

The Mediation Effect of Media in Collective Memory: A Study on the Intergenerational Transmission of the Korean War in China

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Abstract: The deeds of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army during the Korean War hold a significant place in the cherished national memory of China. As oral history gradually fades away, the challenge of preserving and transmitting this memory has emerged as a new imperative in the digital age. Grounded in the perspective of media memory, this study examines the narrative patterns of media productions cross distinct eras following the Korean War. Employing in-depth interviews, grounded coding, and intergenerational comparisons, this study establishes a comprehensive model of "generative mechanism - intergenerational performance", which elucidates the collective memory of the Korean War, delving into the intricate relationships between 3 generations. This study also explores the mediation role of media in shaping and transmitting these memories. It is found that there are three types of mutually inclusive media narratives having advantages in the transmission of collective memory, and the intergenerational performances of the Korean War exhibits both similarities and differences under the mediation effect of media.

Keywords: Mediation Effect; Media; Collective Memory; Intergenerational Transmission; Korean War

1. INTRODUCTION

Media serves as a crucial carrier for the creation and transmission of memory in the digital age, shouldering an indispensable intermediary role. The profound integration of media technology with human society has

brought to light the evolving functions of media in shaping memory patterns. Addressing how to preserve memory and combat forgetfulness has become a pivotal focus in memory research. Anthropological studies have confirmed that the duration of collective memory without an attached carrier is limited and often aligns with the lifespan of approximately three generations (LaBriola, 2023). Consequently, the persistence of memory is closely related to the intergenerational transmission of humanity. War narratives are intertwined with the national memory, spanning across several generations of society. The Korean War, which broke out in the 1950s, marked the first large-scale international conflict after World War II and was a historic event shaping the Cold War and fostering geopolitical divisions in East Asia (Jung, 2015). The Chinese People's Volunteer Army, in their blood-soaked struggle, fought fervently to assist the Korean people in resisting aggression and safeguarding their homeland. This memory of the war has enduringly influenced successive generations of Chinese people over 70 years, representing a precious historical legacy for the Chinese nation. However, as we step into the third decade of the 21st century, oral histories from the wartime generation are gradually fading away. Memory gaps among the following generations are now being bridged through various media narratives, relying on the media to activate and reshape the memories of that period. In this process, how narratives from distinct eras shape the collective memory of the Korean War for the Chinese public, and the role played by the media in the intergenerational transmission of memory, become key inquiries. Grounded in the context of intergenerational succession, this study takes the collective memory of the Korean War as an example to explore the intricate relationships among media, memory, and transmission.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Media as an Intermediary in Collective Memory

The academic community has long been attentive to the field of collective memory. In 1925, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs established the knowledge lineage of collective memory research, defining it as a shared understanding of history among specific social group members, representing a vivid past that constructs a sense of group identity (Tambuscio & Tschiggerl, 2023). As mass media in the 20th century shaped public imaginaries, digital technology and media altered the dynamics of memory and forgetfulness (Greeley & Rajaram, 2023). The perspectives of

academic research also evolved in tandem with the development of a media society, ushering in a new research direction that explores collective memory through the lens of media memory theory. Within the context, the intermediary function of media, as a tool to extend collective memory, is constantly emphasized. Halbwachs, who put forward the concept of collective memory, pointed out that all kinds of memories can be mobilized at any time through media, and the process of media memory is like the process of creating a new image to overlay the old one (Roediger III, 2021). Carolyn Kitch believes that media symbolizes a kind of collective consciousness, providing humanity with an opportunity to discuss the future based on the past (Kitch, 2002). Paolo Jedlowski, on the other hand, regards memorial activities, memory texts, and commemorative spaces as primary mediums of collective memory (Jedlowski, 2001). Other researchers have focused on the different characteristics of different types of media in the transmission of collective memory. For instance, Cristian Candia et al., who found that collective memory is maintained through oral communication and physical recording, with the retention time of the former form being the longest (Candia et al., 2019). Annette Kuhn suggests that visual media such as films and photographs can help institutionalize memory (Kuhn, 2010). Silvana Mandolessi sheds light on the power of digital media in the transmission of memory, proposing that the ubiquity of digital media makes the flow of collective memory omnipresent (Mandolessi, 2021). Regrettably, much of the academic focus on collective memory centers on the content and narrative modes of media memory, often overlooking the integration of the cognition and emotion of a person, whose memory is constructed. Additionally, research methods have primarily leaned toward speculation, with studies exploring the mental realm of memory subjects through dialogues remaining relatively scarce.

