool to get a sense of and integrate into the local culture. By using TikTok, she compares it with her previous experience of using Douyin. It can be seen that Xue considered that the video algorithm on TikTok recommended a lot of generic Chinese content that

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TikTok "thought" she would like. In fact, this content is not in line with the Chinese aesthetics she has seen on Douyin, and her description of such content can be seen as an act of denaturalization on the basis that it is not funny nor attractive, even when the intended objective of it is humor or attractiveness. On the other hand, the Chinese culture she mentioned is typically considered a High context culture, which means campared the content in Douyin, TikTok related less authentic content and familiar feelings to Xue. In particular, Xue mentioned in excerpt 1 that she watched many videos of Chinese girls dancing in Han suits, a type of Chinese tranditional costume, which made her feel that it was not authentic compared with similar video content created in the Chinese cultural context, and most of the Chinese element videos were also more inclined to western aesthetics, these also caused Xue to be unable to adapt to changes in video content on TikTok. Speaking of which, both Zheng and I nodded at the same time because similar situations have also occurred to us. When we first used TikTok, algorithm recommendations would recommend a lot of content that TikTok "thought" you would like. However, people's preferences are difficult to calculate by algorithms sometimes, which makes it difficult for many Chinese young people to resonate with the popular aesthetic of Dutch or European young people on TikTok at the beginning. Unlike Xue turning back to use Douyin, Zheng, Aan and I continue to use TikTok because we all find more interesting content on TikTok that can resonate with us. In the excerpt 2 Zheng's answer responses one of the reasons why we continue using TikTok, because of the content that resonates with us in our daily life living abroad. It took place after I asked how do you think about the content on the TikTok in the Netherlands.

Excerpt 2.

Zheng："I have noticed that I follow a lot of TikTok accounts that belong to people of Asian background. I think this is because I can relate to them on a personal level. On Douyin, we share the same cultural background and face similar social environments, so I appreciate the diverse

*topics in the videos I get to watch. However, on TikTok, I mostly watch content from people similar*

*to me, such as those from Asian countries or those whose parents have Asian backgrounds. Some of*

*the videos they post help me better understand their perspective and feel more empathetic towards*

*them. As a result, I tend to consume more of this type of content."*

Based on Zheng's expression, it is apparent that there are certain video contents on TikTok

that resonate with Zheng's life experiences. In contrast, the Chinese version of Douyin does not

showcase many things that happen in the Netherlands, such as the story of Asian family children

growing up in the Netherlands. The specific content that this dual culture brings has a significant

impact on daily life, adequation of their sharing feelings in the same situation also results in a clear

identification of specific groups. For example, there are similarities brought about by the way

parents speak in family life, the usage habits of daily items, etc. This identification leads to different

functions of Zheng in using TikTok and Douyin. When using Douyin, Zheng and Xue have a

similar experience. They each have their own group of friends, can see the authenticity of content

from Chinese culture, have a familiar communication environment, can understand video content

more easily, and can delve more deeply into the video content. On the other hand, when using

TikTok, it's all about finding resonance through other connections and in this case, adequation.

Users can see more content or comments from people who have had similar experiences and share

similar ideas. Additionally, Zheng also can see some new things that she might not have

experienced before, especially when it comes to dual-cultural video content. This makes TikTok a

good platform for expressing cultural collision and communication. Zheng's content adaptation

experience on TikTok reflects her life in the Netherlands, as she wants to connect with groups who

share her experience and learn how to balance her dual cultural identity better. Similar to Zheng's

usage experience, the following excerpt 3 expresses that Aan has similar feelings about the content

adaptation on TikTok. But, he sees more content from international students, which makes him think that TikTok has quite a practical value for him.


