

NAVIGATING THE COMPETING NARRATIVES IN SOCIAL MEDIA - A STUDY OF CHINESE TRANSNATIONALS' CULTURAL IDENTITY WORK IN FINLAND

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This study focuses on Chinese transnationals in Finland and investigates how they navigate the complex media ecology and the competing narratives circulating through social media. The research questions are: what are the features of the social media practice of Chinese transnationals in Finland; how do they navigate the competing narratives; and how do they construct their cultural identity in the navigating process.</p> <p>I adopted qualitative approaches for the study, combing qualitative interviews and online observations. The interview topics were mainly from my online observations. I have done totally eight interviews with eight different respondents, asking people's media use habits, how they identified themselves, as well as their opinions towards the competing narratives about certain hot events.</p> <p>The concepts of transnational migration, polymedia, and digital diaspora were the main theoretical frameworks adopted for discussing the related themes. Bucholtz and Hall (2010)'s identity principles and De Fina (2015)'s identity analysis through narratives were used primarily as the guidelines.</p> <p>The data have demonstrated that: Chinese transnationals use a diverse source of social media, and their media use reflects how they use their media repertoire to manage social relationships. The Chinese diaspora ethnic media via multiple Wechat channels in Finland is growing. Regarding how people navigate the competing narratives, Chinese transnationals tend to use various references to verify and make judgements, and they are tactical about how and if they would express themselves. As for the cultural identity work, Chinese transnationals tend to present multiple levels of identities: besides a strong Chinese identity, they also manifest identities of being a local as well as being a transnational in-betweener. On the other hand, the findings have also shown that there are various structural limits and obstacles for Chinese transnationals in their social media use as well as in their identity construction.</p> <p>As this study aims to present an all-round picture of the study subject, it explores several topics. As a result, the limitation of this study is that it has not discussed all topics in a very detailed manner. Therefore, future studies of similar topics could prove to be meaningful to focus on one of the topics and analyse in an in-depth way.</p> <p>Nevertheless, this thesis would add insights to the understanding of Chinese migrants in Finland and add to the discussion of Chinese digital diaspora. It also would add new perspective to the study of migrants' identity by discussing how the transnationals navigate the competing narratives from social media.</p>	
Keywords Chinese transnationals, digital diaspora, social media, polymedia, competing narratives, navigating strategies, cultural identity, Wechat	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Historically, immigration to Finland mainly involved population from the adjacent areas, such as the Baltic Sea Area, Russia, Sweden, etc. (Migration Institute of Finland, n.d.-b; OECD, 2017). In the 20th century, Finland also witnessed two waves of large-scale economically-driven emigration when it went through the process of urbanization and industrialization, with a large number of Finnish people moving to the North America and Sweden respectively (Migration Institute of Finland, n.d.-a; OECD, 2017). While starting from the 1990s, the international immigration to Finland has been on the rise (OECD, 2017). Figures from Eurostat showed that by January 2021, foreign-born population accounted for 7.4 % of the Finnish population. Compared to many other European countries or its neighbouring nordic countries, the percentage was not high. For example, the same statistics table showed that percentage of foreign-born population in Sweden and Norway was 19.7% and 16.3% respectively (Eurostat, 2022).

Nevertheless, as immigration increases in scale and migrants continue to come from not only the neighbouring areas but also from other corners around the world (Migration Institute of Finland, n.d.-b), Finland is also going through changes on a societal level. In order to better adapt to immigration, the Finnish government is promoting multiculturalism as well as non-discrimination and cooperation in the society, at the same time offering support to migrants in the integration process (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, n.d.-a). Regarding the stance towards migration, the policy makers in Finland recognize its importance, stating that migration is one of the solutions to aging population and labor shortages in certain sectors, and Finland is competing for international talents and entrepreneurs (Ministry of the Interior Finland, n.d.). In recent years, in order to increase its global competitiveness, the Finnish government introduced the *Talent Boost* program in order to attract foreign talents (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, n.d.-b), aiming to increase the work-based immigration by 2030, and triple the number of foreign students to 15,000 per year (OECDiLibrary, n.d.).

Among all foreign-born nationals who live in Finland, migrants from China constitute one of the largest groups, outnumbered only by nationals from Estonia, Russia,

and Iraq (Statistics Finland, 2023). It is worth to point out that a significant portion of Chinese migrants come to Finland for the purpose of work or study-the target of the *Talent Boost* program. For instance, when checking the statistics, in the one-year period between October 2021 to October 2022, there were totally 1907 Chinese nationals got their first residence permits to Finland, with 625 of them migrating for work and 750 of them for study (Finnish Immigration Service Statistics, 2023). As the Finnish government's policy to attract more international talents has taking effect, the number of Chinese who come to study and work is expected to grow.

This study is set against this background and aims to gain a better understanding of Chinese migrants in Finland. More specifically, it focuses on the media use of Chinese transnationals and investigates how they navigate the competing narratives from social media and how their identity is constructed within the wider environment. Eventually, the findings of this thesis would hopefully add to the understanding of migration life in Finland from the following aspects: migrants' life in Finland, the media realities of the migrants, Chinese digital diaspora in Finland, Chinese migrants' identity work, etc. By offering accounts from migrants' perspectives, this thesis also intends to present the voice of migrants when they face various competing narratives from social media and offer some insights for researchers and policy makers about the topic of Chinese transnationals in Finland.

1.1 Aim and relevance of the study

The starting point of this study is the special social media ecology which Chinese transnationals navigate in. Due to China's internet firewall (Chandel et al., 2019; Hoang et al., 2021; Griffiths, 2021; Yang, 2012; Yang et al., 2014), people living in mainland China do not have direct access to major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Despite all the negative impacts of this reality, it has partly helped the growth of China-based social media platforms such as Wechat, Weibo, Douyin, Taobao, Baidu, etc. As a result, currently when people who come from China settle down outside of the country, while getting access to media offerings such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc, they will continue to use those China-based social media platforms at the same time. Due to those reasons, Chinese transnationals live in a highly complex social media ecology (Sun, 2021), where different and competing ideas, narratives, and ideologies circulate and clash with one another (Appadurai, 1996). Naturally, the same situation also applies to Chinese immigrants who live in Finland.

This thesis adopts a transnational perspective, viewing immigrants' social life as being constantly connected with multiple societies instead of being only bounded by one nation state where they settle in (Faist, 2000; Feldman-Bianco, 2018; Glick Schiller

et al., 1994; Kyle, 2000; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Especially as the globalization process accelerates in every corner of the world and the social media develops at a fast pace, the migrants nowadays are better connected than ever before. They are more accurately described as transnationals and their identity is shaped by their embeddedness in more than one nation-state (Glick Schiller et al., 1994).

In this thesis, I intend to make the discussions around how Chinese transnationals in Finland navigate the competing narratives from social media and pose the research questions of: 1) what are the features of their social media use; 2) what kind of navigating strategies do they adopt towards those conflicting narratives; and 3) how do they construct their cultural identities through this process. In order to make the analysis, I use the theoretical frameworks of transnational migration (Glick Schiller, 2004; Glick Shiller et al, 1994; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), digital diaspora (Andersson, 2019; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Ponzanesi, 2020), as well as the theories about identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010; De Fina, 2015). Chinese migrants are viewed as transnationals who live in Finland but maintain multiple connections across borders, and they participate actively in digital diaspora in their daily life. While facing competing narratives circulating in social media, they are also active agents in negotiating their multiple cultural identities. To answer the research questions, I use qualitative research methods for my study, combining interviews and online observation. Interview is an efficient way for discussing the topics directly with participants and interview data tend to be helpful for analysing the dynamics of migration in a deeper level. Online observation enables me to locate the social media hot topics and the competing narratives about those topics.

Previous studies have provided valuable resources for this study. Sun (2021) has given an all-round review of the Chinese social media and Chinese diaspora in Australia and called on future research to look into the complicated media environment and competing ideologies that the Chinese transnationals needed to navigate. Guo (2022) has provided a deep understanding of the Chinese diaspora using a transnational perspective and pointed out that the Chinese diaspora population were very diverse, mobile and highly connected groups of people. Regarding migration identities, Li and Kroon (2021) discussed the identity articulation of young people of Chinese origin in Netherlands. Lei and Guo (2020) analysed the identity and belonging of returned Chinese transnationals from Canada. All those articles offered insights and understanding to the themes which related to my topic.

Nevertheless, I have noticed that most of the studies about Chinese transnationals and digital diaspora were based on social realities other than Finland or the Nordic countries. The subjects of those studies were mainly Chinese transnationals in traditional immigration destinations such as Canada or Australia (Cassidy & Wang, 2018; Guo, 2022; Zhang & Wang, 2019; Guo, 2022), or in some European countries where there have been established Chinese diaspora such as France, Netherlands (Li & Kroon,

2021; Thunø & Li, 2020), etc. In Finland, the immigration of Chinese is more of a recent phenomenon since the 1990s, so there has not been established Chinese diaspora in the history, and the demography of Chinese transnationals is also different. Therefore, it is of significance to investigate Chinese transnationals in Finland to gain more understandings. The study might also add to the body of research of Chinese transnationals in general.

Moreover, apart from what was mentioned in Sun (2021)'s article, there has not been much research done regarding the topic of competing narratives from social media and how the transnational migrants navigated those in their daily life. Whereas in this study, the interview data has shown that all the participants were well aware of the conflicting ideas and ideologies from social media. In this sense, this thesis did not only present the social media use patterns of Chinese transnationals, but also made it possible to gain direct knowledge of how people handled those competing narratives in their daily life and how those would affect their cultural identity work. From this perspective, the study should also add value to the understanding of the Chinese digital diaspora as a whole.

1.2 Main structure of the thesis

The thesis is organized in the following structure. After the introduction, the next chapter is the literature review. I will review the theoretical background from three main aspects. First, I will discuss migration study from a transnational perspective, emphasizing the multi-embeddedness of migrants and their connections to more than one nation-state. The reviewing of transnational migration theory also includes its theoretical developments, its practical applications, etc. Since this study is related to social media use, I will also review the theories about transnational media, especially polymedia, which would provide the analysis framework for social media use patterns of Chinese transnationals. Second, I will review the concept of digital diaspora and some related studies about digital diaspora which might bring insights to my study. I will then move on to elaborate on the concept of Chinese digital diaspora and make clarifications of related terms and my study scope in order to help readers gain a more accurate understanding about the background of this study. In the third part of the literature review, I will discuss topics about identity in migration studies, the principles of identity, as well as the analysis of identity through narratives.

Following the literature review the next chapter is the methodology part. I will firstly state the research questions. Next, I will review the use of qualitative method and rationalize its use in my study as the aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese transnationals' experiences. Then, I will discuss the values of qualitative interview and its use in practice, as well as how to optimize the design of

interviews. In addition to interviews, I will also describe the other important part of my research methods-the online observation that I have been working on, and provide the basic background information about Chinese migration in Finland. I will also discuss my role as a qualitative researcher and an interviewer, as well as some practicalities in the study including ethical considerations. Finally in the methodology section, I will introduce the data of my study: presenting how the interview was conducted, making a summary of the interview data, explaining the coding process, etc.

The next two chapters are the main body of this thesis, the findings and discussion parts. I will organize the findings into three parts with an aim to answer the research questions. First, I will discuss some significant patterns of Chinese transnationals' social media practice and analyse those patterns with the theories of polymedia. Second, I will summarize the strategies what people adopt in navigating the competing narratives in social media. Third, I will analyse the multiple cultural identities constructed by Chinese transnationals in Finland as well as how they navigate through the multiple levels of identities. In addition, I will also present the structural limits which might influence Chinese transnationals' identity construction. In the discussion chapter, I will reflect on the findings and make further discussions regarding the research questions, such as more dynamics of Chinese transnationals' social media use in Finland, how they exert their influences in the social media ecology by navigating the in-betweenness, as well as more influencing factors in their identity construction. In the end of discussion part, I will also briefly state the limitations of this thesis.

In the last chapter of conclusion, I will briefly reiterate the research questions and the main findings, then again rationalize my study topic and point out its theoretical and societal relevance. In addition, I will also offer some suggestions about how future studies about related themes could focus on.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As the current thesis studies migration and its related phenomenon, it is crucial to define the term *migration* in the very beginning. Generally, it refers to both migrants and their moving activities. According to the United Nations (UN) migration agency—the International Organization of Migration (IOM), a *migrant* is anybody who moves out from his or her place of usual inhabitancy, either across national borders or within the same country regardless of the reasons or durations (IOM, n.d.; UN, n.d.). In the same vein, migration is also defined as a broad phenomenon by various other sources (King, 2020; Migration Institute of Finland, n.d.-c) as including both internal and international migration. In this thesis, I will follow this definition and use the words “migrant” and “immigrant” in their broad meaning.

The thesis sets the focus on migration across international borders, investigating a group of Chinese immigrants in Finland. More specifically, I will investigate how they navigate and make sense of conflicting views circulating around social media in daily life and through everyday activities. The literature review presented in this chapter discusses the theories of transnational migration and the role of media in migration; Chinese digital diaspora and its related social media ecology; as well as migrants’ identities and the role of narratives in migration study.

This chapter is structured in the following way: In the first part, I will discuss the studies of transnational immigration including its concepts, developments as well as applications, and continue with a review of the role of media in transnational immigration; Next, in the second part I will zoom into the area of Chinese diaspora and diaspora media, specifically the social media ecology, analysing the social media realities faced by Chinese transnationals. Similar to the social media ecology in other languages which expose users constantly to conflicting views and ideologies, Chinese digital diaspora also engages people with widely conflicting views about a broad range of issues. Its prevalence in migrants’ daily life makes the topic worth investigating into; In the last part I will discuss briefly the role of narratives in migration study and review some related literature about identity principles as well as the studies of

identity through migrants' narratives, which would be helpful for my analysis of the themes.

2.1 Transnational migration and media

The understanding and analysis of this study is based on a transnational perspective. Transnational migration process was defined by Glick Schiller et al. (1995) as one in which "immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (p. 48). Compared to the traditional migration study approach which views it as a one-way process of migrants obliged to get incorporated into the migrated society, transnational perspective acknowledges the facts that migrants maintain various ties with one or more societies other than the society where they settle in (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). This perspective depicts a more accurate picture of social life of migrants and non-migrants in the background of global immigration. In addition, it offers a more equal view about migration that not only migrants are responsible for getting incorporated to the so-called "host country", but also the whole society plays an important role in the process.

Those considerations rationalize the adoption of transnational perspective in the analysis of this study. Besides transnational migration, this study also involves the topic of globalized media sphere. Therefore, at this part I will first review the theory of transnational migration including its concepts, focuses, developments, possible research methodologies as well as its critics, and then discuss the roles, features, and influences of media in transnational migration.

2.1.1 A review of different approaches of migration studies

Regarding the term *migration studies*, I adopt the definition by the migration studies scholar King (2020), that they refer to "the description, analysis and theorization of the movement of people from one place, region or country to another" (p. 2) and the studies recognize that "there are thresholds of space and time built into this definition" (p. 2), meaning that the studies cover wide ranges of various issues about migration, and that the changes in the wider society is well recognized and paid attention to in migration studies.

Today migration studies have formed its own interdisciplinary research field, which is formed and influenced by multidisciplinary areas of knowledge, such as ethnic studies, economic study, sociology, language study, geography, development study, refugee study, gender study, transnational and globalization study, etc., whereas prior to the 1990s, research from those different fields tended to work on migration issues more exclusively from their own field (King, 2020; Levy et al., 2020).

Regarding the research paradigms and major topics of migration studies, although there is no simple consensus of what those would be, two articles by King (2020) and Levy et al. (2020) provided some general ideas. King (2020) listed some emerging epistemic communities, such as youth migration, gender and migration, lifestyle migration, as well as the qualitative turn in the perspective of methodological difference. Levy et al.'s (2020) computed different clusters of migration studies using bibliometric analysis and showed the result of prominent clusters in diagrams and figures. Combining the data with expert interviews, Levy et al. (2020) noticed the emergence of transnationalism from the 1990s and identified the epistemic distinction between "integrationists" and "transnationalists". The similar issue was also noted by King (2020) in his article. Therefore, before turning to the perspective of transnational migration, I will shortly review the integration approach of migration.