2.2 Media as a Tool for Memory Transmission

The transmission of memory is a crucial topic in the field of memory research. In this context, media plays a significant role in the process of memory transmission. Existing research broadly categorizes media into three types based on their nature: the first type is body media, which transmits memory through expressions, body language, and oral narratives. For example, Ilito H. Achumi affirms the descendants of the Sumi Nagaland Labor Corps in World War I pass down memories through storytelling (Achumi, 2023); Dayra Elizabeth Ojeda-Rosero, in her study on the intergenerational transmission of memories related to volcanic risks in Mexico, found that intergenerational relationships exhibit both enduring

trajectories and transitional changes within collective memory and societal behavior patterns (Ojeda-Rosero & López-Vázquez, 2023). The second category is traditional media, taking print media as an example, a number of studies indicate that textbooks, serving as official historical narratives (Goldberg et al., 2006), wield significant influence in shaping memory. Tina van der Vlies has further explored the meaning-creating functions of multifaceted narratives within history textbooks (Van der Vlies, 2016). The third category focuses on emerging media, but the research on this topic is still in its early stage, with relatively limited outcomes. Andrew Hoskins proposed the concept of a “connective turn”, suggesting that the fusion of digital technology and media facilitates a broader connection of people, thereby achieving the transmission of memory (Hoskins, 2011). In summary, despite memory transmission being a crucial branch of collective memory research, few scholars have attempted to examine the collective memory transmission by establishing a longitudinal sense of time. Additionally, existing research tends to focus predominantly on individual groups, leading to a relative dearth in the field of research that employs intergenerational theory for a diachronic examination of issues related to the transmission of collective memory.

2.3 The Mediated Narratives of the Collective Memory of the Korean War

One significant way in which media influences collective memory is through the presentation of different narratives. Over the past 70 years, spanning from the onset of the Korean War to the present (1950-2023), this period of memory has been continually reshaped and redefined by narratives presented in different eras. By examining and interpreting Chinese media productions related to the war during these seven decades, it is possible to trace how the construction of memory has responded to changes in the socio-cultural landscape. In this context, this exploration is able to clarify the triangular relationship among collective memory, historical context, and media, offering insights into how memory construction adapts to the evolving zeitgeist. Through this process, insightful data can be generated for in-depth interviews.

2.3.1 Origins of Memory: From National Perspectives and Revolutionary Angles

For memories of war, the period when the war breaks out often provides the best opportunity for constructing and solidifying collective memory. In the 1950s and 1960s, marked by the intense opposition between the

Western capitalist bloc and the Eastern socialist bloc, war and revolution were prevailing themes of the time. Consequently, memories of the Korean War during this period were closely intertwined with the defense of the homeland, emphasizing the core memory elements of resistance against aggression and the struggle for national liberation. Furthermore, given the Cold War standoff between the East and West, class conflict and ideological polarization emerged as discernible trends in the collective memory of the war. Therefore, for a long period following the war, domestic media narratives about the Korean War approached the storytelling with a national perspective and a revolutionary angle. Examples include films such as “Battle on Shangganling Mountain” released in 1956, “Surprise Attack” and “On the 38th Parallel” in 1960, and the 1964 movie “Heroic Sons and Daughters”. During this period, artistic works portrayed a relatively consistent image of the U.S. military, depicting them in a demeaning and derogatory manner to starkly contrast with the positive image of the Chinese military. This contributed to the establishment of a grand narrative pattern for heroism during this era. Influenced by such media narratives, the depiction of heroes during this period carried distinct class undertones, overlooking the individual’s worth and the heavy toll imposed by the war. This narrative tendency led people to adopt a simplistic binary view of complex international relations.