*Excerpt 3.*

*Xian: " What language do you usually watch content in?"*

*Aan: "I think the content in Chinese may be around 60%, while the content in English is relatively less."*

*Xian: "Are there any changes in this content after you came to the Netherlands?"*

*Aan: "As for me, I just scrolled the videos about Chinese international students sharing content related to Dutch culture randomly. For instance, there are some international students who are currently in the Netherlands. They have created a video to share their experiences and how great it is to live in Rotterdam. They will introduce themselves as international students and talk about their daily lives, including how they deal with issues like not being able to find food they like. And some of them may also be more in line with some popular trends, and then they turn it into their own pattern, which I quite like."*


Aan has been using TikTok as his short video social media platform, and his main video viewing languages are 60% Mandarin and 40% English. This allowed him to see a lot of video content shared by Dutch or European local Chinese communities after he came to the Netherlands. Most of Aan's favorite TikTok video content is still in Mandarin, and a large number of similar content can be found in the online Chinese international student community. It can be seen that Chinese content is still the main content community for many young people like Aan, who can express their more desired content in Mandarin and find people with similar cultural backgrounds and current experiences. Whether it's sharing the cultural shock they encountered after arriving in the Netherlands or exploring their experiences in a new cultural context, they have transformed

these similar experiences via the process of adequation into creative content and community discussion materials, which gives rise to what Aan calls a "pattern" in the last sentence. The adequation is more clear in Aan's mention of the "pattern" that is created through trends, which can be related to all the users in the same situation. This type of content "pattern" is what Chinese youth living in the Netherlands appreciate and can attract their attention and discussion so that TikTok can build a dialogue bridge for Chinese young people living in the Netherlands.

## 5.2. Subcultural Connection:

From the previous analysis, we can tell there is a "Big C" culture distinction in the content engagement (Simonton, 2013), The videos that can attract these young Chinese groups on TikTok are not only content about the collision of Eastern and Western cultures (Scollon & Scollon, 2005). On the other hand, through the data, "Small C" culture interactions are also found, TikTok users can find community groups with multicultural circles, so that we can find more people who have the same ideas and the same background, but a subcultural community that is easier to connect with in digital spaces. In this connection process, adequation is the a key strategy to bring these people together to let them share and discuss thinkings. In the following Excerpt 4, Zheng found the strange feelings during cultural adaptation also happened on other TikTok users who are moving to abroad, adequative feelings make the bond in this foreign community tight. It took place after I asked whether you have some special interactions with the users.


*Excerpt 4.*

*Zheng*：*"When I first came to the Netherlands, I felt strange about many things. I thought it was on my own, but when I saw videos posted by people from various places, such as Asia, the United States, or other European countries on TikTok, you would find that these questions were also facing them. It means, oh, this is not my own issue, and you will feel a sense of identification because you are closer to them, not to the Netherlands."*

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From this excerpt, it is evident that she initially believed that the challenges she faced while living in the Netherlands were her own. She attributed these difficulties to the differences in cultural backgrounds between China and the Netherlands, as well as differences in lifestyle. However, she found more shared feelings with TikTok users from other cultures, ethnic groups, and countries who are also living in the Netherlands as expatriates. This adequation based on shared experiences rather than shared cultural values has strengthened Zheng's understanding of her complex cultural identity. Early on in her life in the Netherlands, she found solace in the TikTok community. TikTok's algorithm recommended more and more similar content, which connected more and more users with similar feelings, allowing them to discover their diverse identities. The adequation makes this bond tightly and facilitates Chinese youth like Zheng to find more than just a community of foreigners on TikTok. Such connections may only be found with Chinese youth who have not had the living abroad experience, and therefore the subcultural connection through adequation is particularly valuable. In the following Excerpt 5, Aan and Zheng both came up with the experience of subcultural connection on the TikTok, after I asked the how do ou like connecting the interesting group of people or community.