Studies in this approach examine people's post-migration experiences in detail and analyse various affecting factors in the adaptation process, often aiming to develop and improve different adaptation models for the purpose of facilitating study, research as well as practical application in migration. For example, Kim (2017) developed her earlier studies and proposed a *stress-adaptation-growth dynamic* model of migrants' adaptation and analysed all the macro factors in the adaptation process. Berry (2009) summarized individuals' adaptation process into a framework, categorizing four different acculturation models of *integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization*, while correspondingly the society's strategies towards migrants were also divided into four different ones. While yielding results in mapping detailed adaptation process, these studies do have their limits. Some of those studies tend to adopt essentialist views that depict the migrated society is of "different culture" from that of the migrants. Besides, some migrants might be categorized as "mal-adapted" according to those models and are under the risk of being marginalized by the society. Moreover, epistemically, traditional migration studies are often tied to nation-states and have not paid enough attention on migrants' various connections with one or more societies (Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Pillar, 2017). Since the mid-1990s, there have been more and more migration studies adopting a transnational perspective.

2.1.2 Transnational migration

As mentioned above, earlier migration studies tended to take nation states for granted as the boundary for immigrants' daily activities and the unit of study subject. From around 1990s scholars and researchers started to problematize the approach and proposed the perspective of transnational migration (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). As Glick Schiller et al. (1995) noted, immigrants were no longer seen as "uprooted" from their origin, but as maintaining multiple ties with more than one society. This reality had also pushed for the demand of new theoretical frameworks for migration studies. The concept of transnationalism and transnational migration was presented in the 1994

book *Nations Unbound: transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states* by Basch et al., in which they elucidated the transnational perspective by relating to their long-term transnational project work with migrants from West Indians and Philippines. In this work, they defined transnationalism as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement;” and transmigrants were defined as “immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships-familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political-that span borders” (Basch et al., 1994, p. 6). Other than those authors, multiple scholars (Faist, 2000; Kyle, 2000; Levitt, 2001) have also contributed to the theories and practice of transnational studies, which have become one of the key paradigms of migration research since then (King, 2020; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

One of the key terms in transnational migration study is *social field*, which provides the conceptual framework as well as the practicalities of how to conduct research. According to Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), social field referred to “a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed” (p. 1009). The idea of social field dismisses the notion that the boundary of society equals to that of the nation state and it does not prioritize either national social fields or transnational social fields in the studies. In transnational migration studies, empirical analysis should investigate how those multi-layered social fields relate to one another (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). The concept of social fields benefits transnational migration studies in several ways. First, besides migrants, it is also possible to study the non-migrants who are connected directly or indirectly via various social fields with transnationals. The investigation of the strength of those social relations is also made possible. Second, social fields enable the detailed analysis of social relations, avoiding a clear separation of local, national or global level relations. Third, it differentiates transnationals *ways of being* and *ways of belonging*: the former refers to the practices and relations which people engage with, while the later refers to those what people identify with (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, pp. 1009-1012). The differences would help explain the underlying motivations and intentions of people. Last, the idea of social field also shows that incorporations into a society and transnational activities could go hand in hand (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

The main features and premises of transnational migration studies could be summarized as follows: First, the study of transnational migration should consider the multi-layered social fields and the interplay of those factors. Second, the role of nation states should also be acknowledged in transnational migration. In many cases the role of states is not diminishing, but reconfigured and adjusted. Third, although transnational migrants through this lens are viewed as having agency and capable of utilize multiple resources, their roles are not necessarily more “liberated.” Fourth,

transnational perspective makes it convenient to study migration from different aspects, including those neglected before. Besides economic, social, political aspects; religion and gender analysis are also considered in the migration analysis. Fifth, transnational migration studies also acknowledge that not all migrants engage in transnational activities, and their different extent of engagements depend on various circumstances. Last but not least, transnational studies do not rule out the process of migrants getting incorporated in the migrated society (Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

Throughout the years the concepts of transnational migration have been applied in empirical studies of various topics, such as transnational media use (Collins, 2009; Madianou, 2021; Madianou & Miller, 2013), transnational diaspora and identity analysis (Guo, 2022; Mainsah, 2007; Wong, 2017), etc. At the same time, the theories of transnational migration have also been developing as scholars have reflected on changing social realities, past research, and critiques from within and outside of the research field. The more current development in transnational migration theory tend to encourage the upcoming studies to focus more on the various global and social forces which cause migration and displacement.

For example, Glick Schiller (2018) tried to raise the issue that transnational studies had paid unduly attention on places and location, while neglecting the historical moments and background which shaped transmigration. She stated that the social forces today differed widely from when the transnational framework was established, and proposed a multiscalar approach in order to capture the multiple factors in the social process which caused displacements. In another article by Feldman-Bianco (2018), the author reviewed the development of transnational migration theory and further advocated a broader global concept of migration and displacement, calling on future studies to integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines and to contextualize migration in a global background, in order to expose the realities of mobility and immobility as well as people's agency and the limiting social forces.

Based on the above analysis, a transnational perspective in migration analysis would no doubt suits my current thesis topic. First, it advocates a qualitative approach and attention to individual migrants' experience, which is exactly what I intend to analyse in this study. Next, the transnational social fields analysis has the advantage of connecting individual experiences and the dynamic affecting forces on migration and on society as a whole. Besides, transnational approach pays attention to both migrants and non-migrants, and to both the transformations in the migrated society and other societies which are connected by transnational ties. Those could all provide fresh and useful perspectives in my analysis.

2.1.3 Transnational media

The study of transnational migration recognizes how technology changes people's lives and how it transforms the transnational social spaces (Levitt et al, 2004). This is also the focal point of this thesis which investigates how people navigate the transnational media spaces.

Appadurai (2006)'s concepts of five "scapes" directly relate to this topic. The five scapes including ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas, refer to five different types of global flows, through which the disjunctures of global culture, economy, politics could be studied. Mediascape refers to the power to produce and circulate different types of media messages such as newspaper, TV station, film production, etc, as well as the world images captured and presented by the media. According to Appadurai (2006), mediascape featured narratives and images, which composed an important part of people's imagined world. Therefore, nation states tended to use various mediascapas for its own ruling purposes (Appadurai, 2006). While it is important to note that Appadurai's mediascape concept dated back to 1990 and could not be used to explain the current world reality about media and technology, nevertheless, it provides a basic concept of how media messages circulate in the globe in a disjunctured manner and how media is related to people's imagined reality, and briefly pictures nation states' role in the mediascape.

Besides the theory of mediascape (Appadurai, 2006), the concept of polymedia captures today's transnational media reality in a more nuanced way. The theory of polymedia was developed and illustrated by Madianou and Miller (2013) through their ethnographic work with transnational migrants from Philippines and Trinidad. The theory took a transnational perspective about communication which was not bounded by national borders and treated online and offline life as a whole. According to Madianou and Miller (2013), polymedia was an "integrated structure" consisting of all available and related media forms (p. 174). It included not only the media environments, but also how people navigated and explored the possibilities provided by different media. The article analysed media as repertoire and described how people used different media in different ways to create affordances for them, and how different people used media in their own way. Then, with different choices of media use, people also took corresponding responsibilities for their media use. Eventually, polymedia aimed to capture the interplay between media and the society: as people were offered various affordances by multiple forms of media, all the issues among communication and interpersonal relationship were not solved, but instead led to different consequences.

In recent years as social media became an integral part of life, there have been many studies adopting this approach and contributing to the theoretical development of polymedia. In addition to the original idea of polymedia as the environment where people live, polymedia was also viewed as "language" or "tools" what people used to

do things and it reflects emotions and intentions (Madianou, 2021). The concept of *polymedia repertoire* was further developed, that it demonstrated how meanings were made through people's use of different levels of communicative resources, such as different semiotic signs, choice of media, platforms, etc (Tagg & Lyons, 2021). In certain circumstances, there could be also a dominating media in the polymedia environment, such as the case in China where Wechat took the coordinating role due to its multi-functionality, its connection to other social media platforms, and the unavailability of non-China based social media (Xiong & Liu, 2022). Moreover, the wide adoption of algorithm in social media and social realities and limits were also reflected in the polymedia theories. Researchers were reminded of the social inequalities, the role of algorithm, as well as the surveillance of media in the studies (Madianou, 2021).

Regarding the current thesis, I intend to observe and analyse Chinese transnationals' media use features. In this case, Chinese transnationals face very diverse media ecology with multiple choices available to them. Other than the opportunities, they also face various constrains and restrictions when using different media platforms. The theory of polymedia would provide an ideal theoretical framework for me to analyse the realities in Chinese transnational media communication.

After reviewing the broad concept of transnational migration and media, for the next part, I will zoom in and focus on Chinese transnationals in Finland and their use of media, discussing the topic of Chinese digital diaspora.

2.2 Chinese digital diaspora and social media

The term digital diaspora is closely related to transnational migration studies and transnational media, while at the same time it often highlights the aspect that the transnationals are connected online by the idea of an imagined homeland (Ponzanesi, 2020). Therefore, in this thesis, it is appropriate for me to investigate the topic of Chinese digital diaspora in order to discuss the Chinese transnationals' use of social media.

In this part, I will start by discussing the concept of digital diaspora and the important aspects about digital diaspora studies; next, I will focus on the topics of on Chinese diaspora and landscape of Chinese digital diaspora, introducing the Chinese social media ecologies; then I will go on to review some articles which deal with the topic of Chinese digital diaspora and rationalize my own topic about Chinese transnationals' experiences with digital media. Throughout the discussion, I also intend to connect the concepts of transnational migration, digital diaspora, the fluidity in making of identity and belonging, and demonstrate that they are compatible in the study of migration.

2.2.1 Digital diaspora studies

Before focusing on the topic of Chinese digital diaspora, in this section, I will briefly review the studies of digital diaspora, first clarifying the meanings of the terms of *diaspora* and *digital diaspora*, then shortly introducing the main research themes and core ideas of digital diaspora studies.

Simply described, the word *diaspora* historically refers to the Jews living outside Palestine or modern Israel in exile in particular, and then broadens its meaning so that it could denote any migration away from homeland or migrated people settled in a far-away place (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In the same vein, when discussing the topic of Chinese digital diaspora, Guo (2022) also reviewed the meaning of diaspora in detail and used it in a broad sense proposed by Grossman (2019, as cited in Guo, 2022), that it denoted any ethnic community spread around the world with the common idea of homeland being important but not always being the overriding concern. In this thesis, I will adopt the similar approach and use the word diaspora in the broad sense in the discussions and analysis of Chinese diaspora.

Regarding the term *digital diaspora*, it often entails the following understandings within studies and research. First, it is at the intersection of migration and digital media studies, as it deals with both issues of migration, diaspora, transnationalism, as well as study areas of social media, digital technology, etc. (Andersson, 2019). Second, it also implicates a transnational and transhistorical perspective, and highlights that diasporic experiences are often connected with hybrid identities and fluid sense of space. According to Ponzanesi (2020), in digital diaspora studies, the use of the term diaspora did not rule out its original meaning, but rather, it enabled new significances and possibilities in the study, referring to “a postnational space that problematized the relationship between nation, soil, and identity” (p. 979). Third, digital diaspora also emphasizes the connections among diasporic communities. Digital diaspora was defined as “illustrated by the use of the Internet to connect members of the diasporic communities” (Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 983). Diasporic communities referred to the phenomenon that “groups of people are bound together by associating themselves-by birth, past residence, or merely through their identification-with a physical or imaginary ‘homeland’”, and the homeland was what the group members shared in common- “where their roots are, their original home, their sense of belonging, their community” (Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 983). In this sense, diasporas are bound together by their imagined homeland through digital media.

As an interdisciplinary topic, digital diaspora is related to a very wide study area and the studies roughly cover the following themes: 1) the impact of social media on transnational family; 2) how identity construction and cultural production are informed by digital means; 3) the transformations of the meaning of place and homeland; 4) new dynamics in the political and social space (Andersson, 2019). The wide range of digital diaspora study means that it intersects with many study topics, such as

polymedia, transnational migration, etc. For instance, polymedia also discusses topics such as the impact of social media, and transnational migration studies also investigate the meanings of locality and homeland, etc.

The center notions of digital diaspora are as follows: First, digital diaspora views migrants as “connected users” which play their role in social media as well as influence diaspora. Second, digital diaspora does not claim as a new paradigm, but rather about emerging from practices, data and studies. Third, it uses a relational approach which enables multi-layered analysis, meaning it is possible to analyze the intersection between internet, wider social realities, as well as considering specific political, historical and geographical conditions. Its relational feature also enables comparative study of different diasporas and see if they react the same or differently concerning similar issues. Furthermore, digital diaspora also enables the analysis of emotion, which is important for the analysis of motivations and belongings (Ponzanesi, 2020).

Based on the above analysis, I understand that the concept of digital diaspora offers possibilities to investigate the area of transnational digital and media communication in detail; how people, media and various internal and external factors interact and influence one another. In essence, digital diaspora is about the dynamic relationship between transnational migrants and digital media, which is the focal point of this thesis. Moreover, as the studies of digital diaspora pays attention to the specific local contexts (Mainsah, 2014; Ponzanesi, 2020), it also rationalizes my study of Chinese transnationals in the context of Finland.

2.2.2 Chinese digital diaspora

The term *Chinese digital diaspora* was referred to as the Chinese diaspora that “organized around the Internet, social media and other digital platforms” (Yu & Sun, 2021, p. 17). Scholars might also adopt alternative terms such as “digital Chinese diaspora” (Sun, 2021), “Chinese language cyberspace” (Yin, 2015), etc. for the same topic. In fact, instead of discussing the term *Chinese digital diaspora*, studies (Guo, 2022; Sun, 2021; Yu & Sun, 2021) about this topic tended to discuss the term *Chinese diaspora* more in depth, which made good sense: as Chinese diaspora could be vague and include very wide scope, only a detailed definition of its scope and connotation could avoid misinterpretations. Once the study scope of Chinese diaspora is clarified, the concept of Chinese digital diaspora would be best explained by discussing the Chinese digital media landscape.

In this section, I will follow this logic and unpack the topic of Chinese digital diaspora in the following way: I will first review the concept of Chinese diaspora, providing a brief account of the history of Chinese diaspora and the current trend of Chinese migration; then introduce the social media landscape which Chinese transnationals navigate in; lastly review the related research about Chinese digital diaspora and address the research gap of this thesis.

2.2.2.1 Chinese diaspora and the current Chinese migration trend

Other than *Chinese diaspora*, there have been many terms describing Chinese migrants around the world, such as *Chinese overseas*, *Huaren*, *Huaqiao*, etc. For instance, *Huaren* was defined as migrants who live abroad but still retains Chinese citizenship, and *Huaqiao* meant Chinese migrants who have already had citizenship of the country of residence (Guo, 2022; Miles, 2020; Sun, 2021). I would like to note here that these terms are important since they reflect how migrants have been viewed in Chinese society and relate to how studies and research have been conducted. Nevertheless, as the study of Chinese migration started to focus on a transnational perspective, the significance of those different terms and their meanings also began to fade gradually, and the term *Chinese diaspora* is adopted much more widely in current studies and research.

Regarding its definitions, Chinese diaspora was regarded by Sun (2021) as the Chinese who lived outside of Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, which was a very diverse group of people. Yu and Sun (2019) specifically pointed out the feature of hybridity and sense of in-betweenness of Chinese diaspora. Miles (2020) used *Chinese diasporas* to refer to all “Chinese migrants and their descendants” (p. 10) and offered his interpretations of the term when reviewing the history of Chinese diaspora: First, the notion of exile was to be avoided in the discussion of Chinese diaspora; Second, diaspora was not used as a fixed group, but to emphasize the link and claimed belonging that diasporic communities had with homeland; Third, diaspora was used in plural form in order to denote a diverse Chinese diaspora composition, but at the same time, it also reminded some type of sharedness in the diaspora communities.

Based on the above discussions, it is important to note that despite the sense of sharedness it brings along, Chinese diaspora is of great diversity from all perspectives: their language use, place of origin, reason and experiences of migration, social economic situations, ethnicity, religion could vary greatly (Sun, 2021). As a matter of fact, Chinese diaspora is *hyper-diverse*: diaspora population could come from different parts in China as well as different parts of the world such as China, Vietnam, Singapore, etc; having linguistic diversity (Mandarin, Cantonese, other Chinese dialects, language of their current residence country, language of their previous country of residence, etc.); early Chinese immigrants or recent immigrants; as well as social economic, occupation differences, etc (Guo, 2022, pp. 855-858).

