

Warm Power in the Digital Age: Niche Communication and Thai-Localized Narratives in Guangxi’s Cross-Border Social Media Practices

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Abstract

This study examines how local mainstream media in China construct “warm power” through localized international communication practices, taking Guangxi’s Thailand-oriented communication as the primary case, with Yunnan’s Myanmar-oriented practices as a comparative reference. Against the backdrop of deepening China–ASEAN relations and the limitations of traditional soft power in the social media era, the study adopts a qualitative case-based design integrating document analysis, qualitative content analysis, and comparative interpretation. The findings reveal that Guangxi’s international communication has evolved from fragmented media operations toward a coordinated warm power ecosystem characterized by strategic hub coordination, platform-based audience segmentation, culturally localized narratives, and sustained affective interaction. Through Thai-localized storytelling, people-centered everyday narratives, and integrated online–offline engagement, Guangxi’s media practices have shifted the logic of influence from symbolic image display to relationship-oriented communication, fostering emotional resonance, trust, and early forms of cross-cultural affective communities. Comparative observations from Yunnan further demonstrate that cultural proximity, audience segmentation, and “warm interaction” are key enabling conditions for warm power diffusion in Southeast Asia. Theoretically, this study advances the concept of warm power as a form of relational influence grounded in affective connectivity and sustained interaction, enriching international communication theory with a regionally embedded perspective. Practically, it highlights the unique role of local media as affective interfaces in China’s international communication system and offers insights for enhancing people-to-people connectivity and cross-cultural understanding in the ASEAN context.

Keywords

China-ASEAN Communication; Cross-Cultural Affective Communities; Local Media; Niche Communication; Warm Power

INTRODUCTION

With the deepening of China–ASEAN relations and the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), international communication in China’s border and coastal regions has gained increasing strategic importance. As a key hub connecting China with Southeast Asia, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (hereafter “Guangxi”) plays a crucial role not only in local image-building but also in advancing China’s regional diplomacy and people-to-people connectivity. In recent years, China’s central leadership has repeatedly emphasized the need to enhance international communication capacity and effectiveness, providing a clear strategic orientation for local media’s outward communication practices.

Within this broader context, Chinese local media in provinces such as Guangxi, Yunnan, Guangdong, and Fujian have actively explored precision-oriented international communication strategies toward ASEAN countries. Leveraging geographical proximity and cultural ties, these regions have developed multi-platform, multilingual communication networks. Guangxi, in particular, occupies a unique position as the only Chinese region sharing both land and maritime borders with ASEAN countries. Through initiatives such as the China–ASEAN Media Port and the China–ASEAN Information Port, Guangxi has gradually emerged as an important information hub for Southeast Asia, offering a valuable empirical site for examining localized international communication practices.

Meanwhile, the theoretical paradigm of international communication is undergoing significant transformation. The concept of soft power, introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr., has long emphasized attraction through culture, values, and foreign policy. However, in a global communication environment increasingly shaped by social media, fragmented information flows, and heightened cultural sensitivity, the one-way, image-centered logic of traditional soft power has shown clear limitations. International communication effectiveness now depends less on symbolic display and more on the ability to establish emotional resonance, mutual trust, and sustained relational engagement with target audiences.

Against this backdrop, the concept of “warm power” has emerged as an important extension of soft power theory. Rather than replacing soft power, warm power highlights the affective and relational dimensions of influence, emphasizing empathy, emotional interaction, and people-centered communication. It seeks to foster durable goodwill and psychological closeness through culturally resonant narratives, everyday-life storytelling, and interactive communication practices. This relational turn reflects a

broader shift from image-oriented persuasion to relationship-oriented communication in the digital era.

Guangxi's Thailand-oriented communication practices offer a particularly instructive case for examining this transformation. Through social media platforms, audiovisual co-productions, localized storytelling, and sustained audience interaction, Guangxi's mainstream media have gradually moved beyond symbolic national representation toward the cultivation of cross-cultural affective ties. In parallel, practices in neighboring provinces such as Yunnan—especially its Myanmar-oriented, livelihood-focused communication—provide a useful comparative reference, highlighting how localized strategies can reinforce emotional identification and relational trust.