*Excerpt 5.*

*Aan*：*"Some students may also discuss their travels to other cities in the Netherlands or other countries in Europe and provide their opinions on those places. As a half-time travel-sharing blogger myself, I have gained a lot of inspiration from the sharing of Chinese international students in the content I post and watch. They are better able to know which attractions meet our expectations and may be more interesting than those recommended by Europeans."*

*Zheng*："*I also watch a lot of videos posted by international students, which are the kind of videos where students cannot write their papers, procrastinate, and have a dull life in the Netherlands.*"

*All*："*Hahahaha*"

*Zheng*："*And I'm a foreigner living in the Netherlands.*"

*Xue*： "*Subei girl in the Netherlands.*"

*All*： "*Hahahaha*"

*Zheng*："*My TikTok name is Subei girl in the Netherlands. I also pay attention to the Queer culture on TikTok, and many Chinese international students come to the Netherlands because of this important identity.*"

Based on this excerpt, we can tell that Aan enjoys traveling and uses TikTok to search and collect travel guides from other users. He also has Instagram and TikTok accounts where he shares his travel experiences and can easily browse travel content. Since moving to the Netherlands, he has been active in TikTok's Chinese and international student communities. He pays attention to many travel plans and shares information about neighboring European countries. From Aan's interview, it is evident that he prefers travel video content posted by Chinese international students predominantly due to sharing a similar cultural background. In this background, it can be said that they share similar interests in sights or destinations rarely found in Eastern regions. As such, focusing on their similarities (via adequation) as Chinese internationals who are interested in travel has led them to form a unique travel community for Chinese international students. This strategic engagement with multicultural community content reflects a tactical choice made by users to seek out information and inspiration that aligns with their cultural preferences and experiences (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). By leveraging the experiences and perspectives of international students, individuals

like Aan are able to enrich their understanding of cultural diversity and integrate multicultural elements into their TikTok experience.

Later in the conversation, Zheng mentioned that she enjoys watching videos from various subcultural groups on TikTok. Some of these groups belong to her student community, while others belong to the queer community. By engaging with these multicultural video contents, Zheng is able to engage with subcultural interests and connections without necessarily losing sight of her larger cultural connection as a Chinese student in the Netherlands. For example, Zheng's choice of username, "Subei girl in the Netherlands", highlights her engagement and awareness of her multicultural identity. "Subei" is a region on the central coast of China, and Zheng chose to use it to represent her cultural background instead of just identifying herself as a Chinese girl. This way, she is able to assert her cultural heritage while also situating herself within the Dutch cultural context. In this excerpt, when Xue mentioned Zheng's TikTok username, all the participants laughed. We found it interesting that Zheng chose to use "Subei" as her cultural background identity, even though it is not a particularly special region with a strong cultural identity. This username setting with a strong personal original label also shows that Zheng may choose to differentiate herself based on a more specific regional identity rather than align herself with other Chinese users at all times. By actively seeking out content shared by individuals from different cultural backgrounds and engaging in discussions among these subcultural communities, Zheng demonstrates curiosity and openness to learning and connecting with different cultural perspectives. Zheng's attention to Queer culture on TikTok is a great example of the intersection of identity and the importance of representation on digital platforms. After moving to the Netherlands, Zheng discovered the Chinese queer parade and women's equal rights parade on TikTok. Through complex differentiation and adequation processes, Zheng is not only able to express important aspects of her identity, such as her sexual orientation, student identity, and regional background online, but also contributes to the visibility and representation of other subcultural individuals (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). This helps

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foster a sense of community and belonging for individuals who share similar experiences and identities.

**5.3. TikTok as an Assimilation Tool:**

The participants have shown that they are aware of constructing their digital identities on TikTok, as seen through their content adaptation from Douyin to TikTok and active connection into various subcultures. Through TikTok's algorithm recommendations and community cultural influence, young Chinese individuals living in the Netherlands are able to confidently express themselves and find a sense of belonging between two different cultural backgrounds. Unlike on Douyin, where content is specifically catered for Chinese audiences (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004), TikTok's global reach can facilitate multicultural connections for Chinese youth living in the Netherlands and influence their thinking about identity through cultural assimilation. For example, they may use TikTok as an active effort to adapt to Dutch culture, whether in terms of language, lifestyle habits, or cultural norms to learn about and understand it. Whereas they may want to stay connected to more typical Chinese online content, they may also explore ways of understanding Dutch content as a tool for assimilation. In the following excerpt following a question about what role they think TikTok plays in our adaptation to life in the Netherlands, myself and Aan seem to align in considering TikTok as a useful tool to learn about the Netherlands, and try to integrate better into the Dutch culture.