In the study of Chinese diaspora, apart from discussing the concepts, it is also of importance to review the history of Chinese immigration briefly. Chinese immigration started already since the twelfth century when people migrated to Southeastern Asia and their number remained small until the early 1900s. From that time period, there was a great number of Chinese labour force migrating to different corners of the world such as the United States and Canada, Australia, Europe, Asia and Africa, also in the colonies of the European empires. Dire work and hostile conditions facing the Chinese

labours were rampant then. By the end of WWII, Chinese migrants were concentrated in their origin, from the Southeastern coastal area of Guangdong and Fujian Province, and the Wenzhou and Qingtian area in Zhejiang province. Apart from migration labours, at the same time during this period, there were also Chinese merchants migrating across borders. By the end of the twentieth century, the main body of immigrants had started to change since most countries shifted their policies to attract more skilled migrants. In the 1980s there had been a large wave of outmigration from Hong Kong. The period after 1980s also gradually witnessed a mass outmigration of Chinese from mainland China. By now, Chinese diaspora is made up of people from all provinces in every corner of the world (Guo, 2022).

As this study is about the Chinese transnationals in Finland and their current social media use, the topics of the current trends of Chinese migration as well as the shifting features of Chinese migration in Europe are very relevant. According to Xiang (2016), after the end of 1970s, there were two most prominent features of Chinese immigration: wealthier and well-educated people as the dominating part of mass move to more developed countries, and the unskilled immigrants number remain at a low level due to the low economic return and complicated immigration process. The surge and change of Chinese out-bound immigration since the 1970s were facilitated by the following system factors: Apart from implementing economic reforms, the Chinese government had been also renewing its political system through re-orienting its relationship with diaspora groups and releasing the limits of the free movement of people. The government reformed the passport control regulations and residence registration rules. Towards the skilled migration, the government supported student immigration and encouraged their return; while towards unskilled migration, the government implemented more complicated policies and tightened the supervision of the recruitment process (Xiang, 2016). More currently, regarding the Chinese migration in Europe, Thunø and Li (2020) discussed the current changes of Chinese diaspora by reviewing a new issue of articles: for instance, in 2016 the number of Chinese students in Europe first exceeded the number of work and family reunion immigrants in Europe, and that the Chinese diaspora composition started to shift towards professionals and investors. This shift of migration trends also highlighted the significance of doing research in this field (Thunø & Li, 2020).

Although this brief review about the history of Chinese immigration and composition of Chinese diaspora is far from providing a complete picture about the topics, it still offers basic background information and it is highly relevant to my topic.

Returning to the topic of Chinese diaspora in Finland, the composition is consistent with the Chinese migration trend since the end of 1970s (Xiang, 2016). Chinese immigrants mainly consist of skilled professionals, students, people moving for family reunions, as well as unskilled migrants such as cooks from mainland China (Finnish Immigration Service Statistics, 2023). The Finnish government's *Talent Boost*

program might also attract more talent workers from China and bring shifts to the composition of Chinese migrants (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, n.d.-b; Thunø & Li, 2020). As a diverse group, Chinese diaspora in Finland also include those from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, etc. Nevertheless, since my interviewees were all from mainland China and the digital media ecology which I investigated also was mainly participated by mainland Chinese, in this thesis I would focus on the Chinese diaspora of those from Chinese mainland. This is by no means an exhaustive study but it is still representative. For a more detailed description about the Chinese diaspora in Finland, I will elaborate in the later chapters.

After setting the background in Chinese diaspora, I will discuss the landscape of Chinese digital diaspora in the following part, and then review some relevant articles about this topic.

2.2.2.2 Digital media landscape of Chinese diaspora in Finland

Since the Chinese migration to Finland is a rather recent phenomenon, unlike in some other societies where there are established Chinese diaspora and Chinese media (Sun, 2021), there has not been traditional Chinese media presence here. Currently the Chinese diaspora media is almost solely digital. In this study, I will divide the Chinese digital media landscape in Finland into three main interrelated components or dimension: homeland media in Chinese, ethnic media in Chinese, and media content in other language or in non-China based platforms, such as in English or in Finnish.

Homeland media simply means the digital platforms from China that diasporas participate, and *ethnic media* refers to the diaspora digital sources in Chinese which are mainly produced and consumed in Finland. In addition, Chinese diaspora communities also consume *media content in other languages or non-China based platforms*. For instance, Chinese transnationals also use Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, etc, both in Chinese and in other languages. Therefore, those are also included in my discussions about Chinese digital diaspora. Instead of being separate, the three components are interconnected and form the digital media ecology for Chinese transnationals. This categorization follows Yin (2015)'s approach in studying Chinese media ecology in New Zealand, while it does not necessarily refer to the same media contents, since Yin (2015)'s study was based on the locality in New Zealand and it was conducted much earlier (interviews were from 2011) when social media was not as prevalent as today. Moreover, Yin (2015) only investigated homeland media and ethnic media in the study, while I also included the media content in non-China based platforms as it is also an important part of transnationals' media ecology.

Homeland media constitutes an important part for Chinese digital diaspora and is an important for transnational daily life and activities. The economic and political reform in China after the 1980s has been the underlying forces behind the contemporary Chinese migration, while this process is also coincident with the fast technology and

digital development of China (Sun, 2021). Chinese digital landscape is very diverse, dynamic, and active with all the major players such as Wechat, Weibo, Alibaba, Bytedance, etc (Sun, 2021). The diaspora population also use those Chinese social media platforms in daily life for communication and various other activities (Yu & Sun, 2019). Here, I would introduce the Chinese homeland media briefly by listing the main social media platforms and their key features.

Among all the social media channels, the “super-sticky” all-in-one mega app Wechat (Chen et al., 2018) is the most widely used app by all the Chinese. As a complex and multi-dimensional system, Wechat (Weixin in Chinese) is first of all a private communication tool similar to Whatsapp which enables people to chat with individuals and within group chat. Besides chatting function, Wechat is similar to Facebook and Instagram, allowing people to share contents on *Moments* (Pengyouquan) function. Apart from communication function, Wechat is also a platform where people could transfer money and making purchases instantly through the *Pay* function. Moreover, one of the most important functions about Wechat is its *Official Accounts*, which include *Service Accounts*, *Enterprise Accounts* and *Subscription Accounts* (Sun, 2021, pp. 6-10). By subscribing to those accounts, people could follow contents from those sources. Finally, it is worth to mention that Wechat does not stop at its own functions. It also allows direct link and access to various other apps so that people could manage most of the activities through Wechat, for example, people could easily pay their mobile bills, access games, manage their other accounts through Wechat. Those functions provide the most convenient ways for diaspora diaspora people to maintain connection with mainland China (Luqiu & Kang, 2021).

Besides Wechat, Weibo and Douyin (the Chinese version of Tiktok) are also major Chinese social media platforms (Sun, 2021). Weibo is mostly a platform similar to Twitter for people to gain access to the news and post their opinions and follow other accounts. Douyin -the short video sharing app has witnessed viral growth in the past few years and it is nowadays also a popular platform where people could follow accounts, create their own contents, comments with their opinions, as well as selling goods and making online purchases, etc. Other than those well-known apps, Chinese social media ecology is extremely diverse and alive with many other players in the field. For example, checking from the Chinese mainland Apple app store, it is easy to find the most popular apps listed there, such as Hot Apps This Week, Popular Apps, Top Free Apps, 60 Must-Have Apps, etc. Besides Wechat, Weibo and Douyin, the most popular online shopping apps are Taobao (with Alipay), Jingdong, Pinduoduo; the most used video apps are Kuaishou (similar with Douyin), Bilibili (videos are generally longer than Douyin, similar to Youtube); popular lifestyle apps are Xiaohongshu (similar with Pinterest), food delivery apps, taxi ride hailing apps, Baidu (searching engine and map), podcast apps, etc.

Among all those homeland media, it is important to point out that for Chinese diaspora communities, the location specific apps such as maps, food delivery, or maps naturally are not much used, while social media apps which are more media, communication, financial and lifestyle-oriented are used the most, such as Wechat, Weibo, Douyin, Taobao, Xiaohongshu, Tencent news, Bilibili, etc.

Ethnic media-Chinese media content which are mainly produced and consumed in Finland only started to grow as social media got widely used and more and more Chinese students and knowledge workers moved to Finland. Previously before the 1990s, due to the more sporadic characteristic of Chinese migration to Finland, local Chinese media content production was not financially or socially viable.

Wechat is the most important social media platform on which ethnic media is based, and diaspora media via Wechat works in the following ways. First, Chinese transnationals maintained various different chat groups, with the maximum number of participants 500 for each group. Most groups are maintained by the diaspora members themselves. Some groups are for communication purposes, such as Huaren (Chinese diaspora) group, Automobile and real estate group, local level Chinese transnationals' groups (e.g. Chinese in Tampere, Helsinki, Jyväskylä have their separate groups). Other groups are for business or more specific purposes, for instance, some Chinese grocery shops, language or art training courses organize their own Wechat groups. People share local or China-related news, voice their opinions, talk about practicalities about life, sometimes even having arguments in the groups. Second, there are several popular official accounts available via Wechat which feed news and information about topics related to the life of Chinese transnationals in Finland. Among those, the popular ones are Finland Today (Jinrifenlan), Helsinki Times (The English language news media providing news about Finland. <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/>), Fenlanhuaren shenghuohuzhu pingtai (Life and mutual assistance platform of Chinese in Finland), etc. For instance, based on the topic, one news feed from Helsinki Times has around 500-3000 reads. Similar to other diaspora media, the Chinese digital media channels in Finland do not produce its own news but instead follow and translate local news (Sun, 2021). Some accounts might do more than translations, and they compile local news and information. Those Wechat accounts and contents are usually around topics about Finland but they are also open to all the readers, while the Wechat groups are mainly for the local diaspora communities in Finland.

Ethnic media also includes the content produced by Chinese transnationals based in Finland on other platforms, such as Douyin, Weibo, Xiaohongshu. Those contents are mainly about their life and voices from Finland, but for a wider public, both diaspora communities as well as all who live in China. For example, there are many Chinese transnationals update videos to Douyin sharing their life in Finland and attract large number of followers.

As *homeland media* and *ethnic media* are both China-based, it is worth to mention that all of those social media channels and platforms are under supervision from the Chinese government. Sun (2021) has pointed out that under those influences, research in this field should on one hand pay attention to how the Chinese government exerting its power in diaspora communities through those media and the constrains what people face, but on the other hand research should also recognize and analyse people's agency in manoeuvring and navigating order to create negotiating space for themselves.

With China-based social media the most important part in their daily life (Sun, 2018), Chinese transnationals also use various *non-China based digital content and media*. Chinese diaspora has an active presence in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, etc. and follows and produces rich content in Youtube. The non-China based diaspora media is also a very diverse field, containing contents produced from different parts of the world in various languages. For instance, transnationals in Finland might share on Youtube about how to study Finnish language as a Chinese, or use English on Whatsapp to chat with friends in Finland, or consume YLE and other Finland-based apps and media.

After the above brief review, it is still imperative to reiterate that Chinese digital media landscape is multifaceted, hybrid and complex. Instead of being separate, Chinese homeland media, ethnic media in Chinese and non-China based media interconnect and intersect with one another. To list some examples here: there are English media or non-Chinese nationals producing contents on Douyin; there are those who live in China with Finland experiences actively participating in Chinese Wechat groups in Finland; there are also Chinese contents on Youtube and Twitter consumed and produced by people from various backgrounds.

In summary, the complex media ecology also creates multi-layered tensions and incompatibilities, and those are the realities that Chinese transnationals need to face and navigate (Sun, 2021). Besides, as mentioned earlier, there are multiple limits facing the Chinese transnationals when they participate the digital diaspora. Those are directly related to the themes which I will discuss in this thesis.

2.2.2.3 Studies about the topic of Chinese digital diaspora

In recent years as social media becomes ever more integrated to the Chinese diaspora life, more and more studies have focused their attention on this topic. Those studies have analysed the evolving dynamics in Chinese digital diaspora from the following perspectives.

First, there was research reviewing the transformation of Chinese diaspora digital media landscape and its components (Chen et. al, 2021; Sun, 2021; Sun et al, 2011; Yu & Sun, 2019), and those studies often aimed to facilitate the local understanding of Chinese diaspora and add to the local multicultural policies discussion (Sun, 2021; Yu

&Sun, 2019). Then, there were also ethnographic studies concerning individuals' various ways of digital media use in different locations, investigating how the relationship between people, media, locality and society shifted in digital diaspora (Cassidy & Wang, 2018; Peng, 2016; Zhang & Wang, 2019). For instance, Zhang and Wang (2019) observed how transnationals in Australia used Wechat for property topics and how, through the process, Wechat had become the intersection area of media space and diasporic locality. In addition, there were also studies focusing on discussing individuals' identity process in the digital media background. For example, Yin (2015) elaborated on the usage of Chinese transnationals' use of homeland and ethnic media in New Zealand and discussed how the digital media had fostered people's Chinese identity. Chen et al., (2021) observed Chinese diaspora women's use of Wechat to make their cross-border online business, and how through this process that those women were able to build a stable intersectional identity. Most of those articles looking into Chinese digital diaspora also adopted a transnational perspective. Some also used the concept of polymedia to discuss individuals' adopted strategies for using different media for various purposes (Cassidy & Wang, 2018; Peng, 2016).

Those multi-perspective studies not only provide a solid background information in the study of Chinese digital diaspora, but also demonstrate the suitable approaches of study in the area, such as digital ethnography and observation, qualitative interviews, etc., which have the advantage of offering a more detailed insight into the dynamics and issues concerning diaspora communities. The discussions about diasporic and transnational identity, as well as the relationship between people, media and society are thought-provoking.

However, through reviewing the related research, I have not found enough materials specifically dealing with the topic of how Chinese transnationals navigate the different contending voices and competing narratives from social media. As Sun (2021) mentioned, the Chinese diaspora faced daily tension of the transnational "in-betweenness," the incompatibilities in cultural, ideological and political level, as well as the conflicting ideas from China and those from around the globe (p. 15). Therefore, by discussing the topic of Chinese transnationals' navigating of the competing narratives in digital sphere, this thesis will hopefully add to the body of work of Chinese digital diaspora research. Moreover, most of studies in this field are being conducted in areas where there is greater Chinese diaspora presence such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and some European countries such as France or the Netherlands (Guo, 2022; Li & Kroon, 2021; Yin, 2015; Thunø & Li, 2020; Zhang & Wang, 2019). Regarding the situation in Europe, as the Chinese diaspora composition is shifting to more skilled immigrants and students, there have been calls for more research about the changes of Chinese diaspora (Thunø & Li, 2020). This thesis investigates the Chinese digital diaspora in Finland, where the number of Chinese diaspora population is relatively small and the diaspora composition is different, and where the immigration

policy differs from some traditionally large immigration countries. This study might also contribute to the needed digital diaspora research in Finland as well as in Europe, and facilitate the understanding about the Chinese transnationals and Chinese diaspora in Finland.

After reviewing the topic of Chinese digital diaspora, in the next section I will briefly discuss the role of narratives in migration studies and review some related theories of how to make identity analysis.

2.3 Cultural identity through the lens of narratives

In this part, I will review the topic of identity as I will analyse the Chinese transnationals' cultural identity work in this thesis, and the data is from the narratives of my interview participants. First, I will review the role of narratives in migration studies. Next, I will discuss some theoretical frameworks regarding identity analysis including the identity principles, making identity analysis through narratives, as well as the different components of identity.

2.3.1 Narratives in the study of migration

Narrative serves key functions in human society. Facilitated by story-telling, people could make sense of past experiences and everyday life happening; convey values and wisdoms to the next generations; construct individual as well as collective identities (De Fina & Tseng, 2017). In social sciences, the "narrative turn" or "narrative paradigm" had been witnessed since the 1980s as scholars attached high importance to the role of narratives (Fisher, 1985; Bruner, 1985, 1991), shifting from more quantitative approaches to more qualitative oriented ways when studying social issues. While in the area of migration studies, narrative analysis has been one of the most common and important qualitative research approaches. This thesis adopts De Fina and Tseng (2017)'s definition of narratives that it refers to a wide range of story-telling activities, not only including traditional story-telling of making a clear point, but also generic, hypothetical narratives as well as small stories which circulate in social media (Georgakopoulou, 2016).

There are generally two interrelated approaches of how narratives are used in migration studies: studies about how migrants' identities and belonging were constructed through storytelling, and how narratives about migrants were reflected beyond the level of interaction, such as by institutions (De Fina & Tseng, 2017). The first type of research included several main themes, such as immigrants' identity as language learners, immigrants' sense of belonging recounted by themselves, and immigrants' identities through the narratives of others. The second type of studies analysed topics such as how migrants and identities were reflected in the media, and how

migrants' narratives were used in immigration institutions in their proceedings (De Fina & Tseng, 2017).