2.3.2 Development of Memory: With Realistic Features and Development Perspectives

After 1978, China entered a vibrant period of reform and opening-up. As an emerging developing country, China closely followed the trends of the times, gradually shedding the constraints of ideology and social systems. China steadfastly adhered to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, a commitment notably reflected in its diplomatic relations with the United States. Beginning to thaw after the Ping Pong Diplomacy in 1971, Sino-U.S. relations officially normalized with the effective implementation of the Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations in 1979. Concurrently, in the 1980s, the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union shifted from confrontation to détente, and the multipolarization of the international order provided favorable conditions for the realization of a peaceful world. Due to the prevailing theme shifting towards “peace and development”, Sino-U.S. relations tended to ease, leading to a gradual slowdown in the development of productions related to the Korean War during this period. Firstly, there was a noticeable decline in the number of such works. In the realm of cinema, only around 10 films

about Korean War were released from the 1970s to the 1990s. In the news domain, there were approximately 30 related reports published in the People's Daily. Secondly, in terms of content, media works during this period closely aligned with the theme of peaceful development. The construction of the collective memory of the Korean War generally began to adhere more closely to historical facts, with anti-American and derogatory content gradually dissipating from the memory system. Specifically, media narratives during this stage no longer targeted the opposition to imperialist aggression as their main focus. Instead, they emphasized expressing the positive role played by the war in promoting regional development and maintaining world peace. For example, literary works like "War of Resistance Against U.S. Aggression and Aid to Korea" and "The U.S. Military's Defeat in My Hands" began to rely on documentary-style storytelling, presenting a comprehensive and truthful portrayal of the war, leaving a more objective war memory for the public. From 1980s, China became the center of ideological struggles due to political upheavals. Extracting patriotic content from the Korean War to adapt to the new international situation became a primary strategy. For instance, in 1990, China initiated the expansion project of Korean War-related memorials, which is also one of the forms of media, highlighting the patriotic education significance.

2.3.3 Sublimation of Memory: From Global Perspectives and Revival Angles

Since the world is undergoing major transformation unseen in a century, the collective memory of the Korean War is also experiencing a new phase of elevation. Despite the deepening of globalization leading to increasingly close relationships among nations, the world is still confronted with risks, including the rise of hegemony and unilateralism. Some Western countries continue to impose sustained sanctions and pressures on China, intensifying the transformation taking place. Against this backdrop, China faces the urgent need to turn challenges into opportunities by strengthening national identity and uniting social sentiments. Consequently, there is a particularly crucial imperative to revive and reconstruct the collective memory of the Korean War among the Chinese people. This revival is marked by unprecedented changes in both the scale and form of content related to the Korean War during this period. In terms of literary and artistic works, this period has witnessed a surge in creative endeavors, with a blossoming of films, TV dramas, and documentaries. Productions such as "The Sacrifice", "The Battle at Lake Changjin", and

“Chinese Historical Memory: Resisting US Aggression and Safeguarding the Homeland” offer a comprehensive retrospection of the Korean War for a mass audience. Simultaneously, the presentation of war memories has undergone a renewal in this period, with a surge in multimedia reporting and the emergence of short video formats. Internet platforms have become new battlegrounds for presenting war memories, with a heightened focus on key figures and critical groups. This shift aims to seek spiritual resonance and foster effective interaction through nuanced narratives. Since socialism with Chinese characteristics enters new era, the presentation of this national memory has undergone two pivotal changes: firstly, it is directed towards promoting national rejuvenation, advocating the extraction of spiritual elements adaptable to the new era from the Korean War. Secondly, it adheres to the strategy of win-win cooperation, embodying the idea of a community with a shared future for humanity. In summary, the memories of the Korean War in different eras exhibit distinct focuses and shaping methods due to variations in media narratives. Consequently, individuals growing up in different periods construct collective memories with unique characteristics, providing a solid data foundation for the subsequent research.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Grounded Theory

This study adopts Grounded Theory as the foundational research design for intergenerational interviews. Grounded Theory is an inductive qualitative research approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative research methods in social science. It constructs theory through a synthesis of inductive, deductive, and retroactive thinking (Pusa et al., 2021), which aims to unveil individual expressions and underlying causes behind social phenomena. Therefore, this study employs the Grounded Theory to conduct a three-level coding process on the collected interview data, ultimately forming a theoretical framework.

3.2 Participants

Before conducting the in-depth interviews, this study referred to the “Conceptualization and Operationalization Framework of Generations” established by Chinese scholar Zhou Yuqiong and others (Figure 1). Strictly confining the interview subjects of the “three generations” to specific generational units, the elderly generation primarily consists of

those who grew up during the founding of the People's Republic of China in the 1950s and 1960s. The middle-aged generation mainly comprises those who grew up during the reform and opening-up period, that is 1970s and 1980s. The younger generation is predominantly composed of individuals who grew up in 1990s and 2000s, the era of rise and rejuvenation.