Focusing on Guangxi's social media communication targeting Thailand, this study addresses the following core question: How can local mainstream media transition from soft power-based image display to warm power-based relationship construction through niche-oriented narrative strategies and sustained affective interaction? Theoretically, this study seeks to enrich the conceptual framework of warm power by grounding it in regional and platform-specific practices. Empirically, it aims to distill the "Guangxi experience" and offer insights for enhancing China's international communication capacity in Southeast Asia, particularly in fostering people-to-people connectivity and cross-cultural understanding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Soft Power to Warm Power: The Evolution, Rationale, and Process of a Theoretical Shift

Scholarly discussions of international influence have long been structured around the binary of hard power and soft power. Joseph S. Nye Jr. conceptualized soft power as a country's ability to shape others' preferences through cultural attraction, political values, and the perceived legitimacy of foreign policy rather than coercion or material inducement (Nye, 1990, 2004). By foregrounding intangible resources such as culture and values, soft power theory significantly influenced cultural diplomacy and international communication practices in the post-Cold War era (Nye, 2011).

However, the deepening of globalization and the rise of digital media have fundamentally altered the ecology of international communication. Contemporary societies increasingly resemble what Beck (2009) terms a "global risk society," characterized by value pluralism, information overload, and declining institutional trust. In such contexts, communication

strategies framed as “attraction” but embedded with strategic intent may provoke audience suspicion, resistance, or even oppositional decoding (Hall, 1980). Simultaneously, technological empowerment has enhanced audience agency, as global audiences increasingly expect egalitarian dialogue, emotional sincerity, and participatory interaction rather than one-way symbolic projection.

These transformations expose the limitations of traditional soft power theory. While soft power emphasizes the possession and display of cultural and ideological resources, it tends to understate relational construction and emotional connectivity within communication processes. As a result, its explanatory capacity for contemporary, platform-based, audience-centered international communication has become increasingly constrained.

Against this backdrop, the concept of warm power has emerged as both a theoretical response and a practical innovation in international communication research. The core logic of warm power lies in redefining communication effectiveness—from visibility and message transmission to emotional understanding, trust formation, and identity-based acceptance (Du, 2024). This shift resonates with China’s emphasis on building a “community with a shared future for mankind” and constructing a “credible, appealing, and respectable” national image, which require international communication to move beyond image display toward sustained people-to-people connectivity.

Existing scholarship conceptualizes warm power as an extension and refinement of soft power that integrates affective and relational dimensions. At the level of value orientation, warm power emphasizes benevolence, co-existence, and respect for cultural diversity, seeking emotional common ground through universally resonant narratives (Du, 2024). At the level of communication process, it highlights empathy mechanisms, requiring communicators to understand audiences’ emotional states and cognitive frameworks in order to design culturally responsive content and interaction (An & Huang, 2025). At the level of communicative outcomes, warm power aims to establish stable affective relationships and psychological closeness, thereby laying an emotional foundation for deeper value alignment and policy understanding (Zuo, 2016). In this sense, warm power represents a relational communication philosophy oriented toward dissolving barriers and fostering durable mutual trust.

Niche Communication: Theoretical Connotation and Its Integration with Warm Power and Audience Segmentation

As a core theoretical framework of this study, niche communication originates from the "niche theory" in ecology and is gradually applied to the field of communication research in the context of digital media and audience diversification (Dimmick, 2003). The core connotation of niche communication refers to the communication strategy that abandons the homogeneous "broadcast communication" model, and accurately matches the information needs, media usage habits and cultural cognitive characteristics of specific audience groups through audience niche positioning, content niche customization and platform niche selection, so as to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of communication (Wang, 2025). In the social media era, the essence of niche communication is to realize the "precision matching" between communication subjects and target audiences, and its core characteristics are audience segmentation refinement, content positioning differentiation and platform operation specialization.

The connection between niche communication and warm power construction is embodied in three core logical layers, which form a mutually reinforcing theoretical relationship: first, niche communication is the basic implementation path of warm power. The core of warm power lies in establishing emotional resonance and relational trust with target audiences, which requires abandoning the one-way symbolic transmission of traditional soft power. Niche communication realizes the accurate reach of communication content to specific audience groups through refined audience segmentation, which is the premise of triggering emotional resonance and the foundation for the construction of warm power. Second, warm power is the core value goal of niche communication in international communication practice. In the context of China-ASEAN international communication, niche communication is not only a technical strategy of "precision transmission", but also needs to take the construction of cross-cultural affective relationship and the formation of warm power as the ultimate goal, which avoids the alienation of niche communication into a pure "tool-oriented" transmission behavior. Third, the integration of niche communication and warm power forms a new theoretical model of international communication, which breaks the limitation of traditional soft power research that separates "transmission strategy" from "influence value".