There are multiple advantages about using narrative analysis. The detailed qualitative account reflecting the experience from migrants' perspectives is important, as it could serve as counter balance to the often-negative views associated with migrants and help people understand the experiences and emotions of migrants (De Fina & Tseng, 2017). Moreover, by encouraging people to tell their stories, narrative is a more natural way of communicating, thus eliciting people to express their views and opinions indirectly (De Fina & Tseng, 2017). On the other hand, migration scholars also need to be aware of the following issues in doing narrative analysis: First, narratives were highly context-based and sometimes it would be challenging to consider the embedded context wholly. Especially in interviews, the role of the interviewers should be well recognized. Second, it should be acknowledged that narratives were often not coherent but rather fragmented (De Fina & Tseng, 2017).

Regarding my current thesis, it would be more about the first type of narrative analysis mentioned by De Fina and Tseng (2017), that is, how migrants' identities and belonging are manifested through their own narratives. When selecting the research method and conducting my analysis, I also took different perspectives of narrative analysis into consideration. According to De Fina and Tseng (2017), narratives could be helpful way to elicit people's opinions. My study aims to analyse people's identity and belonging, but questions about identities might be challenging to answer or at least require much efforts to organize the ideas. Therefore, it would prove to be much easier to let people tell their stories or use some familiar topics to elicit their views, and this is also the approach that I adopted. Other than the traditional narrative analysis, De Fina and Tseng (2017) also proposed further directions for the studies and research in the areas of mediated context in the background of technology development as well as the "hybrid and transnational identities" of migrants (p. 392). Those are also the themes I would like to investigate and explore within this study. In addition, in my analysis I was also aware of context of the interview participants' narratives as well as made an effort to pay special attention to my role as an interviewer.

Next, I will briefly review the concept of identity which is closely related to the study of narratives, and present the perspectives adopted in this thesis regarding identity analysis.

2.3.2 The principles of identity study

The discussion of identity topic should first consider the premises or the fundamentals of identities, about which Bucholtz and Hall (2010) have offered an extensive elaboration in their article. By reviewing research from a number of disciplines, the authors proposed five principles of how to locate identities in language, which are "emergence principle", "positionality principle", "indexicality principle", "relationality principle",

and “partialness principle” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010, pp. 18-28). The first two principles emphasize that identity is not a pre-existing quality within people but rather constructed through social action in interaction. It encompasses various levels of roles and positions but is made relevant in local context. The indexicality principle illustrates how identity is constructed through indexical processes. People use a variety of linguistic resources, such as referencing by using labelling and categories, choosing stances and style-marking, etc. to construct their identities. The relationality principle emphasizes that identity is constructed in a relational way. Then the partialness principle indicates that identity construction is informed partly by people’s agency and partly by others and the social structures of various levels.

Those principles lay a solid theoretical foundation for the analysis of identity. First of all, it means that identity making is context dependent, and people’s identity is not consistent but fluid and shifting within different contexts. It not only makes it possible to analyse people’s identity from different levels, but also enables the analysis of the different aspects that affect people’s identity making. Moreover, the indexicality principle could prove to be practical in my analysis, since it provides methodological tools to analyse people’s identity through different indexical means in their narratives. This approach of analysis is also adopted in many studies about identity. For instance, Baxter pointed out that people’s identity formation and reformation are often achieved through action and words (2016). Bielewska (2021) observed that people’s *belonging* and *othering* were often expressed by words such as “we”, “us”, “our”, or “you” and “them”, while people’s *identification* was often achieved through their use of different labels of scale, such as family level, local level, until national or transnational level, etc (pp. 615-630).

2.3.3 Narratives and identity

As the analysis of identities in this thesis is based on narratives from the interviews, it is also of importance to review how identity analysis is conducted in the narrative study paradigm. “Narratives are often used to express and negotiate both individual and collective identities” (De Fina, 2015, p. 351). Narrative study scholars also adopt the similar identity principles summarized by Bucholtz and Hall (2010), while focusing on how people’s identity is co-constructed and emerged during the interaction process of story-telling (De Fina, 2015). The concept of *positioning* is critical for an understanding of this paradigm. De Fina (2015) quoted Bamberg’s analysis of three levels of positioning when a narrator presented himself or herself: narrator as in the story world VS others in the story world; narrator in the story telling world VS other interlocutors; and the narrator VS the more general identity she or he would like to present (De Fina, 2015). In the analysis of my interview data, it is also of importance to be aware of the positioning strategies of the interviewees in order to understand what kind of identities they would like to present or how they construct their identity.

As identity is reflected through narratives, narratives also play an important role in people's identity making. This point was noted by Drzewiecka and Steyn (2012) in examining Polish Immigrants' racial incorporation into the South African system and their material-symbolic representation of identities: Stories about immigrants' learning and experiencing the South African racial privilege, when told and retold, were ways of immigrants' identity negotiation and incorporation into the racial structure.

There has been ongoing debate about how or should the result of narrative analysis could be generalized to different scales to a larger group. De Fina (2015) proposed that ethnographic study, with long term observation and interaction with local community members, had its advantages to discover patterns which might be of significance at a more general level.

2.3.4 Identity components of ways of being and ways of belonging

In order to analyse identity in a deeper level, transnational studies use the two different but interrelated identity categories of *ways of being* and *ways of belonging* (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, pp. 1009-1012). Ways of being means people's embeddedness in a certain environment, while way of belonging means people's willingness to be identified with certain group or certain way of being. With *ways of being*, people might not necessarily identify with the way they are embedded in or act on it, while with *ways of belonging* people might not necessarily be in one environment but are willing to identify with it. The approach proved to be productive as it was able to reveal more nuanced motivations of the migrants which might influence their identities, opinions as well as future decisions. In the article about return Chinese Canadian transnationals living in Beijing, Lei and Guo (2020) adopted these concepts and investigated multiple manifestations of transnational migrants' ways of being and ways of belonging. In other studies, scholars adopted different terms to refer to the similar concepts, such as "identification" and "belonging" to refer to the two different but related identity components of migrants (Anthias, 2008; Bielewska, 2021, pp. 615-630).

Regarding my current thesis, the analysis of identity is closely related to the above review: Identity is viewed as a socially and culturally constructed (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010; De Fina, 2015) and it is possible to be analysed through people's narratives. Cultural identity is analysed from multi-interrelated levels, as identity is relational and partial and context dependent (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). The principle of indexicality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010) and the concept of positioning (De Fina, 2015) will offer theoretical tools in the analysis of the narratives. Moreover, the transnational perspective of identity categories of ways of being and ways of belonging will also offer extra level of understanding in my analysis of Chinese transnationals' cultural identities.

3 METHODOLOGY

In the beginning of the methods section, I will introduce the research questions of this thesis, as the research method is closely related to the study aim and research questions. Next, I will briefly review qualitative research methods and elaborate on my adoption of the approach. I will also discuss the use of interviews and the follow-up of social media hot topics in this study. Then, I will describe in detail about my interview design and interview process. Lastly, I will offer an account of the transcription process and a summary of the outcome.

3.1 Research aims and questions

As mentioned in the last chapter of literature review, although various previous studies investigated the topic of Chinese digital diaspora and people's transnational identity, there has not been much research about the competing narratives and ideologies facing Chinese transnationals in social media, or about Chinese transnationals in Finland. About the former subject, Sun (2021) has mentioned that the Chinese digital diaspora constantly faced a media environment that offered them conflicting and competing ideas, and that it became more critical to investigate how Chinese diaspora navigated the environment as the current geopolitical situation pit China more and more against the West. Therefore, it will make sense to analyse how the competing narratives affect migrants at the individual level and observe the daily navigating strategies of Chinese migrants in this thesis. Then about the later topic of Chinese transnationals in Finland, or even in the larger area of Northern Europe where the Chinese migration population is still at a small scale, it is also relatively less studied. The studies about this topic have been more focused on the Chinese students, for example, there were a couple of articles investigating the issues of integration and socialization of Chinese students in Finland (Li & Pitkänen, 2018; Zheng, 2019). Compared to those studies, this thesis focuses more on Chinese immigrants in general,

especially those who have settled for a longer period in Finland, aiming to study their transnational experiences through the lens of digital diaspora.

In this thesis, I propose the following research questions: regarding the Chinese transnationals who live in Finland and navigate daily the social media environment which is full of competing narratives and ideologies, 1) What are the features of their social media practices? 2) What navigating strategies do they adopt when facing those competing narratives from social media? 3) More importantly, how their cultural identities are reflected in this process?

Based on the aim of the study, this thesis is exploratory in nature by examining people's experiences, their individual navigating strategies and cultural identities. A qualitative approach will well serve these purposes. This study combined qualitative interviews and online observation: I have been following social media closely and paying attention to hot topics and the related popular viewpoints there; then I took the topics to Chinese transnationals and asked their social media use habits as well as their opinions and actions towards those hot issues.

In the following section, I will first review the adoption of qualitative approach and interviews in the study. Then I will describe the interview design of this thesis. Lastly, I will give a detailed account of my data analysis methods and a summary of the data.

3.2 Qualitative study and interviews

3.2.1 Qualitative study

The three major features of qualitative study are: its reflexivity on the self, embeddedness in context, and thick description of the context. In practice, those features mean that in qualitative studies, researchers try to interpret the meaning of a scene through description of the details of the circumstances, while the role of researcher is also well noted in the analysing process (Tracy, 2013). Based on the above-mentioned features, qualitative research "provides understanding of a sustained process," "focuses on lived experience, placed in its context" and "interprets participant viewpoints and stories" (Tracy, 2013, p. 5). As the key element in qualitative study, *context* in qualitative research addresses the issues of people's *actions* and *structure*, as well as the dialectic relationship between those. Action refers to what is generated from contexts, such as conversation, texts, etc, while structure means the existing way of norms, standards, etc. Actions could generate from norms of the structure and people's actions also gradually shape and transform the structure (Tracy, 2013).

In this thesis, I intend to analyse how people navigate the competing narratives in social media, and how people's cultural identities are reflected in the process. Here,

people's navigating strategies could be understood as their *actions* and the social media ecology and narratives are the *context* and *structure*. The analysis of this process could also reflect the dynamics between people's actions and the social norms of structure. Moreover, I also look into Chinese transnationals' experiences, their choices and their own accounts of those actions. Those topics are what qualitative methods are suitable for. Based on these considerations, I have therefore adopted the qualitative approach in order to achieve the aim of this study.

3.2.2 Qualitative interview method

Qualitative studies use research methods such as observation, interviews, textual analysis, transcripts, etc. in order to provide a detailed analysis of experiences and deep understanding about contexts (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). All of those also include a wide range of subcategory research methods. For instance, observation includes both online and field observation; a long-term immersion in a field is often a key part of ethnography study; interviews could be group interviews or just one-on-one interviews; and textual materials and transcripts could be found both in paper and online (Tracy, 2013).

Out of those qualitative research methods, as this study aims to investigate the experience of a certain group of people within a certain context, it would be efficient to use interview to conduct the research as it reaches the study subject directly. Apart from interviews, I have been doing online observations, mainly to follow the hot issues and narratives in social media in a given period of time, in order to deepen my understanding of the topic and facilitate the interviews.

Qualitative interviews have the following advantages: First, it is a relatively natural way to communicate with respondents, offering an account of respondents' experiences and viewpoints from their perspective. Second, it provides a good access to issues that is not always easily observed. Third, through communication in the interview, interviewers could also observe other contextual clues, emotions, etc. Last but not least, interviewees also would express or reveal their identity work and sense of belonging through their narratives (Tracy, 2013).

There are a couple of issues to be noted about qualitative interviews. First, qualitative interviews are people's accounts of their social world, and reflect the frame that people use to make sense of their experiences and themselves (Miller & Glassner, 2020). Second, it is important to reiterate the premise of interviews that the conversation is co-constructed between interviewers and interviewees. As the one generally in control of the dialogue flow and the direction of the topic, the interviewer is usually the one with power in this context. That means the interviewer has the ethical duty to handle the data and the respondents with care. In addition, the role of the interviewer has to be taken into consideration in this process and in the analysis of the interview

data (Tracy, 2013). As aforementioned, the same issue was also brought up by De Fina and Tseng (2017) from the perspective of narrative analysis.

Based on these considerations, in the study and analysis interviewees were viewed as interview participants (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017), although I used the words “interviewee”, “respondents”, “participants”. Next, I also will try present my role as a researcher.

3.2.3 The author’s role as a qualitative researcher

My interests in the topic of Chinese transnationals and the conflicting narratives from social media were based on my own experiences.

As a Chinese migrant living in Finland, apart from the local life, I am also constantly keeping in touch with friends and family in China and am concerned about the happenings in China. I also got to know many other Chinese migrants who live in Finland. The background and experiences of us have similarities but also many differences. When I started to study the issue of migration and society, I often reflected on the topic of Chinese migrants in Finland and noticed that this topic was not much studied. Therefore, I would like to do my research about this group of people.

My experience of social media and the competing narratives is the other factor that motivates me to study this topic. Chinese transnationals generally navigate two different social media systems of both China-based media and non-China-based media. For example, I am involved in the Chinese digital diaspora, browsing Weibo (functions similar to Twitter) and checking Douyin (Chinese version of Tiktok) continuously and contacting family and friends back in China with Wechat. At the same time, I also actively use the non-China based social media: reading English news and Finnish news, contacting local friends via Wechat and following friends on Instagram. While social media is always full of competing narratives and opposing views, the media ecology I am in might be even more representative of the conflicting views: popular narratives from China, popular narratives from the non-Chinese media, opposing opinions inside China, opposing views in Finland, etc, compose a multi-folded and complicated landscape. Some issues would concern me so much that I tried to read all the related information and wondered why those opinions were so irreconcilable. Through communicating with other Chinese transnationals, I noticed that people also had concerns about the same issues. In her article about Chinese digital diaspora, Sun (2021) has noted that the Chinese transnationals lived in a “media ecology that offers them often competing and contradictory information and perspectives” (p. 16). Therefore, this particular topic is worth investigating into. Through analysis, I intend to offer an account of Chinese transnational experiences in Finland, and give some voices to the Chinese diaspora group and analyse how they make sense of their life and themselves.

The above content could serve as an establishment of my role as a researcher regarding this topic. Then, as an interviewer, I should also be aware of my role in the process. When approaching interviewees, I pose myself as from within the same group: a mandarin speaking Chinese migrant from mainland China, a master student, a fellow social media user. In this way, it was relatively easier to get in touch with the interviewees and engage them in the conversation. In the interview process, other than using topics and open questions to elicit the participants narratives and their opinions, I sometimes also served as a listener as well as interlocutor, for example, having small chats with interviewees when exchanging each other's background information, or engaging in some fact-checking on particular issues. At the same time, I tried to keep aware of my position as an interviewer, encouraging people to speak out, for instance, stating that responses were never right or wrong and only real responses were valuable source of interview, and not leading them towards any particular opinions or directions. At last, in the post-interview stage, the analysis of interview narratives is a result of my interpretation with adopting certain theories and perspectives.

3.2.4 Online observation-social media and hot topics

I have also adopted the method of online observation to complement the interviews as well as to provide enough sources for the interviews.

To get a more accurate understanding of the media ecology for Chinese transnationals, first it is imperative to explore all the features and functions of different social media apps what people might use. Therefore, besides researching online about the popular social media apps, I also asked from all my acquaintances about their media use habits and the popular media contents and accounts that they were following. Then I downloaded the apps which I did not yet have; followed different accounts related to Chinese transnationals in Finland; and familiarized myself with the features of various social media apps what people might use. The interview process was also a good opportunity to learn more information about this topic, and the respondents did recommend some related accounts from the social media platforms what they had been following.

After the macro-level study about social media ecology, I turned my focus to the competing narratives on social media. Weibo hot topics, Douyin hot topics, and Wechat group chatting are where people most actively voice their opinions through functions such as searching, likes, commenting and forwarding. My online observation lasted a few months from autumn 2021 to the spring of 2022. During that period, I browsed those apps (Weibo, Douyin, Wechat) daily and intentionally checked the group chat messages on Wechat. Generally, the hot topics could range from internal issues in China to international happenings, from entertainment news to political topics, etc. I made notes of the topics which I might use in the interviews. For selecting the topics, I paid more attention to those which were very well-known, more related

to Chinese transnationals' daily life, and around which there were various different or conflicting voices and opinions. Eventually, I was able to locate four topics. The idea was for the interviewees to pick three and speak about their opinions. All the interviewees chose the same three topics and the fourth topic about Winter Olympics was not chosen by anyone. One of respondent also talked about another topic which was not chosen by me. Here I list the four topics which the interviewees talked about: 1) What is a real Finland and what Finland is like in real life. 2) Covid policies in China and in Finland, especially regarding the lockdown of Shanghai in the spring of 2022. 3) The war in Ukraine and the related opposing opinions about the war in China and around the world. 4) The Dior incident, a Dior art show photo which was accused of bad taste cultural appropriation in China.