*Excerpt 6.*

*Xian："If I use TikTok, I would prefer to watch content that shares local Dutch food and Dutch language knowledge. I would be more interested in learning about this country and its cultural way of life. Do you also find this type of content?"*

*Aan："Yes, yes, I also see that some people use a humorous way to explain what this Dutch language means and how to pronounce it. I also kind of like to watch it"*

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*Xian："Is it spoken in Dutch?"*

*Aan： "No, most of what I watched was spoken in English, and a small part was in Dutch. I don't quite understand Dutch either, but I still want to hear it"*

*……*

*Aan: "I think TikTok has been helpful to me in living in the Netherlands to some extent, as I have found more people with relevant experiences. I think it can be considered as a way of integrating into the local Dutch culture."*

In this conversation between me and Aan, we can see the impact of the idea of actively integrating into Dutch culture on TikTok, showing TikTok as a useful cultural assimilation tool, e.g., in terms of language learning and cultural exploration. Through the lens of enculturation theory (Jackson, 2018), we can analyze this interaction to understand how individuals navigate their cultural identity and integrate into Dutch society within the digital space of TikTok. When I express a preference for content about local Dutch food and language, Aan aligns with me. In this process of alignment, Aan is even willing ti engage with Dutch-language content, which indicates a proactive engagement with Dutch culture and language (Jackson, 2018). By seeking out content that introduces aspects of Dutch culture and language, he demonstrates a willingness to learn and understand the cultural norms and practices of his new environment. This reflects a strategic choice to integrate into Dutch society and acquire practical knowledge that facilitates cultural adaptation and social interaction (Oyserman, 2017). The conversation also highlights the role of TikTok in facilitating cultural assimilation and identity negotiation among individuals living in the Netherlands in a fun and engaging way. By engaging with content related to Dutch culture and language, users like Aan actively position themselves within the Dutch cultural context, signaling their willingness to adapt and integrate into their new environment. This process of cultural assimilation involves not only language learning but also the exploration of lifestyle habits, cultural

norms, and social customs, as individuals navigate the complexities of identity formation and belonging. By actively engaging with content that resonates with their experiences and interests, Chinese youth living in the Netherlands like Aan seek to establish connections with the local culture and community, bridging the gap between their Chinese heritage and their new social environment. This process of community integration not only facilitates cultural adaptation but also fosters a sense of solidarity and belonging within the multicultural context of the Netherlands. But the TikTok's cultural assimilation function is not suitable for all the Chinese youth living abroad. In the following excerpt, Xue and Zheng discuss how they view TikTok's assimilation value differently.

*Excerpt 7.*

*Xue*：*"In the Chinese content environment of Douyin, I feel that I am more accustomed to it, and there are also many Chinese international students sharing their lives on Douyin. I think the effect is similar."*

*Zheng*：*"I use Douyin and TikTok because they meet my different needs. Using Douyin may be similar to Xue's idea, but I don't use TikTok to better integrate into Dutch culture either. It's mainly for entertainment, allowing me to see many interesting things different from Chinese culture. And I can feel on TikTok that it constantly reminds me that I am an outsider in the Netherlands. Instead, it encourages me to integrate into a community of all non-Dutch people in the Netherlands, rather than making me feel more integrated into the local Dutch community. It can help me find a sense of belonging in non-Dutch communities"*

The conversation between Xue and Zheng provides valuable insights into individuals who are more inclined to view engagement with Dutch content differently, viewing it not as a tool of assimilation, but of possible feelings of isolation. Xue expresses a sense of familiarity and comfort with the Chinese content environment of Douyin, indicating a preference for content that aligns