Niche communication and audience segmentation are interrelated and mutually differentiated, and the two jointly form the theoretical foundation of warm power construction: on the one hand, audience segmentation is the

core premise and basic link of niche communication. Niche communication takes the accurate segmentation of audience groups as the starting point, and the scientificity of audience segmentation directly determines the effectiveness of niche communication practice; on the other hand, niche communication is the deepening and extension of audience segmentation theory in the digital era. Traditional audience segmentation theory mostly stays at the demographic and behavioral level, while niche communication further combines the psychological, cultural and cognitive characteristics of audiences on the basis of segmentation, and realizes the whole-process customization of communication content, platform and interaction, which makes audience segmentation more operational in international communication practice.

In the context of China-ASEAN international communication, existing studies have initially explored the application of niche communication in regional media practice, but there are two obvious limitations: first, the research on niche communication is mostly limited to the technical level of "platform segmentation and content customization", and lacks the integration with the latest international communication theories such as warm power; second, the empirical research on niche communication is mostly based on the macro-national media perspective, and lacks the in-depth analysis of the niche communication practice of border provincial media with geographical and cultural proximity advantages (Zhang & Liu, 2025). This study fills the above research gaps by constructing a niche communication-warm power integration analytical framework and taking Guangxi's Thailand-oriented social media communication as the empirical case.

Audience Segmentation and Cultural Proximity as Practical Foundations

The effective construction of warm power depends on refined audience insight and cultural sensitivity. Audience segmentation theory provides a methodological foundation by emphasizing that contemporary audiences are heterogeneous and should be differentiated based on demographic characteristics, psychological traits, and media-use patterns, with tailored content delivered accordingly (Chen & Li, 2025; Yu, 2020). In international communication, this requires abandoning homogeneous, self-centered messaging strategies and instead addressing the specific needs and interests of diverse social groups within target societies.

The theory of cultural proximity further clarifies the direction of such segmentation. Hoskins and Mirus (1988) argue that media products experience "cultural discount" in cross-national circulation due to linguistic,

institutional, and value differences. To mitigate this effect, international communication must pursue cultural proximity through localization not only in language, but also in narrative structure, symbolic systems, and value presentation. Effective localization aligns communicative content with the cognitive frameworks and affective expectations of target audiences, thereby enhancing resonance and acceptance.

Empirical studies of China's communication toward Southeast Asia demonstrate that localized narratives and segmented strategies significantly improve engagement and emotional identification. By activating shared cultural references and familiar frames of comparison, localized communication reduces psychological distance and enables warm power to take root in specific national contexts.

Research on China's Regional International Communication

Research on China's international communication has expanded rapidly, yet several limitations remain. At the theoretical level, existing studies largely focus on national-level soft power strategies or macro-policy interpretation. Although warm power has been introduced as an emerging paradigm, it is often discussed in abstract or normative terms, with limited integration into empirically grounded regional case studies (Shen & Jin, 2023; Du, 2024). Systematic analyses that operationalize warm power within concrete country- or region-specific practices remain relatively scarce.

At the level of research objects, scholarly attention to frontier provinces such as Guangxi and Yunnan has increased, reflecting their strategic roles in China–Southeast Asia communication. However, many studies focus on single media platforms or isolated sectors, such as audiovisual translation or social media operations, without adopting an ecological perspective that integrates media institutions, publishing industries, people-to-people exchanges, and platform environments within a unified analytical framework.

From a practical perspective, regional international communication has already developed into a multi-channel and multi-actor landscape. Local media have integrated traditional and digital platforms, diversified content forms, and expanded transnational cooperation. Nevertheless, existing research often treats these practices as parallel cases rather than as interconnected components of a co-evolving communication ecosystem.

This study addresses these gaps by advancing warm power from a conceptual proposition to an empirically operational analytical framework. Focusing on Guangxi's communication toward Thailand, with comparative

reference to Yunnan's communication toward Myanmar, it examines how diverse practices interact to form a relational ecosystem of warm power. By integrating narrative strategies, platform operations, publishing-based cultural output, and online–offline interactive activities, the study demonstrates how warm power becomes concretized and effective through strategic coordination and ecosystem construction. In doing so, it contributes a regionally grounded and dynamically integrated perspective to the broader literature on international communication with Chinese characteristics.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, case-based research design to examine how local mainstream media construct warm power through localized international communication practices. Focusing on Guangxi's Thailand-oriented communication, with comparative reference to Yunnan's Myanmar-oriented practices, the research integrates document analysis, content analysis, and comparative interpretation to explore the mechanisms of affective and relational communication in a regional context.

1. Population and Samples

1.1 Population

The target population of this study consists of international communication practices conducted by Chinese local mainstream media toward Southeast Asian countries, particularly through digital platforms, publishing initiatives, and offline exchange activities. This population includes media institutions, official overseas social media accounts, and cultural communication projects operating within the China–ASEAN communication framework.