The first topic was generated from Douyin. One influencer in China (云裂痕宏观 *Yunliehenhongguan*) published a short video about Finland which used many stereotypical ideas, saying that it was a well-being society where people were provided money by the government even if they did not work, and it was dark for half a year in Finland. Another influencer who lived in Rovaniemi in Finland (北极圈芬兰大鱼 *Beijiquanfenlandayu*) immediately posted videos refuting those ideas and tried to tell Douyin audience what it was really like in Finland. Both of those videos generated great number of comments with various opinions: the video about stereotypes of Finland was deleted later, and the video who tried to tell about the real Finland got 441,000 likes and 17,000 comments. The second topic was very much talked about in the special period of lockdown in Shanghai during spring 2022. On social media, people sent messages about their situations in China and in Finland, comparing those Covid control measures and communicated their opinions. The third topic was also directly related to Chinese transnationals in Finland because of the special relationship between Finland and Russia. In China, there were also very conflicting opinions, with some criticizing Russia on the invasion while others showing understanding about Russian's position towards Nato expansion. The fourth topic was from one interviewee and it was about the criticism in Chinese social media about a photo in display in Dior art show in Shanghai in November 2021. The photograph featured a Chinese woman holding a Dior bag, but the makeup and tone of the photo were at the center of controversy. It was accused of cultural appropriation and catering to the western's stereotype about the beauty of Chinese. The study about Chinese social media ecology and the selection of those topic served as very important preparations for my interview.

3.3 Data

In this section, I will first provide the brief background information of the research subject-Chinese transnationals in Finland. Then, I will elaborate the details of my interview design and implementation, as well as the ethical base of this study. In the last part, I will review my transcription and coding process and offer a short summary of the data.

3.3.1 Chinese transnationals in Finland

In the year 2021, 7.6% of the population in Finland were foreign born (OECDiLibrary, n.d.). Demographically the number of migrants from China living in Finland ranked the fourth among all countries of origin: by the end of 2021, there were 14,780 Chinese speaking people in Finland and 11,405 of them were of Chinese citizenship (Statistics Finland, 2023), and the top three origin countries of the foreign nationals in Finland were respectively Estonia, Russia and Iraq (Statistics Finland, n.d.).

In regard to the major causes of immigration in Finland, among long-term migration, family reunion is most common cause. In 2020 for instance, 36% migration move to Finland is for family reasons, 23% for work, 29% free movement, 12% for humanitarian reason; Among temporary migration, international students from non-EU nations and seasonal workers make up the majorities. Among those different types of immigration, the Finnish government is making special efforts to attract knowledge workers, specialist and entrepreneurs. In 2021, the government had set targets to increase education and work-based immigration substantially by 2030 (OECDiLibrary, n.d.).

The migration of Chinese to Finland in a large scale was a relatively recent phenomenon, as a search from the Statistics Finland's database showed that in the year 1991, the number of Chinese citizens living in Finland was less than 312, while the number in 2021 was 11,405 (Statistics Finland, n.d.). While it is difficult to get a complete picture of Chinese immigrants' status in Finland, it is possible to get a good idea from the statistics from Migri - the Finnish immigration authority, since Chinese nationals are obliged to apply for a Finnish residence permit from Migri in order to stay in the country for more than three months. In the one-year period between October 2021 to October 2022, there were a total of 1907 Chinese citizens who received a positive decision when applying for a residence permit for the first time. Among those, 448 were for family reasons, 625 for work, and 750 for study. In another period between October 2017 to October 2018, the number of Chinese nationals who received a first-time Finnish residence permit was 1981, 437 of them were for family reasons, 555 for work and 962 for study purpose (Finnish Immigration Service Statistics, 2023). Those numbers show that Chinese migrants in Finland are mainly for the purpose of study, work, and

family reunion. Family reunion and work migration are generally long-term migration. Studying is considered as short-term migration but it could lead to long-term residence in Finland.

Here, it is worth to point out again that the by saying Chinese migrants, I refer to the Chinese who come from mainland China, which are the subject of this study. Chinese diaspora is of very diverse composition: apart from Chinese from mainland China, there are also Chinese from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Chinese descendants of other nationalities. The social media practices of different groups might vary to different extent. This study only represents the situation among Chinese transnationals from mainland China and their digital diaspora experiences.

After reviewing migration in figures, it is also important to look into the macro-level changes what migration has brought to the Finnish society as well as the societal environment for migrants in Finland. The number of people of foreign origin and speaking a language other than Finnish is increasing (Statistics Finland. 2023). Immigration has also been the topic of focus of discussion and debates both in media and in society (Ministry of the Interior Finland, 2019). In order to get better adapted to an internationalized future and multi-cultural society, Finland has been adopting the policy of encouraging immigrants' integration, anti-racism and non-discrimination. For instance, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland is responsible for the implementation of integration and offering corresponding services for immigrants. On its website, it acknowledges that the integration is a two-way process and calls on both immigrants and the whole society to work on it. It also emphasizes the importance of local communities and all members of the society to be committed to a more equal, non-discriminated, anti-racism environment (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, n.d.-a).

3.3.2 Data collection

The selection of interview respondents is partly based on my personal connection, and partly based on the idea to choose interviewees with different professions in Finland. For this purpose, I went to some activities arranged by local Chinese associations and got in contact with some potential respondents. At the same time, I also asked friends to recommend the suitable people that they knew. Altogether I interviewed eight respondents, from which I believe that I have collected enough materials for the analysis.

Regarding the composition of the respondents, I focused my study on the long-term migration groups among Chinese transnationals in Finland. As discussed in the previous part, the majority of Chinese transnationals in Finland are people who come to work, to reunite with family members and for study. My respondents were either in Finland for work purposes or for family reasons, and all of them had stayed here for more than three years. That being said, those categories are by no means mutually exclusive, and people's migration and settlement in a new place usually involves more

than one element: a person who migrates for family reasons will most probably need to work or continue their study in Finland; another person who moves to Finland to work might build his or her family here or would like to move his or her family here; and a student studying in Finland is very likely to stay for a longer term and get employed here. Those multiple reasons and elements were also reflected in my interviewees' experiences.

The interviews were designed in a semi-structured way. The extent of how much structured the interview is generally depends on the degree of interviewer interference. Brinkmann (2013) stated that semi-structured interviews with a certain type of format recognized both the interviewer and the interviewee's roles in constructing the conversation. Tracy (2013) also proposed that the structure of the interviews should be according to the research goals: unstructured interviews could generate more easily organic and spontaneous responses but also pose high requirements for the interviewer's skills to understand and interpret the context; and that some prepared general guidelines could prove to be helpful in the interview process.

Regarding the research purpose of this thesis, it is about people's experiences but not about life story to every detail. If being asked open-ended questions about certain topics, interviewees might find it easier to explain their stances or opinions without losing focus. Therefore, I planned a structure for the interview, and the questions concerning the topics were mainly open-ended questions.

The interview was designed as two parts. The first part was mainly about respondents' social media use habit and it took around 12-20 minutes. The second part was about their opinions and experiences about certain social media hot topics, and it lasted about 25-40 mins. For six interviewees, the first part interview took place in the autumn of 2021 when I just started to collect data. Their second part interviews were done in spring 2022. For the other two interviewees, I only interviewed once in spring 2022 and combined the two parts as one whole interview.

Here I will describe the interview design and interview questions in detail. Before going into interviews, I always started by briefly introducing my research idea, the interview topics, terms about ethical standards, and answering the possible questions from the respondents. In the first part interview about media use habits, I first asked people's general personal background and situation in Finland, their profession, their reason for coming to Finland, their social circles in Finland and in other places, etc. Then I asked about their social media habits. In order to facilitate interviewee's thinking process, I sometimes asked for example, how people read news, get entertainment, or contact with others online, and sometimes I asked them to recall their typical day with social media and their smart phones. Last, I would ask some questions which might require some reflections from people, for example, how satisfied were they with their situation in Finland; how did they perceive their identity; and were they aware of the conflicting opinions from social media, etc. The second part of

the interview was more focused on opposing narratives and conflicting opinions on social media and the interview participants' navigating strategies. As mentioned in the online observation part, I have selected several hot topics from social media beforehand. There were four topics and I would ask respondents to pick three and elaborate their views. For the first topic about "What is the real Finland like," I introduced it by showing the two Douyin videos; and for the other topics, I just explained the topic and listed the possible different opinions about those. The questions I asked included: Which stance do you take about this issue, and what kind of viewpoints do you have, and why? What is the real Finland like in your mind? Does the war in Ukraine affect your life in any way and do you talk about it with somebody? How do you comment and compare on the Covid policies in China and in Finland? Do those conflicting ideas and ideologies bother you, and why? Do they affect your thoughts or your daily life?

The interviews were conducted in Finland and were almost wholly organized face-to-face, except for one interviewee whose first part interview was carried out online. The meetings took place in different places: interviewees' work place, restaurant, public library, and coffee houses. The interview language was solely in Chinese. The interviews were audio-taped with my mobile phone and were transcribed and translated later in autumn 2022. I took notes with computer when I initially started interview, but after the first four interviews in which I asked about respondents' media use habit, I decided to only audiotape with my phone. Audiotape captured all the information I needed, and interviews without notebooks or computers might provide a more relaxing environment for the interviewees. In some cases respondents might send me messages afterwards to exchange opinions about the interview topics, and I kept those in my notes.

TABLE 1 List of the interview participants

Inter- view- ees	Esti- mated age range	Gender	Status at the time of interview	Years in Finland	Other info
1	40-45	Female	Housewife, mother, jobseeker	6	
2	43-48	Female	Restaurant worker	7	
3	36-40	Female	Training to be as an assistant nurse	8	
4	48-53	Male	Cook	3	Previously in Ger- many
5	33-36	Male	Cook, restaurant owner	7	Previously in Ger- many
6	40-45	Male	Restaurant owner	15	
7	36-40	Female	White collar worker, mother	9	Education degrees from a third country
8	36-40	Female	Master student, mother	10	

3.3.3 Ethical considerations-informed consent

Throughout the data collection, I acted in accordance with the ethical rules and guidelines (TENK guidelines 2019). I first compiled research notification and interviewee consent form into one document, in which I explained my research questions and topics in a way that could be easily understood, left the contact information, and stated clearly the respondents' rights and how the privacy data would be protected. All the information in the document was in both English and in Chinese. Before each interview, I would give respondents enough time to read through the research notification information and explain to them in words about the terms concerning their rights and the protection of their private information. I also made it very clear by telling each interviewee that the respondents had the right to withdraw from the research at any time without the need to provide a reason, and their information concerning name, address, age, and city of residence would not be disclosed in the thesis, and that they could ask me any time if there were any doubts. I also informed that the interview would be audio-taped and transcribed later into texts. Last, I would ask the interviewees to sign the consent form.

3.3.4 Coding of data

From the eight interview participants, I got a total of around 8 hours audio materials which were later transcribed and translated into English by the machine transcribing and translating service from *Xunfeitingjian* (讯飞听见). Afterwards, I checked the materials and corrected the inaccuracies in transcription and translation. I also got some notes from the first several interviews, and notes from message exchanges with respondents after the interviews if those were related to the research topic. When doing data analysis, I mainly used the transcribed Chinese material. The English translation was for the purpose of assisting the thesis writing. The notes were for my reference.

TABLE 2 List of the hot topics used in the interview

	Hot topics from social media	Background	Selected by
1	What is Finland really like?	Two Douyin videos: using stereotypes VS real experiences in Finland	all
2	Covid-19 policies in China & in Finland	Lockdown in Shanghai in spring 2022, opposing views on social media	all
3	The war in Ukraine which started by Russian attack in spring 2022; Various reactions in Finland and in China	Opposing views from China and from around the world; The war caused intensive debates and discussions in Finland, which decided to join NATO later.	all
4	Beijing Winter Olympics 2022	Different narratives: criticizing the Olympics bubble VS successful organization	none

5	Dior Art show 2021 was accused of cultural stereotyping	One photo showing a model with Dior bag was accused of bad taste and catering to western stereotype of Chinese.	one interviewee's own topic
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As this thesis and interview design were theme-oriented, in the first-round analysis I used open coding procedure (Bielewska, 2021) in order to identify the sub-themes for each research question. I read through all the interview data and tried to find those contents which were related to my research questions, which were: Chinese transnationals' social media practice, their navigating strategies about the competing narratives, and their cultural identity work. Then I organized the initial findings into three excel tables, with content for each research question in a separate table. By comparing the materials, I listed those with similar themes in the same category, through which I was able to find the rough themes or patterns for each research question. For example, for the topic of Chinese transnationals' media use practice, in the first stage I identified several features: social media as an indispensable part of life, using different media for different purposes, consuming more content in Chinese, the selection of media was restricted by certain limits such as language skills, etc. For the analysis of cultural identities, I found several themes such as identity as a Chinese, as a local, identity of in-betweenness, and also noticed that the respondents would manage their multiple cultural identities in different contexts, their feelings of inclusion and exclusion in Finland, etc. Those initial findings were still at a superficial level which needed to be analysed further.

Subsequently, I used the constant comparison technique adopted by grounded theory (Kolb, 2012; Memon et al., 2017) and went back to the transcript again and again and compared the data of each respondent with the initial themes. This was a constant process of confirming and refining the themes. At the same time, through carefully checking and comparing, I was also able to discover new or more nuanced messages from the interview data. For instance, when the interviewees talked about the war in Ukraine and their stances, although in most cases there were not explicit expressions of participants' identity or belongings, it was possible to find some traces of how those social events and happenings influenced their identity construction.

Throughout the process of constant comparison (Kolb, 2012; Memon et al., 2017), data analysis and reflections on theoretical frameworks went hand in hand. On the one hand, the data has led me to reflect on certain theoretical frameworks, while on the other hand, the data analysis was also guided by theoretical frameworks. For instance, when analysing the social media practice of Chinese transnationals, I noticed that the participants tactically used different social media channels for different purposes, and they faced multiple limits such as language barriers in using the media. As these features corresponded to the polymedia theory (Madianou, 2021; Madianou & Miller, 2013; Tagg & Lyons, 2021), I went back again and again to the previous studies

about the theory. Then the better understanding about polymedia theory, in turn, facilitated my analysis in a deeper level.

For analysing the cultural identity work, the data analysis and theoretical reflection also went hand by hand, while it is worthwhile to mention that the analysis for this topic was more guided by theories. Multiple theory frameworks and previous studies about similar topics informed the data analysis of this theme. From the initial categorization of the identity analysis, I noticed that the interviewees used various references to indicate identities, such as using “we” and “here” for referring in-group members and their current locality, “foreigners” for out-group members who were not Chinese or Asians; and that they navigated different identities in different occasions. Those features reminded me of the five identity principles of Bucholtz and Hall (2010)- “emergent principle, positionality principle, indexicality principle, relationality principle and partialness principle” (pp. 18-28). Therefore, I went back to this theory and adopted it in the analysis. The indexicality principle proved to be especially practical for analysing the data, as it offered practical tools for me to recognize the interview respondents’ identity labels and categories, and to understand how they took stances or present their identities. The relationality and partialness principles meant that it was theoretically sound to analyse people’s cultural identities through multi-interrelated levels, the various influencing factors on people’s identity, and how people navigated those different aspects of their identity. Then, the identity analysis through narratives elaborated by De Fina (2015) also informed how I transcribed the data and analysed the respondents’ construction of their identities through a *positioning* perspective. In addition, I also used the identity components of *ways of being* and *ways of belonging* by Levitt and Glick Shiller (2004) to analyse the respondents’ different ways of motivations and belonging. Moreover, in the identity analysis I also compared some relevant previous studies, such as studies about transnational identity (Bielewska, 2021; Open Society Foundations, 2015; Yin, 2015), and found some similar or different patterns of identity work of my respondents. As a result, about the theme of Chinese transnationals’ cultural identity work, I was able to organize the initial themes and synthesize those into a multi-level interconnected identity analysis framework, through which I could also discuss how the respondents navigate the different identities as well as the limiting factors in their identity construction.

