

LI ZIQI AND HER SHANGRI-LA

He Huan

Foreign Language Department of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, Yibin, Sichuan, China

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ABSTRACT

Li Ziqi is very popular in china and overseas because of her short videos featuring a pastoral life which is exactly opposite from a material life, her simple, quiet and perfect life that is the envy of modern city people who live a fast-paced life, and also the harmony among people and between human beings and nature reflected in her videos. This paper will introduce her to reveal why she is so admired and adored by a number of followers across the world, explore how the ancient Chinese philosophies influence Li Ziqi living a bucolic lifestyle and attempt to find out how Internet celebrities can gain popularity through short videos.

Key Words: Li Ziqi; a pastoral lifestyle; ancient Chinese philosophies; Internet celebrities

1 The Introduction to Li Ziqi

1.1 Li Ziqi's life

Li Ziqi was born in Mianyang, north-central Sichuan Province, China in 1990, a creator of short videos, Well-known food blogger on Weibo, independent media entity contracting with Weibo, known as "Life Artist of Oriental Foods ".Her videos focuses on traditional Chinese food and showcases the bucolic life of Chinese rural communities. After her biological parents deserted her when she was very little, she was adopted by her foster mother who did not treat her very well, and her elderly grandparents decided to take her home and attend to her. Unfortunately, when her grandfather died when she was in the fifth grade of elementary school, her grandmother started to raise her alone, and their life became unsustainable.

1.2 Li Ziqi's Career

When she was only 14 years old, she had to eke a living in big cities on her own, during which she once even slept in a chair of a park and ate mantou for two months in a row. However, her being strong and unyielding, Li Ziqi quickly learned a skill in a strange city and was able to support herself and her grandmother in her hometown. This work experience also helped her to

present the final video effect perfectly. In her spare time, she has tried to start a business with friends many times, hoping to improve the living conditions of her rural home as much as possible. When she once was a waiter, her monthly salary was only 300 yuan. After that, she began to learn music. In 2009, Li Ziqi found a job playing DJ in a bar. In 2012, she stayed in her hometown to make a living by opening a Taobao shop because her grandma was ill and needed her the most, but she could barely survive through it. At that time, Li Ziqi accepted his younger brother's suggestion and started to publish some nonsensical videos on the Internet for better business. After groping for a while, she turned to take pictures of things that she was really good at, such as cooking. Sometimes, a video takes several days. In 2015, Li Ziqi started taking short videos of Chinese foods characteristic of ancient style. In the early days, although her videos were creative, they were of average quality, such as "Cherry Liquor". In the choice of shooting content, Li Ziqi who lives with his grandmama chose the most familiar "rural life". The topic she initially set was taken from the saying: "Four seasons change, and we eat foods seasonably", and later changed to "ancient foods with ancient flavor" at the editor's suggestion. During this period, she spent more than a year restoring the ancient production process of the "Four Treasures of the Study". She also used ancient methods to make handmade soy sauce. She even used wood and bamboo to build a thatched shed and swing in the yard. She mainly posts her videos on Weibo, the Chinese micro-blog website, similar to Twitter. Partly she owes her success to the great platform that Weibo can provide for her to enable her to popularize her videos. 2016 was a shining year for Weibo which relied on the topic ranking system, as well as new content carriers such as short videos and live broadcasts, the number of platform users and its activity increased one after another beyond expectations, and the market value of Weibo surpassed that of Twitter. More importantly, that year Weibo launched a plan to support content creators, and video content during the period of time became the top priority. At the same time, Li Ziqi started to shoot short videos in order to improve the business of her Taobao stores. Her previous videos were mainly food, but unlike other "food bloggers", she moved rural life to the Internet, and the duration of the shooting closer to the essence would be days, months, and even years. Because of the exquisite composition and leisurely pace of life, her videos are more like a pastoral documentary, which has been praised by countless people across the world. From making bread kilns, bamboo furniture, the four treasures of the study (writing brush, ink stick, ink slab and paper), cosmetics mainly containing natural plants and flowers, her own clothes characteristic of Sichuan embroidery which she learned from Meng Dezhi, a heir of Sichuan Embroidery of National Intangible Cultural Heritage and a master of Chinese arts and crafts, to roasting whole lamb, making wine, brewing soy sauce etc. In short, it seems that there's nothing that Li Ziqi cannot make, which is probably the greatest honor her fans or netizens who have watched her short videos can bestow on her. For example, ordinary people may use soy sauce when they cook food, and then start with "We already have soy sauce", but Li Ziqi will start with "How do we grow soybeans?". In April 2017, the video of Li Ziqi's swing production exceeded 10 million