Given the exploratory and theory-building nature of the study, purposive sampling was employed. Guangxi was selected as the primary case due to its unique geopolitical position as China's only region with both land and maritime borders with ASEAN countries, as well as its institutionalized international communication platforms such as the China–ASEAN Media Port and the China–ASEAN Information Port. Yunnan's Myanmar-oriented communication practices were incorporated as a comparative reference case to enhance analytical depth and contextual robustness.

1.2 Samples

The research sample includes:

- 1) Representative overseas social media accounts operated by Guangxi mainstream media and governmental communication institutions;

- 2) Selected audiovisual productions, short-video content, and multi-lingual media outputs targeting Thai audiences;
- 3) Publishing projects, cultural exchange initiatives, and institutional documents related to Thailand-oriented communication;
- 4) Secondary materials on Yunnan's Myanmar-oriented communication for comparative analysis.

Rather than relying on numerical representativeness, the study emphasizes analytical saturation and thematic relevance, ensuring that sampled materials adequately reflect the structural features and strategic patterns of warm power construction.

2. Research Instrument

The primary research instruments include:

2.1 Qualitative Content Analysis Framework

A coding framework was developed to analyze narrative themes, emotional orientation, localization strategies, audience segmentation, and interaction modes. Coding categories were derived inductively from the warm power literature and refined through repeated reading of media texts.

2.2 Document Analysis Protocol

Policy documents, institutional reports, project descriptions, and official media releases were analyzed to identify strategic objectives, organizational coordination mechanisms, and institutional support structures underlying international communication practices.

2.3 Comparative Analytical Matrix

A structured comparison matrix was used to contrast Guangxi–Thailand and Yunnan–Myanmar communication practices across dimensions such as platform use, narrative localization, affective interaction, and ecosystem construction.

To enhance validity, the study employed data triangulation across platforms, media forms, and institutional levels. Reliability was strengthened through iterative coding, category refinement, and consistency checks across data sources.

3. Collection of Data

Data were collected over a continuous observation period spanning multiple stages of Guangxi's Thailand-oriented international communication development. Materials were gathered from:

- 3.1 Official overseas social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, TikTok);

3.2 Published audiovisual content and multilingual media products;
 3.3 Publishing projects, cultural exchange records, and institutional reports;

3.4 Publicly accessible secondary literature and media analyses on Yunnan's Myanmar-oriented communication.

Data collection followed a non-interventionist approach, focusing on naturally occurring communication practices and publicly available materials. The duration and longitudinal scope of data gathering enabled the identification of both short-term interaction patterns and longer-term affective relationship formation.

4. Ethical Approval

This study does not involve direct interaction with human subjects, personal data collection, or experimental manipulation. All analyzed materials are derived from publicly accessible media content, official documents, and institutional publications. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, the research adheres to established academic ethical standards, including responsible data use, accurate representation, and proper attribution of sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ecological Landscape: From Fragmented Actors to an Empathy Network

Guangxi's international communication toward Thailand has evolved into a multi-layered warm power ecosystem characterized by coordinated actors, platform-based audience reach, and deep cultural carriers. Rather than relying on isolated media outputs, this ecosystem integrates strategic coordination, overseas social media matrices, publishing-based cultural depth, and inward-oriented services into an internally coherent empathy network. Comparable developments in Yunnan's Myanmar-oriented communication—marked by multilingual platforms, segmented audiences, and localized interaction—further indicate a shared trajectory among Chinese local media toward Southeast Asia.

1) From Media-Driven Operations to Strategic Hub Coordination

In its initial stage, Guangxi's Thailand-oriented communication was dominated by parallel operations of provincial mainstream media, including Guangxi Radio and Television Station and Guangxi Daily. These actors launched international channels and overseas social media accounts such as GXRTV Int'l Channel and Beautiful Guangxi, accumulating practical

experience but lacking systemic coordination (Mo & Gao, 2025). Fragmentation limited brand coherence and affective accumulation.

The establishment of the Guangxi International Communication Center in 2024 marked a shift toward systematized coordination. Led by the Publicity Department of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Party Committee and jointly operated by major provincial media, the Center functions as a strategic hub for ASEAN-oriented communication. By integrating resources, aligning narratives, and cultivating flagship brands such as Hello Guangxi and Splendors of Guangxi, it transformed fragmented outputs into coordinated brand-based communication (Wei, 2024). This hub model parallels Yunnan’s integration of provincial media resources and reflects a shared trend toward centralized coordination in regional warm power construction.