Eventually, I was able to identify the final themes to answer each research question. Regarding social media use, Chinese transnationals use a diverse source of social media, and their media use corresponds to the polymedia theories. About how people navigate the competing narratives, the Chinese transnationals tend to use various references to verify and make their judgements, and they are also tactical about how and if they would express themselves. As for the cultural identity work, the Chinese transnationals tend to present multiple levels of identities: besides a strong Chinese identity, they also manifest identities of being a local as well as being a transnational in-

betweeners. There are also various structural limits and obstacles for Chinese transnationals in their social media use as well as in their identity construction. In the next chapter, I will elaborate the findings in detail.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will present the findings from three aspects with the aim to answer the research questions. First, I will summarize some features of social media practice of Chinese transnationals in Finland and analyse the media use with polymedia theory. Next, as the intention of this thesis has been on how Chinese transnationals navigate the competing narratives from social media, I will present an overview of people's navigating strategies when facing the conflicting views and narratives. In the last part, I will provide an analysis of the cultural identities of Chinese transnationals based on the interview data.

4.1 Practices related to social media use

It is perhaps not surprising that the interview data attest the fact that social media has been an indispensable part of people's life and the same holds true for Chinese transnationals in Finland. For all the respondents, a typical day starts and finishes with checking on their mobile phones and social media. Their social media use is for various purposes, such as for keeping in touch with family and friends, establishing and maintaining social relationships, getting news updates, and searching for information, entertainment, etc. During the interview process and through my discussions with respondents, I have noticed that all the interview participants were updated with latest news from China, Finland, and around the world as well as the different circulating narratives towards various issues, albeit that their familiarity with the issues differed. A wide range of China-based social media apps are used by the interviewees in their daily life, especially Wechat, Weibo, Tencent news, Douyin (Chinese version of TikTok), etc. Most of the popular non-China based social media channels such as Youtube, Whatsapp, Facebook, are also used by Chinese transnationals. Next, I will elaborate

some noticeable patterns what I have observed and reflect on those with the theory of polymedia.

4.1.1 The importance of Chinese language media content

Chinese language content is the most important part of transnationals' daily media life. Naturally the major reason of its popularity is that it provides the most convenient source of information, connection, entertainment, etc. for the Chinese who live abroad, especially for those who only speaks Chinese or with limited skills in other languages. For those with proficient English or Finnish skills or who work or study in English or Finnish, Chinese language media content is also part of life. For instance, one interviewer mentioned her use of Chinese content media:

Anyway after a whole day, (people) need some Chinese content to fill the mind. I have spoken enough English and Finnish in the work place and I feel the need to read some content in Chinese to relax, although English is not exhaustive for me. Still, reading some Chinese content is the most relaxing...(Interviewer 7)

The phenomenon could also be explained by the connection with China, the Chinese language, and all the aspects of social life and knowledge that they have been familiar with. Since all the interviewees migrated to Finland in their adulthood and grew up in China, not only do they have their social connections in China, but also they could relate to the happenings there very deeply. The interview data shows that besides news, hot events, newest trends from China, entertainment content such as Chinese music, episodes, talkshows are also very popular among transnationals. For them, Chinese media contents could be engaging as well as relaxing.

Another important underlying reason of the consumption of Chinese language media could be the sense of belonging that people get when they immerse themselves in the Chinese language media environment, especially Chinese homeland media-the contents produced in China and the audience is for all the Chinese (Yin, 2015). Those media content often does not differentiate Chinese who live in China or overseas, and the access and participation offers users the ease to be just like any other Chinese (Yin, 2015). For Chinese transnationals, despite of being physically away from China, through navigating the Chinese language media, they actively participate the Chinese language online space and at the same time gets the feeling of being involved as well as being included.

For Chinese transnationals in Finland, the Chinese language media landscape what they navigate is a very diverse media ecology, including China-based media and non-China-based media. It serves all the functions that are needed in people's daily life, such as socializing, obtaining news and information as well as entertainment. China-based media includes both homeland media-the contents produced in China, and ethnic media-the contents produced in Finland for Chinese transnationals. All the popular Chinese social media apps, such as Wechat, Weibo, Douyin, Tencent news,

etc. are China-based homeland media. Ethnic media in Finland is usually in the form of Wechat Official Accounts and Wechat group chats, which are followed closely by large number of people. Non-China-based media such as Youtube, Facebook, etc. all have rich Chinese language contents and are used by transnationals.

4.1.2 The prevalence of Wechat and the wide usage of Youtube

Among all the social media platforms, Wechat is the most used social media app for Chinese transnationals, and this observation resonates with many other previous studies (Yali Chen et al., 2021 ; Yujie Chen et al., 2018; Luqiu & Kang, 2021 ; Xiong & Liu, 2022). People maintain connections with their family, friends and other social circles through private chatting, group chatting, as well as "moments" function. All the interviewees mentioned that Wechat was their primary social media app. Apart from social functions, the transnationals also use Wechat official accounts and short video channels to read news, subscribe articles and watch short videos for entertainment. Besides, for many Chinese transnationals in Finland, some official Wechat accounts which offer local news feed becomes important channels for them to read local news about Finland and understand local governmental policies.

Generally for socializing, Wechat is used the most with (contacts) inside China, and Whatsapp for contacts here. With Wechat it is possible to check the happenings in China, some news, hot events, but with Whatsapp that function is not possible. (Interviewee 8)

With family members, we have (Wechat) group chats every day. With good friends, I will call directly with (Wechat) voice calls. If there is any updates, I will post on (Wechat) Moments, but now when my age grows, I do not feel like updating on Moments anymore. If I have anything, I will just contact (call with Wechat). (Interviewee 3)

I don't check Finnish news much...the source of local Finnish news are from Wechat groups and official accounts, such as *Fenlandujingqun* (Bible reading group in Finland), *Fenlanbianminfuwuzhongxin* (Wechat group, Service for local matters in Finland) (Interviewee 2)

As for non China-based social media, it is interesting to note that Youtube is the most used platform among the interviewees. In the case of Chinese transnationals in Finland, when they are overseas and offered all the freedom and options to select from any media channels, Youtube become the one that they use the most actively. Of all the eight interviewees, seven of them mentioned specially that they used Youtube on a daily basis. Although not being a primary social network, Youtube with its multiple functions and offerings is used actively by the respondents for checking news, information, listening to music, and watching episodes, as well as voicing their opinions. Other than Chinese content, the transnationals also use Youtube to get content in other languages. The followings were mentioned by some interviewees about their use of Youtube:

I read some contents from Wechat. Then in the evening when I have free time, I will go to Youtube and cross-check the content (compare with the Wechat content)...If there were nonsense comments on Youtube, I will comment...(Interviewer 4)

Aiqiyi and Youku (Chinese streaming service offering episodes, movies, etc.) have limits for overseas users, so I could only watch (episodes) on Youtube. ...In the afternoon I might be a bit tired or bored, then I would open Youtube, for some entertainment. In fact, Youtube is also helpful for study. My (coding) class was in Finnish, if I do not understand I need to watch some learning videos in English (from Youtube). (Interviewer 1)

Other than Wechat and Youtube, China-based social media apps such as Weibo, Tiktok, Tencent news, Baidu news, Ximalaya, etc, are used by the interviewees for get news from China and around the world, watching short videos, as well as get to know all the hot topics and participate in discussions about those hot topics. Non-China based social media apps such as Whatsapp, Facebook are often used much for maintaining contacts with non-Chinese contacts.

4.1.3 Interests in local and global happenings

The interview participants also showed concerns about the happenings in the whole world, specially issues about Finland which were closely related to their life. All of the interviewees were in one or more wechat groups which consisted of local Chinese diaspora members in Finland, and most interviewees also mentioned that they followed some Wechat official accounts related to Finland and Finnish news. Their special interests about the local issues are expected since those might have direct influences on their life. For instance, the Wechat Chinese official account of Helsinki Times is one of the most popular ethnic media among the Chinese transnationals. In December 2022 they published over 30 news feeds and the most read news was about the Finnish social security Kela policy changes, which got over 3000 reads.

Apart from ethnic media channel from Wechat, the interviewees also tried to access Finnish and global news from other sources. One of the interviewees mentioned that she often checked English media for news. Several interviewees also mentioned that they followed Finnish media regularly, albeit not so often. The Finnish national media YLE is what people would usually check news from and its content are free and with open access. Other than the news, Chinese transnationals also expressed their interested in the perspectives of Finnish media and views of locals on different issues. One interviewee expressed like this:

The Finnish news...could not understand because of language (barriers). Baidu news are more like, represent Chinese perspectives. I would also would like to see how Finland, the Finnish perspective about the same issue: what they would say, sometimes I would like to read. (Interviewer 7)

The above quote also showed the some of the difficulties for Chinese transnationals to get local news and knowledge. The lack of Finnish language skills is the common obstacle for migrants to be closely connected with the local society.

4.1.4 Reflections about transnationals' social media practice and polymedia

For the Chinese transnationals in Finland, they have affordances of all the media choices. The cost and accessibility to internet and mobile phones are not the concerns anymore. They are faced with a proliferation of media channels and platforms. Compared to the people who live in China, they have access to a more free media environment and possibilities to use Youtube, Google, Facebook, etc, which are blocked in China. Compared to non-Chinese users, they also have the China-based social media platforms in their repertoire. The issues regarding their media practice are more about how people would select which media platform, how they use and navigate the media environment, and the impacts those would bring. Those aspects could be analysed through the theory of polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2013).

Polymedia serves as both the set of tools for communication and the integrated structure of environment for people to navigate in (Madianou, 2021; Madianou & Miller, 2013). The Chinese transnationals tactically make use of those tools to manage their social networks and organize their personal media repertoire according to their emotional preferences and their understanding of social norms and values. For my interview respondents, they generally use Wechat to keep in touch with their family, friends and other contacts in China and other Chinese transnationals, WhatsApp for non-Chinese connections in Finland, and Facebook for general connection with their social circles outside of China.

Wechat is for (contacting) wipoth friends and parents, there is the group chat function as well. I use Facebook to check the "likes" and comments about the restaurant. I post information such as food about the restaurant...Youtube is used for listening to music...Whatsapp is used to contact the foreigners, for example, with the accountant of the restaurant who is Finnish. (Interviewee 5)

The study by Peng (2016) analyzed the similar practice of mainland Chinese students' use of Wechat with friends and family back home and Whatsapp with Hong Kong locals, concluding that this phenomenon, in practice, created digital boundary and strengthened the students' migrant identity. However, the data from this thesis do not totally support this viewpoint. As the Chinese transnationals do not always use Whatsapp passively, often they tend to adopt Whatsapp actively and use it to get better connected with the local contacts and local society.

Polymedia means that the choice of media has emotional reasons and moral consequences and it also reflects relationships (Madianou, 2021). It could be used to explain how the Chinese transnationals manage their use of Wechat, as the Wechat use is so prevalent and its numerous functions almost form a standalone media ecology. With Wechat private chat, people maintain close contacts with their friends and family by sending messages directly or making voice or video calling to their contacts. The Wechat group chat function is similar to that of Whatsapp group chat, and the number of group members range from only family members, several friends to several

hundred people. In the group chat of several hundred members, people tend to send messages only related to the group theme. For instance, in one Wechat group which is managed by an Asian grocery shop owner in Finland, people could inquire information about food or even discuss some issues about some events in Finland. However, if somebody send messages promoting their own products without asking group admin in advance, it is considered inappropriate. Then, Wechat has also *Moments* function which works like Facebook posts. People might post their own contents there, comment and get updated about their contacts. For those contacts which people have not contacted very frequently, Moments could already serve the socializing function and people do not normally start to send private messages. In fact, during the interview, there were a couple of respondents mentioned that after long time, their contacts with previous friends started to get less and less and eventually they could only get their updates from Wechat Moments or Facebook posts. Here I will list this quote from one interviewee:

Those who don't like to post in Moments (on Wechat), I have basically lost contact with them... With family members, we have (Wechat) group chats every day. With good friends, I will call directly with (Wechat) voice calls. If I want to make updates, I will post on (Wechat) Moments, but now when my age grows, I do not feel like updating on Moments anymore. If I have anything, I will just contact (call with Wechat). (Interviewee 3)

Regarding the role of Wechat for those who live in mainland China, Xiong et al. (2022) suggested that Wechat has become the coordinator of polymedia due to its dominating role for Chinese. Compared with what stated by Xiong et al. (2022), in the case of Chinese transnationals in Finland, Wechat use is prevalent but not that dominating, since in Finland people could not use many of the Chinese lifestyle apps which is accessible through Wechat, such as making payment everywhere, getting shared bike or taxi, etc. Nonetheless, among their social media ecology, Wechat does play a key role: as everybody else is using it, people at least need to have Wechat to get themselves connected.

Polymedia emphasizes people's affordances with media, while it also recognizes that it is practiced under certain structural limits (Madianou, 2021). For Chinese transnationals in Finland, language is one of main challenges in their media use. This might apply to migrants in general in Finland. Of my eight interviews, around half of them do not know any Finnish; half of them have only very limited English skills; and three of them only speak Chinese. Language obstacles also affect people's daily life such as understanding local policies, dealing with banks and visiting hospitals, etc. In those occasions, people could only rely on Chinese media content, even if they often would like to get to know other perspectives. The below example has been quoted earlier as well:

The Finnish news...could not understand because of language (barriers). Baidu news are more like, represent Chinese perspectives. I would also would like to see how Finland, the

Finnish perspective about the same issue: what they would say, sometimes I would like to read. (Interviewer 7)

The other main limiting factor for Chinese transnationals' free use of media is the Chinese government's online censorship on China-based social media platforms, which is the reason why many people turn to other platforms to express themselves. For instance, the respondents are aware that they could not post any politically sensitive content on China-based social media, especially in Wechat group chat. The account would get deactivated if sensitive terms were detected in Wechat group chats. A banned Wechat account could mean much inconvenience for them to communicate with others back in China. One respondent had to send message about comments on Chinese Covid restrictions to me from Whatsapp in order to avoid the censorship and reduce the risk. Another respondent expressed like this:

I only read (contents, but do not comment) , it is dangerous. We had two family group chats. Last time when the pandemic was at its peak, there we chatted about it briefly (reminding each others) to be careful (not to expose to virus), prepare your stock, etc. Around March at the tight (restriction) time, the account (one group chat) was deactivated. Then we did not use that account anymore, had to use the other one. (Interviewer 4)

As a matter of fact, the prevalence of Wechat and the popularity of Youtube among Chinese transnationals in Finland is not totally a result of free-flowing dynamics (Madianou, 2021). People still use Wechat because they are used to it and they have already the language and other skills for it (Sun, 2021). More importantly, only with Wechat could they keep in touch with their most important connections. Regarding Youtube, people sometimes choose it because the Chinese contents such as music and episodes are not easily available overseas, while Youtube provides the convenient platform for those purposes.

I mainly watch videos from Youtube...After coming abroad to Canada, all the videos (I watch) were from Youtube. Chinese video platforms such as Youku is not available (abroad). (Interviewee 7)

Polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2013) also emphasized the socialization process brought by media. For Chinese transnationals in Finland, Wechat group chat starts to become one of the sites for socialization, since it offers the most convenient way to connect with the Chinese diaspora in Finland. The interviewees all participated in one or more such Wechat groups. Based on my observation, the transnationals discuss all kinds of topics in the groups, such as issues in China, practical inquiries about matters in Finland, about Chinese food in Finland, etc. Sometimes there were very hot arguments about issues which reflected people's conflicting ideas and opinions. This was also mentioned by one interviewee:

Many people were discussing in the group chat, and many had their different ways of expression (radical way). Many were like young and cynical. I actually thought the same way but I just kept it to myself... (Interviewer 3)

4.2 Navigating the transnational media scape

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, Chinese transnationals navigate in a media environment full of competing narratives and conflicting perspectives (Sun, 2021). This is what made me reflect as a student studying intercultural and migration topics and it is also the starting point of this thesis. Apart from briefly asking about the media use habit and the perceived identity of the interview participants, I mainly invited them to elaborate on their opinions about several hot topics which had generated conflicting narratives and views, intending to investigate how Chinese transnationals navigate this reality. In this part, I will summarize and analyse those navigating strategies based on the interview data.

The respondents all showed a good knowledge of the circulating competing narratives and conflicting opinions about the hot topics. The first topic was about the two opposing Douyin videos: one telling about the myths and stereotypes about Finland and other one trying to argue against those stereotypes. The second topic was about the Ukraine war which started from Russian's invasion in spring 2023, the Finnish government's decision to join the NATO and the different opinions towards the war. The third topic was about comparing different Covid restriction measures in Finland and in China and the opposing views towards those policies. All the eight interviewees appeared to be concerned about those topics and were well aware of the opposing views without my explanation. They were familiar with the popular narratives from different sides: the Chinese government, Western governments, media, popular opposing views from China, popular opposing stances outside of China, etc. They were also aware of the common misconceptions about China or about Finland. In the interviewees, they were all able to give their opinions without any delay or difficulties. This demonstrates that people are very conscious of the transnational in-betweenness that they need to navigate in.