views on Meipai, an application for live broadcasting and making small videos, and the video scored 80 million views across the network and more than 1 million likes. Every day dozens of advertisers seek to cooperate with her, which seem to be the peak of her career. Unexpectedly, at this time, she began to be questioned. Because of constant harassment and pressure from the public, she was concerned that her grandma would be harmed, so amidst doubts and defamation, she decided to suspend the update in May. Fortunately, she used a lot of facts to testify to her videos finished by herself without so-called “group” to help her to intentionally become famous and popular. On June 16th, she won the “Top Ten Gourmet Celebrities Award” of the Super Star Festival hosted by Sina Weibo; on July 20, holding 49% of the shares, Li Ziqi established Sichuan Ziqi Culture Communication Co., Ltd with Hangzhou Weinian Technology Co., Ltd. Li Ziqi, together with her assistant, and a photographer is responsible for the fulfillment of her videos. The video content is still in charge of Li Ziqi herself. The company is only responsible for the business development and helping her take care of some daily affairs. At this time, Li Ziqi gave up working on her own and had the professional team and traffic support that an Internet celebrity needed most. The only thing that remains unchanged is that she is still the girl walking on the countryside road and living in poetry.

1.3 Li Ziqi's Achievement

She is a jack of all trades, though she dropped out of school early and never attends any college, which doesn't hinder her from becoming versatile. Fellow netizens are always surprised to find that such a delicate girl less than 99 pounds repeatedly and tirelessly never lets her audience down, instead surprises them time and time again. In 2016, she became popular on the Internet due to the release of original food videos in the form of “ancient style” and was known as the best influencer of 2007. In 2018, Li Ziqi's original short video won the YouTube Silver Medal after three months of overseas operation. Her YouTube channel has 11.9 million followers, more than BBC's YouTube channel. She was called “the mysterious power from the East” by foreign netizens. In August 2019, she won the “Most Popular Blogger Award” on the Super Star Festival and “The Most Commercial Value Super Star Award of the Year”. On August 17, 2018, Li Ziqi's Tmall flagship store officially opened, launching five gourmet products and selling more than 150,000 goods for merely 6 days. On May 19, 2020, the Steering Committee by Organization of Harvest Festival of Chinese Farmers formally established the “Promotion Ambassador of Harvest Festival of Chinese Farmers”, and Li Ziqi was appointed as one of the promotion ambassadors. In May 2020, Li Ziqi became the first Chinese YouTuber to have over 11 million fans. And furthermore, many of China's mainstream and authoritative media such as CCTV NEWS, People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, China Newsweek reported her deeds in detail, which is the glory that other influencers who may only think about making profits and attracting fans by flashy videos cannot boast, because almost all of these reports admit that she contributes a lot to

popularize Chinese culture and help friends across the world know more about China and Chinese through spreading positive energy. Lately, she was selected as one of the newest members of the All-China Youth Federation.