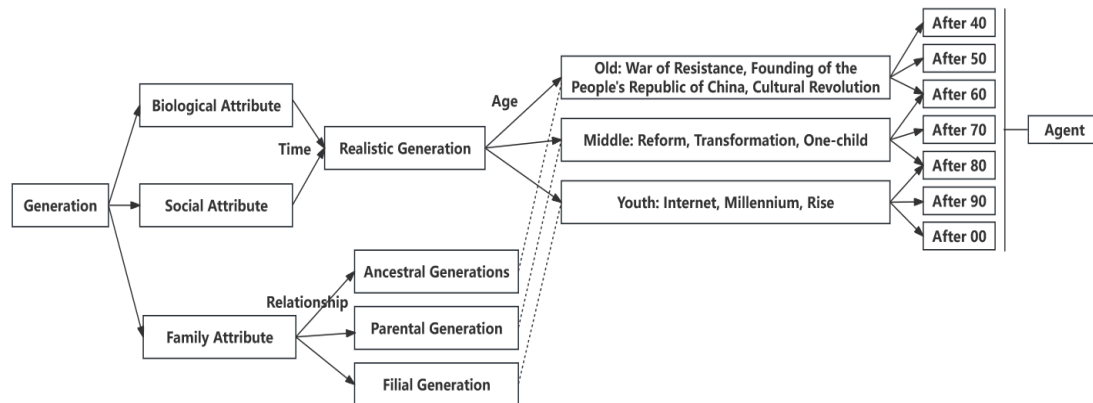


Figure 1: Conceptualization and operationalization framework for generation

This study selects a total of 38 participants through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Initially, focusing on individuals who demonstrated an understanding of the Korean War and actively engaged in related content discussions, potential interviewees were identified on internet platforms such as Douban, Bilibili, Weibo, Douyin etc. For example, Interviewee Z-06 is a content creator in Bilibili specializing in content related to the Korean War. Accordingly, focused on content creators specializing in the Korean War niche across various platforms, this study utilized a snowball sampling method to select participants from their respective fan communities. Consent from participants was obtained through direct messages, with almost half of the younger interviewees recruited through this method. Moreover, if it was revealed during the interview process that the interviewee's elders also possessed knowledge of the Korean War, additional interview invitations would be extended. As an illustration, Interviewee Z-04, the father of Q-02, was introduced through Q-02. The final selection comprised 11 elderly participants, 10 middle-aged participants, and 17 young participants, ensuring a diverse representation across various regions, occupations, and educational backgrounds within each age group.

3.3 In-depth Interviews

Before the formal interviews commenced, the preliminary interview outline based on the pre-interview situations would be adjusted. The final

set of interview questions revolves around 10 key questions: four inspiring questions focusing on retrospective memory, four emotional intelligence questions concentrating on cognition, one open-ended question centering on reflexive thinking, and one supplementary open-ended question designed for additional insights and responses.

Throughout the interviews, predefined discussion topics were introduced in advance, accompanied by the presentation of the “Interview Informed Consent Form”, which explicitly informed participants that the entire interview process would be recorded. At the same time, detailed notes were taken on participants’ responses, with additional questions extended as required. The collected information was then organized within the theoretical framework, and comprehensive memoranda were compiled for each interview session. A comprehensive record of the interviews, totaling 35 hours, with an average duration exceeding 1 hour per person, was compiled. Elderly participants were interviewed for a total of 8 hours, middle-aged participants for 13 hours, and young participants for 14 hours. After transcribing the audio data into text, the interviews resulted in a manuscript of nearly 450,000 words.

3.4 Data Analysis

This study employed the coding logic of Grounded Theory for a three-level coding of the interview data. After cleansing the raw interview texts, 21 preliminary categories were established through open coding. Subsequently, after axial coding and comparison, these were refined into 7 higher-dimensional categories. Building on this foundation, selective coding was further employed to identify core categories, and logical connections between core and subcategories were explored to derive research conclusions.