2) *Overseas Social Media Matrices as Precision Affective Frontiers*

Under strategic coordination, Guangxi has constructed a diversified overseas social media matrix serving as the primary frontier for affective outreach. Rather than operating as isolated accounts, the matrix aligns platform affordances with audience segmentation, covering Thai audiences’ information, entertainment, and social interaction needs (see Table 1). Platforms such as Facebook and YouTube emphasize news, culture, and interaction, while TikTok prioritizes light, youth-oriented short videos, ensuring both breadth and emotional immediacy.

Yunnan has developed a similar yet contextually adapted model through Burmese-language accounts on YouTube, TikTok, and X, targeting Myanmar audiences with localized content. Together, these cases confirm the effectiveness of platform-based segmentation as a tactical foundation for warm power diffusion.

Table 1. Core Overseas Social Media Platform Matrix of Guangxi Mainstream Media

Platform	Representative Account	Operating Institution	Main Languages	Functional Positioning and the Manifestation of <i>Warm Power</i>
Facebook / YouTube	Hello Guangxi	Guangxi International Communication Center	English, Vietnamese	A comprehensive display and in-depth interaction platform. It disseminates news, culture and tourism, and people-centered stories, while fostering everyday affective connections through comments, livestreaming, and community engagement.

YouTube / Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / X (Twitter)	Discover Guangxi	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Department of Culture and Tourism	English, Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Khmer, Burmese, Indonesian, etc.	A youth-oriented empathy space. By employing creative, fashionable, and light-hearted short videos, the account reaches ASEAN youth audiences and stimulates affective resonance through the language of popular culture.
YouTube	Beautiful Guangxi	Guangxi Daily	Chinese, English	Dedicated to vividly presenting Guangxi's natural landscapes, ethnic cultures, economic development, and tourism appeal through original multimedia content (videos, images, and articles), thereby telling the "Guangxi story" to international audiences.
Radio / YouTube	<i>Guangxi North Bay Radio</i>	Guangxi Radio and Television Station	English, Thai, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin	As a multilingual regional international broadcasting service, <i>Voice of the Beibu Gulf</i> covers ASEAN countries via shortwave, medium wave, FM, and digital platforms. Its core mission is to disseminate China–ASEAN regional cooperation narratives and enhance mutual trust and friendship.
YouTube / Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / X (Twitter)	Splendors of Guangxi	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Department of Culture and Tourism	English, Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Khmer, Burmese, Indonesian, etc.	Promotes Guangxi's tourism resources, ethnic cultures, and festivals through an integrated media matrix. Core content includes iconic natural and cultural assets such as the Li River and Yulong River landscapes in Guilin, the volcanic and marine ecology of Weizhou Island, the Huashan Rock Art of the Zuojiang River, Detian Waterfall, and Mingshi Pastoral Scenery, contributing to the branding of Guangxi as a world-class tourism destination.
YouTube	<i>Amazing Liuzhou</i>	Liuzhou International Communication Center	Chinese, English	Showcases Liuzhou's natural scenery, industrial achievements, and ethnic cultures through images and short videos. Content centers on the city's signature elements—automobile manufacturing, river ecology, <i>luosifen</i> cuisine, and ethnic traditions—using internationalized narratives to tell localized Chinese stories.

Source: Compiled by the author

According to the latest operation data of Guangxi mainstream media's overseas social media accounts (January-February 2026) released by Guangxi International Communication Center, the Thai-language content of Discover Guangxi account on TikTok has achieved a total exposure of 120 million+ and an interaction rate of 18.6% in two months, of which the short video content of "Thai-Chinese food culture exchange" and "China-Thailand high-speed rail cooperation" has become the top ten popular content of ASEAN-related topics on TikTok Thai station. The high interaction effect is attributed to the precise niche communication strategy of the account, which takes Thai Gen Z as the core audience and customizes light and interesting content in line with Thai youth's media usage habits.

3) Deep Cultural Carriers: Publishing as Value Consolidation

While social media enables rapid affective stimulation, the publishing sector consolidates warm power through sustained intellectual and cultural exchange. Guangxi's publishing institutions have advanced Thailand-oriented communication via platforms, physical spaces, and flagship projects.

Platform-based initiatives such as the China–ASEAN Copyright Trade Service Platform and the Relay–ASEAN Children's Book Alliance have facilitated extensive copyright cooperation while cultivating shared professional identity and emotional continuity. Physical spaces, exemplified by the Duxiu Bookstore at Prince of Songkla University, function as immersive "cultural living rooms," enabling participatory and everyday experiences of Chinese culture. Flagship projects—including the Modern Thai–Chinese Dictionary and the China–Southeast Asia Bronze Drum series—embody respect for linguistic and historical commonality, transforming academic collaboration into affective and civilizational dialogue (Chen & Li, 2025). Collectively, these deep carriers provide the rational and value-based grounding necessary for sustainable affective resonance.