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with their cultural background and experiences. This suggests a desire to maintain a connection to their Chinese cultural identity, as she feels more accustomed to the content and community on Douyin. In addition, the lack of long-term development plans in the Netherlands may also be behind Xue's preference to just use Douyin. Compared to trying to integrate into the Dutch culture, it is more valuable for her to continue to find her own fun on Douyin. This shows that while TikTok can function a tool for cultural assimilation, it is highly dependent on the perspectives of the user, cultural identities, and aspirations. Namely, Zheng provides a contrasting viewpoint of using TikTok and Douyin and TikTok to meet different needs. While Zheng acknowledges the appeal of Douyin for accessing Chinese content and connecting with the Chinese international student community, she also uses TikTok for entertainment and cultural exploration. However, Zheng's experience on TikTok differs from my and Aan's, as she perceives the platform as a reminder of her outsider status in the Netherlands rather than a means of integration into Dutch culture. This suggests a different perspective on engaging with Dutch culture on TikTok. It can be inferred that regarding the content on TikTok, different people may have different feelings about similar content, which may depend on our perspectives, cultural interests, future plans, etc, like Aan and I have plans to live and study in the Netherlands or Europe, we would prefer to learn from TikTok content and integrate into the local culture. However, Zheng and Xue have no further plans to live in the Netherlands in the future, resulting in excerpt 7 the last sentence speaking of feelings, Zheng felt TikTok helped her find a sense of belonging in non-Dutch communities. Similar to Zheng, Xue not only has no long-term plan to live in the Netherlands, but also has a fixed social group, is familiar with authentic Chinese cultural content, and has a preference for Chinese-based content, which makes Xue feel more comfortable when using Douyin.

Through excerpt 7, Xue and Zheng exemplify the diverse ways young individuals strategically use TikTok. Xue focuses on engaging with familiar Chinese content, seeking connection with the Chinese community, while Zheng adopts a more nuanced approach, balancing

her engagement with both Chinese and non-Chinese content and strategically resisting cultural assimilation. Their experiences highlight how perspectives, cultural interests, and future plans shape the way they interact with content on TikTok. While I and Aan find TikTok welcoming and exciting, Zheng finds it isolating, underscoring the complex processes of identity negotiation and cultural adaptation on social media platforms.

## 6. Discussions

Through the analysis of the three trends of Content adaptation, Subcultural connection and TikTok as an assessment tool, we can see that participants have their own thoughts on exploring and adapting to their online identity while living in the Netherlands, TikTok, as a bridge for them to explore their online identity, plays an important role in finding resonant community cultures and discovering valuable emotional content. It can be learned from the interviews with Aan and Zheng that adequation has played a great role in their online identity exploration, which allowed them to connect with different subcultural groups across various boundaries beyond 'national culture'. On TikTok, they can find and connect to subcultural content that they are more interested in and intercultural content sharing that is less accessible on Douyin, which has deepened their dependence on TikTok. Aan can learn more about Dutch and European culture through TikTok, which can help him better integrate into Dutch life and become a Chinese youth living in the Netherlands authentically, Zheng discovered more interesting intercultural phenomena and found resonance through TikTok, and deepened communication with subcultures to find community belonging. Her online identity is more diverse, Zheng is more inclined towards the intermediate nature of his identity, emphasizing that using TikTok is more of an entertainment tool, she can become any desired identity without overly pursuing integration into Dutch life. Unlike them, Xue, on TikTok, many traces of distinction and denaturalization were found in her discourse as to why she thinks that cannot attract herself, Douyin is the environment she is able to feel most authentic which is where traces of authentication were most prominent, making it her preferred platform over TikTok.

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From our analysis, it can be seen that these Chinese young people have significant subjective factors in exploring and adapting to their identity on TikTok, with one of the main factors being whether they are willing to accept integration into a new living environment and adapt to different cultural circles. Like Zheng and Xue, they do not have specific plans for long-term living in the Netherlands, which leads to a trend of being more neutral towards online identities and even emphasizing their own Chinese cultural aspects.