The analysis revealed that the “Generative Mechanism of Collective Memory of the Korean War” is a core category, overseeing several other main categories. The specific relationships are as follows: Different generations living in a media ecology all engage in the self-construction of collective memories of the Korean War through means such as history teaching, memorial ceremony, and literary and artistic creation. Consequently, they form a unified cognitive identity and different practices in the way of emotion expression. The final coding details are presented in Table 1, and based on this, the model of the “generative mechanism - intergenerational performance” of collective memory of Korean War is depicted in Figure 2.

Table 1: Selective coding situation

Typical Category Relationships	Relationship Structure	Relationship Connotation
History Teaching - Memory Generation	Causal Relationship	History teaching directly influences the generation of collective memories of the Korean War.
Memorial Ceremony - Memory Generation	Causal Relationship	Memorial ceremonies directly influence the generation of collective memories of the Korean War.
Literary and Artistic Creation - Memory Generation	Causal Relationship	Literary and artistic creations directly influence the generation of collective memories of the Korean War.
Memory Generation - Intergenerational Performance	Mediating Relationship	The memory generation through media influences the intergenerational performances.
Survival is not Easy-Hard Work	Causal Relationship	The hardship of survival directly triggers the diligent struggle of the hard-working elderly generation.
Have a lot of Experience-Inherit Memory	Causal Relationship	Rich experiences directly trigger the memory inheritance of the middle-aged generation.
Happy Life-Constantly Reflect	Causal Relationship	A happy life directly triggers the continuous reflection of the young generation.

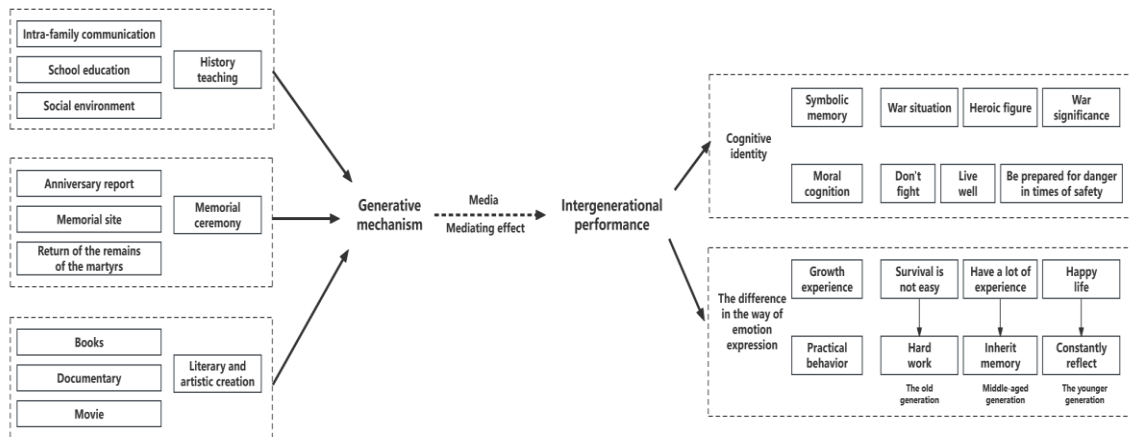


Figure 2: A model of the “generative mechanism - intergenerational performance” of collective memory of Korean War