4.2.1 Making efforts to obtain more information and using references to make judgements

Regarding how they navigate the competing narratives, I have observed several features of how the interviewees tried to obtain more information in order to make sense and to evaluate certain issues. Some interviewees would take the initiative to check information from multiple sources when facing conflicting views, to understand and make sense of the different stances towards the war, Covid, etc.

Using Tencent news for (checking) major social events and for entertainment news. For the details, such as the big flood in Henan (province), I will search with Douyin, but Douyin might be misleading as well. If I would like to check comments, I will search from Weibo, and Zhihu. (Interviewee 3)

Information is not possible to be verified by only single source. It could be verified by two sources, or even better by three sources. (Interviewee 4)

Sometimes I read in Chinese about some issues which regarded both China and the West, I might want to know what the voices (narratives) in China were about, and what the voices here (in Finland) were about. Then I might search online, searching by myself for some news and talk to my husband about it. (Interviewee 8)

Other than searching from different sources, the interviewees also used multiple references points, such as examples of daily life and examples of people around them, to make sense of reality and to understand local practices and local environment, as well as to compare, make judgement, and form their stances towards various topics and conflicting ideas. The following quotes from the interviews are such examples:

You did fight in other's house right? You went from your home and fought in the other's home and ruined their house. No matter what reasons you have. You have indeed ruined their house. Even if you retreat, they need to rebuild after the war, it is not that they will rebuild in one year or two years. Their society would go backwards (after the war). (Interviewee 6)

But in China it is different, especially for children and old people, right? People (are used to) rush to the hospitals even if they have only minor illness. If you say some minor syndrome (from Covid) does not matter and no need to visit hospitals, no one will listen. Then the whole healthcare system might crash...Because we had lived in China we know those things...But then Chinese do not understand the Western ways, that why they do not put enough restrictions to people (when the Covid situation was serious) and get the virus contained. Then what? They do not understand the western way of life and they (people in the west) are not willing to do like that. (Interviewee 8)

(When asked about the video of Finland with stereotypes that people in Finland do not even need to work if they do not want, and this is the happiest country in the world; people with low income in China might get minimum living allowance from government.) You might tell (people about Finland) a simple truth, not explaining too much. I will say would you feel happy if you live on minimum living allowance? Same thing, right? If you only live on minimum living allowance, can not even buy a bag or go to travel, how can you talk about happiness then? (Interviewee 2)

Through those aforementioned strategies, people try to make sense of different narratives and form their own understanding and stances toward different issues. Nonetheless, similar strategies do not mean they will have same opinions. I have noticed that the interviewees did have different views about same issues. For instance, about the Covid policies, some people were supportive of the Covid restrictions in China, while some were strongly against it, and others might adopt a stance somewhere in between.

However, the Chinese transnationals do not always get a clear stance towards certain issues. Among my interview respondents, I have also noticed that they often struggle between different positions or might be hesitant to take a clear stance about local issues in Finland, especially about more sensitive issues such as the war in Ukraine and the decision of Finland to join NATO.

I have complex feeling about the issue of joining NATO. Maybe the Finnish people should vote for that? *(This interviewee mentioned earlier that joining the NATO means protection but also*

at the same time more risk factors for Finland)... I have talked about it at home, but not with my colleagues. It is about my standpoint...what stance should I take to communicate about this issue? That is tough. (Interviewee 7)

4.2.2 Strategies towards the competing narratives

After reviewing how Chinese transnationals form their views towards competing narratives, next I will discuss how they choose to act on those: do those affect their social media use habit, do they express their opinions, or how do they express their opinions, etc.

In some cases, people might resort to some self-protection mechanism and intentionally avoid reading too much about the highly opposing and sometimes irrational opinions online. Some were just not bothered too much with the conflicting views. Two interviewees expressed in the interviews as follows:

Seems that I do not like to read those (opposing views), because I feel the voices from online are way too violent (extreme), too much negative stuff. I only read when I have some issues of concern, otherwise I do not even want to read at all. (Interviewee 8)

What views could I have? Because even if Finland would join NATO, it is not my business. Even if it would end up like the situation with Russian and Ukraine, for me actually it is ok. I do not have capabilities to take care of others, but I could take care of my small family, isn't it so? (Interviewee 6)

No matter if they avoid the competing narratives or not, most of the interviewees serve the role of in-betweenness of China and Finland, at least explaining to their close family and friends about the real situations in China and in Finland. This also corresponds to what Sun (2021) has stated in her article that most transnationals seem to be willingly as the intermediary between China and Australia. Actually during one interviewee, I was talking to the participant about one incident when we met earlier in a restaurant, the two Finnish men from neighboring table started to ask us about the Covid restrictions in China, and we tried to explain to our best knowledge about the situation and people's reactions to the policies in China. The Douyin video which I showed to the interviewees was also such a case: the influencer who lives in Finland did the same by arguing against the stereotypes about Finland and telling people what it was really like in Finland. In the interviews, I related to the Douyin video and my own experience and asked the participants had they been asked about some stereotypes about Finland. One interviewee replied as follows:

Yes, definitely. However, if it would be family members or friends, I will explain patiently about how Finland it is like, that it might be that some places are much colder, etc...But if it is this kind of irrational video online, I would not care about it. (Interviewee 8)

Regarding how people would voice their opinions, the Chinese transnationals resort to different tactics in different occasions. In online spaces people tend to be more vocal about their opinions online. One interviewee told that he would check from

Youtube everyday about social issues and comment actively when he found outrageous views.

Then in the evening when I have free time, I will go to Youtube and cross-check the content (compare with the Wechat content)...Sometimes I will use strong language on Youtube. If there were nonsense comments on Youtube, I will comment...(Interviewer 4)

Whereas in real life especially with the people they do not know very well, the interviewees tend to be more careful about expressing themselves. Some interview respondents did have their own reflections about the war topic, but they also chose not to speak it out especially within the local Finnish groups in order to avoid conflicts.

I do not even express my opinions to my family (who are Finnish). If they would grab me and ask I might say a little bit. I will explain to them (the narratives in China) but anyway they could not understand, so that was about it. (Interviewee 2)

Although people might choose not to express their opinions in those occasions, the Chinese transnationals do need a discursive space to voice their opinions. That is also why they could react to my interview topics easily. Some interviewees sent me messages after the interviews to express their feelings towards those topics or share with me some videos about the Covid situation in China. As already noted in the previous section about transnationals' social media use, I have also observed that the Wechat group chat sometimes becomes a discursive place for the Chinese transnationals in Finland. In the group chats, many people are very vocal about different issues, such as local issues in Finland, the opposing views towards the war in Ukraine, some not so sensitive topics concerning China, etc. Sometimes the chats would turn into very hot debates in the Wechat groups.

4.3 Media use and cultural identities

In the article about Chinese diaspora and transnational space, Sun (2021) has noted the complex cultural identity Chinese transnationals had to manage, and the ambivalence and tension that they need to navigate. Through investigating how the Chinese transnationals navigate the conflicting social media ecology and the competing narratives, this thesis intends to explore how the cultural identities of Chinese transnationals are reflected in this process. It is also the key theme of this thesis. In this part I will analyse how people construct their cultural identities based on the interview data.

The identity analysis was guided by multiple theoretical frameworks. I followed the identity principles by Bucholtz and Hall (2010) and adopted a transnational approach (Basch et al, 1994; Glick Schiller, 2018; Levitt, 2001; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007) in order to explore people's multiple and mobile cultural

identities while taking consideration of all the interrelated and multidimensional social fields (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004) in which transnationals were embedded in.

I will present the cultural identities analysis of Chinese transnationals from several perspectives: their Chinese identity, transnational identity, local identity as well as how people navigate the multiple identities. Additionally, I will also analyse how the interview participants' ways of being and ways of belonging are manifested in the interview.

4.3.1 Strong identity of being Chinese

The term *Chinese identity* contains multi-faceted meanings and connotations. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to have an in-depth discussion of what exactly constitutes the Chinese identity, it is still worth to emphasize that the concept is rich and diverse and have different meanings in different contexts. It is far from only limited to a national identity, it also could be ethnic or biographical Chinese identity, and it could be related to cultural identity. According to Liu (2017), the Chinese identity is formed through the long history and civilization of China and continues to evolve and change against the development of society.

In the current thesis, my respondents only include people from the People's Republic of China (so called "mainland China") who speak mandarin. The analysis of the Chinese identity here does not intend to be exhaustive of all the identity aspects, while it still includes a mix of national, ethnical and cultural identity of being Chinese, influenced by people's previous experience from mainland China.

The interview data shows that people present a strong identity of being Chinese, mainly when asked about how they see themselves in the local society, and sometimes it is indicated from their narratives about certain issues. The interviewees used various indexical means such as categories and labels to differentiate the in-group and out-group, especially when talking with other Chinese, in this case, with me who shared the same background. Even when the respondents are outside of China, they still refer to non-Chinese, especially non-Asians as foreigners, vis a vis themselves as Chinese. Such indexical terms also include, for example, us VS them (Chinese VS others), Guonei VS Guowai (inside China, outside of China/abroad). This corresponded to Yin (2015)'s analysis about identities of Chinese migrants in the New Zealand.

Participants also mentioned in the interview that they were often aware of their own Chinese identity in cases such as when they were at public space, especially when other Chinese around. One interviewee recalled such an incident:

This time (the business trip) coming back to Helsinki from Mexico, I had a transfer in London. Lots of lots of Chinese passengers, lots of luggage, the baggage rack was totally full. The flight attendant had a difficult time to figure out what to do, and he/she had to tell the passengers that only one piece of luggage was allowed to be on the upper rack. The flight attendants did not indicate any opinions or anything, but I could sense it. Why every

(Chinese) had to travel with so many luggage, or causing unnecessary inconveniences? (It would be nicer) to win others' respect. (Interviewee 7)

Some other respondents also mentioned that their Chinese identity was evoked once they were outside of China, which was also typical for migrants. In such contexts, respondents might show strong affiliation to China and their Chinese identity.

Back in China I was not concerned about political issues at all. After moving out (of China), because of being Chinese, I had to focus more (on political issues), and become more and more affiliated to my home country. (Interviewee 3)

Moreover, their Chinese identity is also presented through their consumption of media content both in Chinese and about China, as well as their interests in expressing their views about issues concerning China. As mentioned above, some interviewees will send messages to me afterwards about topics such as Covid restrictions in China, or other political issues in China, etc.

4.3.2 Transnational identities

I use *transnational identity* here in a general way to refer to the identity features that are not bounded by the limits of one nation-state (Glick Schiller et al, 1994). When asked how do they identify themselves, one of the interviewees responded that she still felt being a foreigner, but also added that she considered herself half Chinese half Finnish. Other respondents mentioned specifically about their in-betweenness of China and Finland, or China and "the West", as they were not only aware about their identity of being in between, but also active in navigating in the middle sphere.

Because now that as a migrant, we have been living in China for many years, and lived in the West for many years. In fact, I feel that with our thoughts we are among the most open-minded ones, we could accept (and understand different perspectives). (Interviewee 8)

About 10 to 15 years ago since I started to teach Chinese as a foreign language, I already came to contact with Chineses and foreigners, and I have been used to navigate in this in-betweenness. (Interviewee 1)

Respondents often actively acted on their identity of being in-between. For example, some respondents mentioned that they would explain to their family and friends in China what Finland is really like. In times of tight Covid restriction in China, respondents also would tell their family and friends there how the Covid infection would behave on people, as many in China had panic feelings towards the virus then.

Other than presenting their identities as not limited to one nation state, the interview data also show that the respondents use a transnational resources or repertoire for different activities in their daily life. The transnational repertoire refers to the transnationals' previous life experiences, information from their contacts around the world, as well as from social media. People often compare different perspectives of China, Finland or other countries to evaluate the good sides and negative sides of a

place, or to compare with or relate to different groups, although their conclusions might vary. Here are a couple of examples how people use the transnational perspective to make comparisons:

Here there are so few Chinese...In Germany there were many Chinese, from mainland China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam...It was so convenient to go out and do the errands (in case you do not know local language). (Interviewee 4)

For instance, Daniel Wu (Asian American actor, activist for the Asian rights in the US), and another Korean American actor who had earlier tried to clarify that he was not Chinese, realized that he was the prejudiced because of being Asian. In Finland, the situation is better. We are more like just reading those news about racism. (Interviewee 3)

There are things in Finland which easily increase people's life satisfaction, but there are also things which do not. Opportunities, many other aspects, are more limited. (Interviewee 8)

4.3.3 Local identity

Generally, the interview participants have shown their interests in local issues and willingness to understand local happenings in Finland. They either read Finnish news directly, or subscribe some Wechat accounts which produce contents about Finland. Depending on their individual differences, they construct their identity of being a local in different ways.

Wish to have my own career in Finland. Hopefully I could do the things that I want...Live in Finland before retirement and serve the Finnish society. (Interviewee 1)

Regarding the (social) benefits (in Finland)...from my perspective, not only the big enterprises, but small enterprises like us also contribute significantly, don't we? (Interviewee 6)

During the interview, I also noticed that people present their belonging to the locality in more implicit ways. For example, one interviewee mentioned that as other locals, in dark times in winter, she started to light candles and put more decorations at home to ease the anxiety in the mind. Some also mentioned about their activities in Finland, such as picking berries and mushrooms, started to like to have a walk in the nature, etc, all being popular ways of life in Finland. One interviewee also mentioned that he used Facebook to promote his restaurants to the locals, posting photos and reading comments on the restaurant account although he had to always use Google translator.

Here, it is also important to discuss the meaning of *local* here, which means the belonging to the Finnish society as a whole, not to any specific location in Finland. So far, I have not identified the respondents' obvious belongings to any specific local town or city, contrary to what was noted by Bielewska (2021) in the analysis of migrants in cities in Poland and Open Society Foundations (2015)'s discussion about Somalis in Europe. In both articles the migrants constructed their identity as belonging to a certain city level as well as other levels (Bielewska, 2021; Open Society

Foundations, 2015). I have not noticed the same pattern from the interviews. Half of the respondents had experiences of living in other cities before moving to their current city. One of the respondents had stayed totally in three different cities of similar scales in Finland, and mentioned that living in those cities did not make any differences to him.

It was interesting that one respondent pointed out the differences among capital city Helsinki, other big cities, and small villages to her and to other migrants in general. It also reflected the situation of the Finnish society. She remarked that

In the beginning it was difficult even if I was with my husband. No other foreigners. I lived in the village where my mother-in-law was...No friends...I was depressed...After moving to bigger city, people were more friendly there, also the language teacher...I became more positive. (Interviewee 3)

It certainly would be better with English skills, such as in Helsinki. Small cities might not help, need to study the (Finnish) language. (Interviewee 3)

4.3.4 *Ways of being and Ways of belonging*

As discussed in the above content, depending on the context, people construct multiple levels of cultural identities. Cultural identities could be further analysed into “ways of being” and “ways of belonging” from the transnational study perspective (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, pp. 1009-1012). Those features are also observed from the interview data. Here, through ways of being and ways of belonging, I do not intend to analyse people’s transnational identity or way of life, but instead to analyse people’s multiple cultural identities in a more nuanced level- how belonging or not-belonging are manifested towards certain cultural identity. Different individuals might show cultural belongings in different ways, and those might act as potential motivations when people make decisions or act on certain issues (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

One interview participant described his experience in China: although being there, he did not have *ways of belonging*, and there was the main reason he migrated. While for another participant who had settled in Finland, he might be more feeling at home in China.

I went to Germany before the economic situation in...(certain part of China) was not so good, social environment was not so good, either. Lots of things I did not like...I was thinking to leave, to change an environment and left the place with so much unpleasant happenings. (Interviewee 4)

If there were good restaurant (that I would run) in China, definitely I choose China, not here. Since I did not have those in China, I came abroad to work. I did not have this in China. (Interviewee 5)

Several interviewees expressed that they identified with the way of how things done in Finland. For example, people have expressed that the Finnish social care

system might save lives and make a difference, or the government subsidy during Covid had helped the restaurant substantially, or that the relatively less stressed environment in Finland was good. Sometimes people also tended to generalize and make some essentialist remarks:

Anyway, many (good) small details indeed (such as the relatively more complete system of maintaining the house, etc.), I feel there are many good qualities with Finnish people. Also their indomitable quality is also very valuable. Their success is not accidentally, and there are a lot we could learn from. (Interviewee 7)

On the other hand, regarding political issues or social participation in Finland, while they are “being in Finland,” some interview respondents showed hesitation or low level of “belonging.” When asked how they would do if they need to vote for the decision to join the NATO (which was only a hypothetical question), many respondents replied that they would rather leave the decision to the “Finnish” people themselves.