So we can see that Aan has a mindset of wanting to learn more about European culture and integrate into local Dutch life, which gives him a more positive attitude to balance his dual cultural identity by interacting with different local cultural content on TikTok. Zheng's activity on TikTok tends to be more focused on finding her favorite community culture and discovering interesting phenomena arising from the collision of Eastern and Western cultures. Integrating into Dutch life is not her goal, but accepting and exploring her favorite subcultural identity is what she finds TikTok most attractive. Xue is a young person who is not very interested in the local culture displayed by TikTok. She is more immersed in maintaining her identity recognition in the Chinese cultural environment, and even living in the Netherlands, she believes that TikTok cannot bring her more valuable identity recognition. From three different types of identity emotions, we can see that when dual cultural identity explores self positioning on social media, whether there are interested community groups, preferences for a certain culture, and the emotional value that social media can provide to users will all affect their exploration of online identity. It is also the case that having subcultural affiliation (e.g., interest in staying in the Netherlands, being queer, or having a European partner) can facilitate interest in branching out beyond certain types of familiar content in order to seek new modes of belonging and familiarity. This process cannot be predicted across nationalistic cultural lines and thus intercultural communication can benefit from investigating cultural and subcultural contact beyond our essentialist modes of understanding (Blommaert, 2010).

## 7. Conclusion:

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This thesis set out to explore how Chinese youth living in the Netherlands explore and adapt their identities through the use of Douyin and TikTok. Through a detailed analysis of content adaptation, subcultural connection, and TikTok as an assessment tool, we have uncovered the intricate ways in which these young individuals engage with digital platforms to explore and express their multifaceted identities within a multicultural context. The theoretical framework of tactics of intersubjectivity, proposed by Bucholtz and Hall, has been instrumental in understanding the strategies employed by participants in constructing their online identities. Adequation and distinction, authentication and denaturalization have provided valuable insights into how these tactics are utilized in the digital realm.

From the group interviews, it is evident that TikTok serves as a significant bridge for Chinese youth in the Netherlands, facilitating their exploration of identity through resonant community cultures and emotionally valuable content. However, it is apparent that the level of engagement and interest depends on various factors beyond our traditional modes of understanding intercultural contact as Chinese vs. Dutch or Eastern vs. Western. The factors can extend beyond such nationalist lines to more individual and community-based reasons such as communal and subcultural identities, personal gains or desires (e.g., staying in the region), and so on. This makes it less predictable to see how different youth adapt in new environments both physically (a new country) and digitally (a new mobile application) and offers insight to the field of intercultural communication beyond essentialist understandings. This makes the qualitative approach followed in this research even more valuable and recommended for future research in the field.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates that the process of identity exploration and adaptation among Chinese youth in the Netherlands is multifaceted and dynamic. TikTok, with its global reach and diverse content, plays a crucial role in this process, offering a platform where users can navigate their dual cultural identities, find community belonging, and engage with a wide array of cultural content. The findings underscore the importance of understanding the interplay between digital

media, cultural identity, and social integration in the context of globalization and intercultural communication. This thesis contributes to the under-researched area of digital intercultural communication, emphasizing that cultural interactions are not confined to physical spaces but extend significantly into digital realms. As digital platforms continue to shape social and cultural landscapes, it becomes increasingly important to explore these virtual interactions and their implications for identity and belonging in a globalized world. While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The small sample size, consisting of a few participants, limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, my dual role as both researcher and participant, despite my best efforts to remain objective, may have influenced the data collection and analysis process. These factors, combined with constraints imposed by word and time limits, highlight the need for further research. Future studies could expand the participant pool to include a more diverse range of experiences and perspectives and explore similar dynamics in different geographic and cultural contexts could provide a broader understanding of how digital platforms like TikTok influence identity formation across various diaspora communities. Furthermore, integrating quantitative methods alongside qualitative approaches could offer a more comprehensive view of this phenomenon.

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