In 2025, Guangxi Normal University Press Group published a special report "Taking publishing as a link to build an "overpass" for cultural exchange and mutual learning —— Exploration and practice of cultural exchange between Guangxi Normal University Press and ASEAN", which pointed out that Guangxi's publishing institutions launched the "China-ASEAN Niche Cultural Communication Series" during 2022 to 2025, focusing on the small and beautiful cultural themes such as ASEAN ethnic folk customs, traditional handicrafts and food culture, and adopted the "small book + short video" niche communication model to realize the accurate transmission of deep cultural content to specific ASEAN audience groups, which has become a new practice of Guangxi's warm power construction

through publishing carriers.

4) Inward-Oriented Services and Bidirectional Circulation

Warm power ecosystems also require inward-oriented communication serving ASEAN nationals residing in China. Guangxi's multilingual broadcasting and localized video platforms provide Thai and other ASEAN audiences with culturally familiar information environments, enhancing lived experience and emotional identification. Such individuals subsequently act as authentic interpreters and secondary disseminators through interpersonal networks.

This bidirectional mechanism—mirrored in Yunnan's Burmese-language services for Myanmar nationals—forms an endogenous circulation loop of “inward service— affective accumulation—outward diffusion,” enabling warm power to move beyond one-way projection toward sustainable people-to-people connectivity.

In February 2026, Guangxi North Bay Radio launched a special Thai-language program "ASEAN Friends in Guangxi" for Thai nationals living in China, which takes the daily life, work and study of Thai people in Guangxi as the core content, and sets up an interactive section of "Thai-Chinese Life Sharing". The program is broadcast on both radio and Thai social media platforms, and has become an important carrier of Guangxi's inward-oriented niche communication. According to the program's operation data, more than 80% of the audience are Thai nationals living in China and Chinese people who have exchanges with Thailand, and the program has effectively enhanced the emotional identification of Thai audiences in China with Guangxi, and further promoted the bidirectional circulation of warm power.

Core Strategies: Thai-Localized Narratives, Audience Segmentation, and “Warm Interaction”

Guangxi's warm power construction toward Thailand rests on three interlocking strategies: Thai-localized narratives, refined audience segmentation, and integrated online—offline warm interaction. Together, they translate strategic intent into resonant communicative practice.

1) Thai-Localized Narratives

Thai-localized narrative functions as the core grammar of Guangxi's communication. First, at the content level, narratives shift from macro national themes to everyday life and shared regional concerns. Audiovisual works such as the Thai-dubbed drama *Daughter of the Mountains* and the micro-series *Sawadee—Adventures in Thailand* foreground universal human values and youth collaboration (Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

Radio and Television Bureau, 2025; Li, Huang, Qi, & Wang, 2025). Publishing projects similarly translate Zhuang epics and shared cultural symbols into accessible narratives (*Chen & Li, 2025*).

Second, at the discursive level, cultural translation replaces direct assertion. Analogies between Guilin and Krabi or the linkage of China's high-speed rail with Thailand's future infrastructure transform national development into locally relevant meaning (Wei, 2024). Third, communicative actors adopt softened, personified roles—engaging Thai audiences as “friends” rather than official representatives. Finally, deep textual carriers such as dictionaries and children's literature sustain long-term respect and understanding, enabling affective resonance to evolve into value identification.

In January 2026, Guangxi Radio and Television Station and Thailand's Thai Public Broadcasting Service (TPBS) jointly launched the micro-documentary series "China-Thailand Niche Cultural Exploration", which takes 10 small and beautiful cultural themes such as Thai silk weaving and Chinese Zhuang brocade, Thai mango sticky rice and Chinese osmanthus cake as the core content, and adopts the niche communication strategy of "small theme + deep exploration + cross-border co-creation". The documentary has been broadcast on both Chinese and Thai mainstream media and social media platforms, and has been highly praised by the audience and media critics, which is a new practice of Guangxi's media to construct warm power through Thai-localized niche narrative.

2) Refined Audience Segmentation

Rejecting undifferentiated broadcasting, Guangxi employs multi-tiered segmentation. Platform-based segmentation aligns TikTok with Generation Z, LINE with localized Thai communities, and Facebook/YouTube with broader demographics. Interest-based segmentation tailors content to children, scholars, and business professionals through animation, academic series, and industry forums (Huang, 2023).