2 The Enlightenment of Ancient Chinese Philosophy on a Pastoral Lifestyle

2.1 Filial Piety

THE HSLAO KING, one of the thirteen books of Confucian School centers around filial duty in which at the beginning it records: “Now filial piety is the root of (all) virtue, and (the stem) out of which grows (all moral teaching)...Our bodies—to every hair and it of skin—are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them:—this is the beginning of filial piety. When we have established our character by the practice of the (filial) course, so as to make our name famous in future and thereby glorify our parents:—this is the end of filial piety. It commences with the service of parents; it proceeds to the service of the ruler; it is completed by the establishment of character.”[1] (孔子, James Legge, 2019)*Sitting around a stove and Talking at Night*, which is collected mottoes written by Wang Yongbin (1792-1869), a scholar in Qing Dynasty says: “You should respect and take care of your parents before you do other good things.” [2] (王永彬, 2020) It’s obvious that Liziqi fulfill her filial piety to her grandmother. That Li Ziqi's grandmother suffered a serious illness in 2012 made Li Ziqi determined to return to the countryside to for her. She worried that if she couldn’t have been there with her grandmother for a long time as before, she might live a lifetime of regret of “It’s for a child to finally grow the desire to take care of his parents, only to realize that they were long gone. ” This is also the most important turning point in her life when she can become who she is. When being interviewed in 2016 and asked about her grandparents and her early struggling years, she said that it has always been a pity in her heart that she cannot stay at home with them to show them her filial affection. The boisterous working environment also made her miss her life in the mountains even more. The biggest wish in life is to be able to live a simple farming life with her grandma. Frequently, her audience can find from her videos that she always shows her respect and affection for her grandmother, and her grandmother also amiably provides advice on cooking for her and cares about her. If you are patient and meticulous enough to finish watching some of her videos on cooking, you may not forget a very affectionate thing that she always tenderly picks foods for her grandmother before eating, and then she enjoys the meals with her grandma gleefully, which is one way of expressing her love for her grandmother and reflecting that she is grateful for her grandmother. And also she is worried that it’s so cold that she made silkworm quilt for her grandmother. In a word, you can find so many considerate things she had done for her grandmother in her videos.

2.2 Harmony between Man and Nature

The heart of the idea of “Harmony between Man and Nature” is that all creatures under heaven, including man, are an indivisible and closely connected organic whole, and each part is ingeniously related. Such view is not only the meat of the idea of “Heaven and man are identical”, but also the soul of ancient Chinese thought. American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson supported a similar conception. In “Nature”, he lays out and attempts to solve an abstract problem: that humans do not fully accept nature’s beauty. He writes that people are distracted by the demands of the world, whereas nature gives but humans fail to reciprocate. In “Nature”, he writes: “To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says,—he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight.”[3] (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 2001) However, as human beings liberate productivity, improve economy, develop technology, resources in nature have been exploited, environment polluted. At the end of last century, the rapid deterioration of the natural environment has not slowed down, and almost all ecosystems have been destroyed or seriously threatened. The human impact on the ecosystem has greatly increased in scale and variety. Environmental problems have developed from local and regional environmental pollution and ecological destruction to a global ecological crisis. Such as climate change, sharp decline in biodiversity, biosecurity, forest destruction, etc. The depletion of natural resources accompanied by ecological destruction and environmental pollution is becoming more and more serious. Human beings are facing increasing ecological risks. However, Li ziqi lives in harmony with other creatures, which impress her audience a lot. She feeds many animals, such as ducks, chickens, dogs, sheep, geese and so on, you can frequently find that she takes good care of them, even talks and plays with them, like good friends. Once She went to fish, letting go of small ones, which is a kind, philosophical act, which embodies ancient Chinese wisdom, “If seasons of agricultural production were taken advantage of, grains would not become used up; If fine nets were not used in deep ponds to catch fishes, soft-shelled turtles and other aquatic products, they would not run out for humans to enjoy; If you entered mountains and cut logs seasonably, timber would not become exhausted.” These are principles that Li Ziqi puts into practice, and also why her videos seem like a perfect land where a lot of us seek to pursue. Moreover, without being polluted by emissions from factories and bothered by unbearable stress and alarming competition

facing many city people, her hometown, a countryside where her videos have been filmed looks like so beautiful, clean, serene, unworldly, in which she can get along well with all her neighbors who always greet her and helps her or she sends foods she cooked for those senior citizens heirless and without support. So the writer can always find humanity through her videos. To help each other has always been a good tradition and virtue of all human beings around the world. To boast lucid waters and lush mountains has always been the common wish of mankind. Her audience and fans can always find serenity and harmony in her videos which embody the best hope which the human race want to seek for. In addition, the writer even can really learn how to cook with her help while she is watching her exquisitely made videos.