4.3.5 Negotiating multiple identities

In this analysis, other than analysing people’s multiple cultural identities, I would also like to review how the interview respondents actively negotiate their multiple identities in different contexts, as well as the possible structural limits they might face. As noted by Bucholtz and Hall (2010), identity is partly intentional, and partly influenced by structures of different levels, meaning people’s agency in identity making is also limited by certain structures.

Depending on contexts, people might have different means of navigating their identities. When asked about their cultural identity, one respondent tactically positioned herself like this:

I have my root in China, and I love Finland, too. (Interviewee 1)

When reflecting on her way of doing things, one interviewee responded in the following way:

I will be, like...do things in a way that I could accept and also respecting others. Of course I would not approach things in a way only favoured by the Finnish, but it does not mean that I will totally stick to my way. (Interviewee 8)

People also tactically construct their identities according to different contexts. In the case of one of the respondents, she might be presenting herself from different aspects in various occasions. For example, she consumed Chinese media contents actively, while at daily life she chose to downplay the Chinese identity. In work environment when she was aware of the possible conflicts between cultural identity and professional identity, she would choose to prioritize the professional identity.

I have spoken enough English and Finnish in the work place and I feel the need to read some content in Chinese to relax, although English is not exhaustive for me. Still, reading some Chinese content is the most relaxing...I am a Chinese, but the way of doing things and thinking, is quite in the local way. When my parents came to Finland, although not speaking Finnish, they greeted with everyone. I would at most nod and then walk away. (Interviewee 7)

I do not present myself that strongly of the Chinese identity. Sometimes during business trip to another country, I will emphasize that I work as a person coming from Finland... The company is based in Finland, (in this way) I would possess relatively more authority at work (trip). The things I say would carry more weight, and I get more chances to speak and easier to be trusted. (Interviewee 7)

Another respondent also navigated between his cultural identity of being Chinese and identity as a local business owner and tax payer in the interview.

Maybe Finnish people and Chinese people, the idea of doing business might be a bit different. Yes. Chinese doing business by putting your focus totally to the work... Regarding the (social) benefits (in Finland)...from my perspective, not only the big enterprises, but small enterprises like us also contribute significantly, don't we? (Interviewee 6)

Apart from actively navigating among different cultural identities, it was shown in the interview data that Chinese transnationals in Finland also face various structural limits in constructing their identity. Compared to non-migrants, they also experience the constraints of multiple institutions and legal structures (Levitt & Glick Shiller, 2004). In Finland, language is the first major obstacle for many respondents. Some interviewee spoke directly of limited range of social circles because of not knowing the local language. The language issue could also make people sometimes feel socially excluded. For example, some interviewees mentioned that visiting the dentist without knowing the language and the local system would be so complicated that they would rather visit dentist when back in China. Even people with good Finnish skills also spoke of the same issue about visiting hospitals. Not knowing the Finnish language could also mean that people have limited access to the media content produced in Finnish and have limited chances of local matter participation.

I can not make a reservation (to the dentist). Don't know the language, either. I don't even know to which site the hospital door is open. It is complicated. The address here is like blah, blah...I do not understand. That is very difficult. (Interviewee 4)

Other than language issues which might affect their belonging to the local level, people also face obstacles from participating transnational activities. The censorship of China-based media platforms mean that people are not free to post any content that they would like. Moreover, the Covid pandemic further limited people's mobility. The restrictions put by nation states made people aware of the national boundary during Covid time, further demonstrating the role of nation states for migrants. This limits the transnational activities to a large extent.

In this chapter, I presented the findings and reviewed the findings using the related theories and previous studies. First, I pointed out some important features of

Chinese transnationals' media use and analysed the media use with the theory of polymedia. Next, I analysed the different navigating strategies of Chinese transnationals towards the competing narratives in the media. Last, I analysed the Chinese transnationals' cultural identity work from several different levels and briefly discussed how they navigated their multiple identities. In the next chapter, I will further analyse the data based on the findings and make some discussions by reflecting on the related literature.

5 DISCUSSION

In this study, I am investigating a group of Chinese transnationals in Finland about how they navigate the complex social media ecology and the competing narratives circulating around media and pose the following research questions: how Chinese transnationals in Finland use social media in their daily life, their navigating strategies regarding the competing narratives, and their cultural identities work in the navigating process. In this chapter, I will make further discussions about the findings from my qualitative interviews and online observation data. As I have posed three interrelated research questions and organized the findings in the order of the research questions, the discussion chapter will be following the same order. In the end of the chapter, I will also evaluate the limitations of this study and propose some possible directions for the future research on similar topics.

5.1.1 Social media use and dynamics of Chinese digital diaspora in Finland

Regarding the first research question of social media practice of Chinese transnationals in Finland, the data has shown that the social media is used widely by Chinese transnationals for various purposes. Chinese language media is the most important part in their media use. Among all the media platforms, Wechat is the most used by all the respondents and Youtube is also widely used by the transnationals. Besides those patterns, the Chinese transnationals are also concerned about the local issues around them in Finland and major global happenings.

The data show that the media ecology what the Chinese transnationals navigate is very diverse. Yin (2015) has divided the Chinese language media space into “home-land media” and “ethnic media” (pp. 556-572). Whereas the data of this study demonstrated that besides those, Chinese transnationals also consumed media contents in non-China based media space both in Chinese and other language, e.g. respondents read news in other languages and actively used Youtube in Chinese. Therefore,

studies about Chinese transnationals' media use should also include the non-China based media contents.

The findings from this study also point out that the media practice of Chinese transnationals in Finland corresponds to the theory of polymedia. Transnationals organize their polymedia repertoire based on their special needs (Madianou & Miller, 2013; Tagg & Lyons, 2021), tending to use China-based media for communications with other Chinese, while using Whatsapp and other non-China-based media for communication with non-Chinese. In their polymedia system, Wechat is the most important media platform for Chinese transnationals in Finland, but it does not dominate. This is different from the situation in China, that Wechat might serve as the dominating role and coordinator of polymedia for many people (Xiong & Liu, 2022). The findings also demonstrated that the Chinese transnationals' media use was not without constraints, corresponding to what was proposed by Madianou (2021) that polymedia was not a free-flowing space. Chinese transnationals faced the limits of language barriers, Chinese government's restrictions, etc. in their media practice.

The interviews and observation also indicate that the Chinese transnationals are gradually establishing their ethnic media space and creating their own discursive space with ethnic media in Finland. Previous research has focused more on social media dynamics in other Chinese diaspora groups such as in Australia, New Zealand, or Canada (Guo, 2022; Sun, 2021; Yin, 2015). While in Finland the development of ethnic media is more recent. This study has shown that ethnic media, especially Wechat group chat has becoming an important discursive place where Chinese transnationals have discussions and debates about some hot issues, doing business, sharing information, etc. Apart from Wechat group chat, some Wechat official accounts also start to grow their readers group as they provide local news feed, other services such as real estate broking, etc. to the diaspora group.

5.1.2 Transnationals' navigating strategies and their possible influences on non-migrants

About the second research question of how people navigate the competing narratives circulated around social media, I have identified the following strategies which are adopted by Chinese transnationals. Although their navigating strategies vary, the respondents were all aware of the competing narratives and opposing views from different sides. The respondents tended to check from multiple sources from all the media channels and used reference points and examples in their daily life to make sense about the situation and make their own evaluations, although they might reach very different conclusions. In terms of voicing their opinions, some respondents were more actively expressing themselves online while most respondents were more cautious when communicating with others in daily life, especially about topics such as the war in Ukraine to avoid conflicts. Then there were also cases when respondents struggled

about their positions as a Chinese who lived in Finland. Towards those competing narratives, people might react differently as well. In some case people tried to avoid reading too much about the irrational opinions online and in other case the respondent just tried to take himself out as a bystander. Most of the respondents also served as the in-betweenness role, actively telling the family and friends about what was really like in Finland and in China, what people in Finland or in China might think about certain issues, etc.

The findings also indicates that the Chinese transnationals are exerting influences on the media dynamics inside China through participating the digital diaspora. The data shows that as the Chinese transnationals navigate the competing narratives, they are also playing the mediating role between people who live in China and those who live in Finland (Sun, 2021). Previous studies about digital diaspora focused more on the dynamics of digital diaspora and its role in the settled society, as well as its role on the identity building of transnationals (Guo, 2022; Sun et al., 2011; Yu & Sun, 2019), while the data from this study also indicates that digital diaspora might influence the media dynamics inside China. Chinese digital diaspora connects the migrants and non-migrants directly within the same platforms. As media is censored and many non-China based media platforms are not accessible in China, the diaspora people have the affordances to access different media freely. They also physically live outside of China and have experiences around the world. In this way digital diaspora is an important bridge which links China to the outside world. When communicating with people who live in China and through the media, Chinese transnationals bring their narratives with them. This might in one way or another have influences on social media users in China. For instance, the Chinese transnational influencer actively told the Douyin audience what is really like in Finland; the interview respondents explained the Covid policies in other countries to people in China; and many Chinese transnationals told their real experiences of Covid positive to friends and family as well as to the online audience in China that the situation might not be as serious as depicted by lots of media in China, etc. Those are examples of how the digital diaspora might impact the dynamics in social media in China.

5.1.3 Multiple cultural identities and the influences of wider social forces

The last research question about the cultural identity work of Chinese transnationals in Finland is also the focus of discussion in this thesis. I have analysed the Chinese transnationals' cultural identity from several multi-interconnected levels. Apart from manifesting a strong Chinese identity in the interviews, at the same time the respondents also presented their identity as being a transnational-somewhere in between, as well as the identity of being a local in Finland. With their transnational experiences, the respondents' sense of belonging was fluid instead of being unchanging. They

tactically navigated their multiple cultural identities in different contexts. At the same time, they also faced different structural limits in the identity construction.

The features of how Chinese transnationals navigate their multiple cultural identities while facing multiple structural limits in their identity construction correspond to Li and Kroon (2021)'s study about the young people of Chinese heritage in Netherlands, that those young people presented both "inhabited and ascribed identities" (p. 137): while they faced various imposed identity by others and the society, they also navigated their polycentric identity by deploying their complex repertoire of linguistic and communicative resources.

In addition, the findings suggest that Chinese transnationals' identity work is influenced by the wider social forces (Glick Schiller, 2018; Levitt & Glick Shiller, 2004) and ideological processes (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). For Chinese transnationals in Finland, there are a series of significant backgrounds which might have profound influences in their daily life, such as China's rise to power, the ideological and technological war between China and the West, as well as the multiculturalism policy of Finland. All of those have found ways to manifest as different narratives in social media, which people need to navigate in their daily life. Interview data show that the competing narratives and ideologies have been shaping people's identity in one way or another. The respondents took different narratives to themselves and expressed opposing views towards certain topics, such as the war towards Ukraine, their belonging to China and Finland, etc.

The findings also show that specific historical conjunctures and happenings would have manifestations on people's identity work (Feldman-Bianco, 2018; Glick Schiller, 2018). The Covid pandemic was such an example as it highlighted the immobility of migrants, especially in the case of Chinese. Chinese transnationals had not been able to travel freely to mainland China for a long term. The same was the case for people who live in mainland China, and their international travelling possibilities were largely restricted. The interview data indicated that it influenced people's opinions concerning the Chinese government, people's motivation of migration, and identification of being a Chinese. In the interview, many participants have also expressed their change of opinion about Covid restrictions in China. Another such example is the war in Ukraine, about which the respondents might have difficulties to position themselves, since there might be contradictions of stances when they present themselves as a Chinese and when they present themselves as a local in Finland. A couple of respondents also indicated that they had difficulties to discuss about the war topic with other people in Finland, since the popular narratives in China and in Finland were rather different, and they were aware that others might view them as representing the stance of China.

5.1.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

Instead of focusing on one aspect, in this study I discussed several main topics, including the media practice of Chinese transnationals in Finland, how they navigated the competing narratives, as well as their cultural identity work. This is also related to the limitations of this study, that the investigation of each topic is not at a very detailed level or covering all aspects. Also, the eight participants I interviewed were only limited to a small scope. Nevertheless, the qualitative interviews and the online observations data could still prove to be representative. In addition, in this study my intention was to portray a more all-round picture of the social media practice of Chinese transnationals in Finland and how they navigated the competing narratives and the in-betweenness, and the study was able to achieve the goals. Not only does it provide a good understanding of the social media life of Chinese migrants in Finland, but also it offers a fresh perspective of investigating the transnationals' identity work through their navigating of competing narratives and conflicting ideologies embedded in media and their daily life.

To gain a deeper understanding of the similar topics, future studies could investigate a single topic and conduct more in-depth research. For example, it could prove to be meaningful if studies would focus on the activities of Chinese transnationals in the digital diaspora and analyse the dynamics there, or investigate how some other groups of people navigate the competing narratives and analyse their cultural identity work. Besides, since in this study respondents were of a limited scale, future studies focusing on respondents from other groups, such as Chinese international students in Finland, or Chinese migrants who have lived in Finland for longer term, etc., could also be helpful in the understanding of the Chinese transnationals in Finland.

6 CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to explore the dynamics of the social media use of Chinese transnationals in Finland. By focusing on how people navigate the competing narratives and ideologies presented in social media, the study asks questions about how the Chinese transnationals use social media, what strategies they adopt when facing the competing narratives, as well as what kind of cultural identity people construct in the process.

The study is qualitative in nature and two main approaches are adopted. I have used qualitative interviews and asked from eight participants about their social media use habit and their opinions and strategies concerning opposing narratives. At the same time, I have also done online observation and followed closely the hot topics on social media in order to refine the interview topics as well as to understand the issues in a deeper way. For the data analysis, I have used open coding and constant comparison technique (Kolb, 2012; Memon et al., 2017) in order to identify the themes. The data analysis has been guided by multiple theoretical frameworks such as transnational migration (Feldman-Bianco, 2018; Glick Schiller et al., 1994; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), polymedia (Madianou, 2021; Madianou & Miller, 2013; Tagg & Lyons, 2021), identity principles of Bucholtz and Hall (2010) and De Fina (2015)'s identity analysis through narratives.

The adopted methodology proved to be suitable for answering the research questions. The findings of this study suggest that: 1) Chinese transnationals in Finland use much Chinese language media content; their use of Wechat is prevalent and Youtube is popular among them; they tactically manage their media repertoire for various purposes; ethnic media via Wechat channels is growing among Chinese diaspora. 2) Chinese transnationals in Finland use multiple strategies to make sense about the competing narratives and make judgements; they are tactically about how and if they would express themselves; the transnationals might exert influences on non-migrants through Chinese digital diaspora. 3) In the process of navigating the competing narratives, Chinese transnationals in Finland construct a multi-level cultural identity and they tactically navigate the multiple identities; they also face multiple limits in

constructing their cultural identity; their identity work is influenced by wider social changes in Finland, in China, and around the world.

Due to the scope of this study, I have focused on selecting interview participants who had settled in Finland for more than three years and intended to stay in the future. It did not include Chinese international students, or Chinese who were from elsewhere than mainland China, etc. Therefore, future studies could focus on other group of Chinese transnationals in Finland, such as Chinese students in Finland, which might discover different patterns. In addition, since the current study was about how people navigated competing narratives from social media, it discussed several topics, but did not delve deeper into all the themes. Future studies could also focus on one of themes and analyse in a deeper level. For example, how Chinese transnationals in Finland construct their discursive space in Wechat group chat or on other platforms; how the competing narratives affect other groups in other parts of the world, etc. Those topics might yield useful results as well.

Nevertheless, this study was able to give a general review of the social media use of Chinese transnationals in Finland, discuss their cultural identity work, as well as explore the dynamics in Chinese digital diaspora and their transnational social fields. The earlier studies regarding Chinese transnationals were mainly based in the traditional migration countries where there was already large Chinese diaspora. The migration situation and the social dynamics in Finland and Nordic countries differ significantly. This study discussed the specific situations of Chinese transnationals in Finland and their social media practice. Besides, against the current background of world politics that people facing ever more competing narratives and ideologies, especially in the case of the Chinese transnationals who live outside of China (Sun, 2021), it makes sense to analyse how they navigate the social media ecology and how their identity construction is influenced in this process.

In summary, this thesis might add insights to the understanding of Chinese migrants in Finland about their media realities and their identity work. It might also be helpful for policy makers as well as researchers in gaining qualitative data for migration situation in Finland. Theoretically, it might also add value to the discussion of the Chinese digital diaspora and the identity work of Chinese transnationals. In addition, it might add new perspective to the study of migrants' identity by discussing how the transnationals navigate the competing narratives from social media.

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