At a higher level, segmentation extends into cooperative and industrial integration. Projects such as Sawadee—Adventures in Thailand combine micro-series production, tourism promotion, and trade, transforming audiences into participants across experiential chains. Comparable practices in Yunnan's Myanmar-oriented communication further demonstrate the synergy between warm power and regional development.

3) “Warm Interaction” Strategies

Warm power ultimately materializes through lived interaction. Guangxi operationalizes warm interaction via three mechanisms. Flash events and co-creation—such as the Bangkok street performance of New Folk Song

Gala—generate intense shared emotional experiences and amplify them through social media circulation (Wei, 2024). Professional mutual learning initiatives foster peer trust through journalist training and intangible cultural heritage exchanges. Immersive visits invite Thai media professionals and influencers to experience Guangxi firsthand, transferring narrative agency to credible first-person storytellers.

Together, these practices complete the transition from information transmission to relationship construction. Parallel developments in Yunnan’s Myanmar-oriented communication confirm that warm interaction is essential for affective community formation.

Effect Evolution: From Image Display to Affective Community Construction

Guangxi’s Thailand-oriented communication effects exhibit a staged evolutionary trajectory. In the initial stage, depoliticized lifestyle content enhances visibility and acceptability, generating cognitive goodwill (Nye, 2004;). Interaction remains low-involvement. In the intermediate stage, Thai-localized narratives and two-way engagement deepen affective identification through perceived similarity and participatory interaction (Hall, 1997; Jenkins et al., 2013). Audiences begin to seek further engagement, such as travel information and cultural participation.

In the advanced stage, sustained interaction fosters affective communities. Audiences participate in meaning production, adopt inclusive “we” narratives, and form emotionally grounded networks. Comparable developments in Yunnan—such as the *paukphaw* discourse in Myanmar-oriented communication—demonstrate that such outcomes exceed traditional soft power and align with warm power’s relational logic.

Overall, this effect evolution underscores local media’s distinctive advantage in international communication: influence derives not from scale, but from sustained affective depth. Precision-oriented, localized, and interaction-driven practices enable China’s international communication to shift from image presentation toward durable relationship construction.

CONCLUSION

This study selected four classes of non-English major undergraduates as participants. Three classes were assigned to experimental conditions involving different languaging interventions, while one class served as a control group without any motivational intervention. The results indicated that: (1) Participants’ L2 motivation was at a moderate to high level both before and after

the intervention. (2) Different types of languaging activities had varying effects on L2 motivation, with oral languaging emerging as the most influential in promoting L2 motivation.

However, this study has certain limitations. Due to constraints such as fixed course schedules and standardized teaching materials, the intervention period was relatively short. Consequently, this study cannot determine the long-term effects of motivational interventions via languaging activities, especially whether requiring students to engage extensively in such activities over a longer duration might eventually lead to decreased motivation.

In the social media context, Guangxi mainstream media's Thailand-oriented communication proves that local media can construct warm power via audience segmentation and affective narratives. However, warm power does not emerge spontaneously; its formation is constrained by multiple structural factors, with implications for both practice and institution-building, as well as directions for future research.

Practical Challenges in Warm Power Construction

First, sustaining affective communication is a key challenge. Unlike agenda-setting or image-oriented models, affective community building relies on long-term, stable, and high-frequency interaction, demanding continuous investment in human resources, production capacity, and cross-cultural expertise. Weakened interaction or homogenized content can dissipate emergent affective ties and hinder warm power accumulation (Couldry & Hepp, 2018), a challenge observable in both Guangxi-Thailand and Yunnan-Myanmar communication practices.

Second, structural tension exists between depoliticized narratives and national position articulation. While localized, everyday narratives boost audience intimacy, excessive depoliticization may marginalize national discourse, and overt political messaging risks eroding affect-based trust. This inherent dilemma in local media's international communication cannot be resolved by singular strategies (Sun, 2015).

Third, platform algorithms impose external constraints. Recommendation systems prioritize high-emotion, fast-feedback content, facilitating short-term diffusion but undermining narrative depth and relational continuity—risking reducing warm power to episodic emotional stimulation rather than sustained relational construction. Additionally, Western platform dominance and algorithmic suppression of Chinese content further limit the effectiveness of local media like those in Guangxi and Yunnan.

Finally, limited extraterritorial knowledge and talent shortages impede precision communication. Insufficient understanding of Southeast Asian politics, culture, and society may cause content-audience mismatches, while gaps in interdisciplinary professionals with cross-cultural and media expertise undermine the quality and sustainability of warm power construction—a common challenge for local media targeting Southeast Asia.