2.3 Tao Yuanming and Shangri-La

Tao Yuanming (352 or 365—427) is a great poet (He is the first pastoral poet in China) and master of poetic essays, that is fu, a literary form descriptive prose interspersed with verse from the late Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420) to the early Song Dynasty (420—479), famous for his will to resign his public official position and live a pastoral life, writing numerous popular and much acclaimed poems and poetic essays throughout his life. His poems are mainly about his alienation from the filth of the officialdom and the bondage of the worldly affairs, and about his wish for pastoral life and lofty realm of thought. Because he loves nature with all his body and mind, and injects his true feelings into his writing, his rural bucolic scenery is strikingly harmonious and natural for readers. Incorporating vivid countryside descriptions, Tao Yuanming also sings about farming life in his simple and sincere pastoral poems. Later critics and poets have given him high praise. He is also best well-known for his refusal to bow and scrape for five pecks of rice (the regulation salary of a magistrate), which made him admired and praised for being of moral integrity. He not only left limitless spiritual wealth to his later generations, but also became a role model for many Chinese people. Take one of his celebrated poems for example to help you understand him and his thoughts:

Back to Country Life (I)

I've loathed the madding crowd since I was a boy

While hills and mountains have filled me with joy.

By mistake I sought mundane careers

And got entrapped in them for thirty years.

Birds in the cage would long for wooded hills;

Fish in the pond would yearn for flowing rills.

So I reclaim the land in southern fields
To suit my bent for reaping farmland yields.
My farm contains a dozen mu of ground;
My cottage has eight or nine rooms around.
The elm and willow cover backside eaves
While peach and plum trees shade my yard with leaves.
The distant village dimly looms somewhere,
With smoke from chimneys drifting in the air.
In silent country lanes a stray dog barks;
Amid the mulberry trees cocks crow with larks.
My house is free from worldly moil or gloom
While ease and quiet permeate my private room.
When I escape from bitter strife with men,
I live a free and easy life again.[4]

In this poem, his temperament and living conditions can be seen clearly. He lived a satisfactory and serene country life, being himself having neither sadness and sorrow from imperial court nor worries and wrangles from earthly world. How Tao has Yuanming's Shangri-La influenced Li Ziqi's videos? Next, the writer will introduce *The Peach Colony*, a great poetic essay written by him to you. *The Peach Colony* uses the clues of the whereabouts of the Wuling fishermen to link reality and ideals. Through the description of the peaceful, happy, free and equal life of the Taohuayuan, similar to Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Tao Yuanming expresses his ideal of pursuing a better life and his dissatisfaction with the real life at that time. Similarly, Li Ziqi's fans can always feel that her short videos seem like from a magnificent world, telling different stories in which self-sufficient people have no worldly worries, but only care about their farming and family. It's easier to make her audience forget the reality, because she always combines many fantastic and dreamy elements into her products, such as harmonious people, ancient costume, cozy courtyard, cute animals (dogs, cats, sheep, even horses etc), foods featuring ancient style, green lands, murmuring streams and brooks, blossoming flowers, luxuriant forests,

majestic mountains etc. No matter her fans from which country, almost all of them have the simple and common wish for goodness that is exactly what her fans can find in her video works. Consequently, she has gained popularity across the world via her exquisite and down-to-earth works.

3 The Key to the Success of Li Ziqi

This is the best time for creators of short videos to try their luck in the market. Firstly, nowadays, as China grows economically independent and culturally confident, Chinese government encourages more ways of popularizing Chinese culture, therefore Li Ziqi provides a perfect answer to the question. Besides, she rarely speaks in her videos, she always keeps reserved and dexterous when she is cooking or working, however, we can hear her talking with her grandma and neighbors in a friendly and amicable way. If she kept talking in her videos in her dialect like what most bloggers did, most of her audience, especially her foreign followers would definitely not understand what she said. So her audience can enjoy the peace, harmony reflected in her videos, even though they hardly can hear her voice and sounds, then which avoids the trouble of subtitles which usually impair the best effects of watching for her audience. Another thing worthy of being mentioned is that her life style is totally different from what most of young generation choose. The young are under a lot of stress from study, employment, unemployment environment, international conflicts and interpersonal relationship etc, whereas she sets a good example of choosing a new path leading to the perfection where people care for and have confidence in one another. She presents us a real place where we can find what “home” stands for.

Conclusion

In the past Hua Mulan was a warrior and hero who can protect her country at the expense of her own safety. While Li Ziqi is like a role model of her contemporary counterpart, doing her best to protect her family and repay those who have been grateful to her. What if everyone in the world could share the conception of presenting goodness to others, showing how the foods we already take for granted grows out of soil, the world would become a better place to live in. Li Ziqi embodies the traditional Chinese culture which has been profound and thought-provoking, if you have the intention of knowing more about Chinese culture, why not watch her videos? If you really intend to popularize your country’s culture, why not learn from her to make it known and popular?

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