Institutional Implications and Core Findings

Despite these challenges, Guangxi and Yunnan's experiences provide key institutional insights: local media can act as “affective interfaces” in China's international communication system. Compared to central media's macro-narrative focus, local media excel at fostering emotional connections through everyday cultural practices, playing a foundational mediating role in regional communication. This multi-level division of labor enhances national communication resilience (Sun, 2015).

The warm power framework also requires recalibrating international communication evaluation metrics. Traditional indicators (exposure, click-through rates, short-term attitude changes) fail to capture relational effects; instead, interaction continuity, relationship stability, and affective depth are more suitable for assessing affective community formation—with implications for national-level evaluation systems.

Practically, local media should leverage geographical and cultural proximity by strengthening extraterritorial research, deepening cooperation with Southeast Asian media, and advancing media convergence via AI-assisted translation and audience analysis to enhance localization accuracy, credibility, and precision.

The core findings of this study are as follows: Amid social media-driven global communication shifts, China's external communication is moving from grand to everyday narratives and from image construction to relationship building. Through Thai-localized narratives and audience-segmented content, Guangxi mainstream media have reduced cross-cultural barriers, with outcomes extending beyond image display to foster affective identification and initial cross-cultural affective community formation.

Theoretically, this study proposes the concept of warm power as relational influence, emphasizing local media's long-term impact mechanism via affective interaction. The relational effect–evolution model addresses limitations of outcome-oriented research by integrating affective and relational dimensions into international communication analysis. Practically, local mainstream media are not peripheral actors; their advantages in regional proximity

and everyday affective connectivity inject warm power into China's international communication system.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

This study has limitations: it focuses primarily on Guangxi-Thailand communication (with Yunnan-Myanmar practices as a reference), leaving regional variations and cultural distance factors underexplored; moreover, it relies mainly on content and discourse analysis, with insufficient examination of audience-level affective identification mechanisms.

Future research can proceed in three directions: first, cross-regional comparative studies (e.g., Guangxi-Thailand, Yunnan-Myanmar, Guangdong-core ASEAN countries) to test warm power's applicability across contexts; second, micro-level analyses of affective community interaction mechanisms, combining big data analytics with qualitative methods to identify key processes and nodes in warm power generation; third, integrating warm power into broader international communication theory discussions (especially public and cultural diplomacy) to contribute to an autonomous Chinese knowledge framework.

Finally, looking ahead, the value of local media lies not in replicating grand narratives but in transforming cultural identification into relational identification through sustained affective interaction. This pathway enhances communication effect stability and offers a new perspective for advancing China's cultural outreach from soft power to warm power.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged.

1.1 The research focuses primarily on Guangxi's Thailand-oriented international communication, with Yunnan's Myanmar-oriented practices serving only as a comparative reference. While this design allows for in-depth contextual analysis, it limits the generalizability of findings across other Chinese provinces or ASEAN countries with differing cultural distances, media environments, and political sensitivities.

1.2 The study relies mainly on qualitative content and discourse analysis, emphasizing communicative strategies and institutional practices. As a result, it does not directly measure audience reception, emotional identification, or behavioral change at the individual level. The affective impact of warm power is therefore inferred from communicative patterns rather than empirically tested through audience surveys or experiments.

1.3 Platform algorithms and data access constraints restrict insight into the full circulation dynamics of overseas social media content. Engagement metrics such as reach, recommendation logic, and algorithmic filtering cannot be comprehensively analyzed using publicly available data, which may obscure certain dimensions of communication effectiveness.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research can extend this study in several directions.

2.1 Cross-regional and cross-national comparative studies are recommended. Expanding analysis to include provinces such as Guangdong or Fujian, or comparing China's communication with multiple ASEAN countries, would allow for systematic examination of how cultural proximity, political context, and media ecology shape warm power construction.

2.2 Future studies should incorporate audience-centered methodologies, such as surveys, in-depth interviews, or digital ethnography, to empirically examine affective identification, trust formation, and participatory behavior among target audiences. Such approaches would strengthen causal explanations of warm power mechanisms.

2.3 Integrating computational methods and big data analytics—including sentiment analysis, network analysis, and interaction pattern mapping—would help reveal micro-level affective dynamics and diffusion pathways within platform-based communication ecosystems.

2.4 Further theoretical work is needed to embed warm power within broader frameworks of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and international communication theory, thereby contributing to the development of a more autonomous and systematic analytical paradigm rooted in China's regional communication practices

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