4. EDUCATION, CEREMONIES, AND CREATION: MECHANISMS FOR THE GENERATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

4.1 History Teaching and Memory Foundation

History teaching serves as the enlightenment of individual memory, and

this type of media narrative typically originates from family, school, and society, laying the foundation for the collective process of individual memory. Family is the most primitive primary group for human beings, establishing family memory narratives through continuous social interactions and communications among family members. The purpose is to create a sense of collective identity and connection across multiple generations (Evans, 2021). Many descendants' memories of the Korean War come from the oral accounts of the previous generations within the family. The younger generation forms a general impression of it through the words of the older generation, thus inherit memories of the Korean War initially. Interviewee QN-02 expressed, "Initially, my understanding of the war was influenced by my family. I gained some insight since I was young. Because my grandfather participated in the Korean War, and I often heard him and my father talk about it." Some interviewees, especially those with family members who experienced hardships on the battlefield, have deep feelings about the traumatic experiences of war, a theme frequently mentioned by their children. ZN-03: "I noticed scars on my dad's body since I was little, and there was this kind of soft flesh that grew after the wounds healed. I used to play with it when I was a child. It wasn't until later when I heard him talking about the war that I learned those scars were all from shell explosions. His position was frequently under American gunfire. He carried the simplest rocket launcher to fight against heavy artillery. When a round came over, the ground around him was lifted up." Second, in terms of school education, history is undoubtedly a crucial material in shaping national identity (Toler & Capodilupo, 2023). Regarding the history teaching related to the Korean War in China, it is continuously developing. For those who did not personally experience the war, their initial memories of it largely come from various textbooks. By tracing the history of the war and narrating heroic deeds, textbooks facilitate the construction of a historical perspective that aligns with the national will. Despite some interviewees noting that the war narrative in textbooks is not entirely comprehensive, the profound impact of school education on fostering historical awareness remains indelible. QN-01: "The earliest exposure I had was in high school history textbooks. At that time, I felt that such a war truly demonstrated China's great national spirit. Additionally, the fact that it could resist the United States, one of the most robust countries at that time, made me think China was incredibly powerful." Additionally, the social environment plays a crucial role in shaping the creation and development of memories related to the Korean War. Nowadays, memory symbols of the Korean War are deliberately

incorporated into social life, intertwined with people's social practices, providing a powerful macro-environment for the inheritance of these memories. Interviewee QN-09 observed changes in social facilities, stating, "Previously, when walking by the roadside bus stops, there were mostly mobile phone advertisements. Now, you will see promotions about the deeds of Chinese People's Volunteer Army." Interviewee QN-15 also acknowledged the influential role of the environment, saying, "In such a social setting, our mindsets would be definitely reshaped under the influence of promotion". This integration of memories into daily life effectively counters the phenomena of memory fragmentation and weakening, assisting the Chinese people in completing the initial encoding of memories and forming a broad memory lineage of the Korean War.

4.2 Memorial Ceremony and Memory Revival

Commemoration can rejuvenate the past, forming and inheriting new collective memories. As interpreted by Émile Durkheim, past notions are cultivated and renewed through regular memorial ceremonies, with the purpose of reproducing and making them as vivid as before (Ikkos & McQueen, 2019). To sustain the lasting impact of this war memory in society, activities and reports related to the anniversary of the Korean War on October 25th each year function as a continuous expression of official memory. This evokes familiar and unforgettable feelings to countless Chinese people, simultaneously promoting collective mourning and reviving collective memory. QN-08: "Although I studied relevant content about the Korean War during my school days, it was only a relatively superficial information at that time. It wasn't until I watched the speech at the 70th-anniversary commemoration event that I began actively seeking to get more knowledge of the war." LN-08: "I've watched the Battle on Shangganling Mountain several times before, but I don't quite remember the plot. I vaguely recall that a squad of soldiers shared an apple together (due to material shortages), and they didn't finish it (out of consideration for their comrades). The memories associated with this event, which I can now recall, gradually returned to me after watching the news about the 70th-anniversary commemoration in the past two years." Meanwhile, commemorative spaces such as memorials and military graveyards related to the Korean War, serving as mediums of memory, possess a dual function of retrospection and prospection. They not only trace history and evoke memories but also connect the past with the future, sparking empathy and identification among participants (Ho Tai, 2001). As firsthand narrations from those who experienced the Korean War gradually diminish with their

passing, commemorative spaces naturally become primary battlegrounds for reenacting memories and shaping identities. QN-16: “When I personally visit the museum, see those artifacts, and hear the guide narrate that period of history, I can immerse myself even more into the soldiers’ perspective. It feels as if I am standing at the front line in North Korea with my predecessors, fighting alongside them.” Additionally, the annual “Return Ceremony of the Remains of Chinese Martyrs Killed in the Korean War” intricately intertwines the narrative of China’s progress with the ceremonial performance. Serving as a poignant national event, this grand ceremony reawakens the collective memory of the Korean War. Over the years, it has steadily cultivated positive memory effects, breathing new life into recollections that were on the verge of fading. By doing so, it fosters a deep emotional connection between individuals and the nation, cultivating an increasingly intimate bond between the Chinese public and shared history. As interviewee QN-03 stated, “The return ceremony provides me the feeling that even if I died there in battlefield, whether it be 30, 40, 50 years later, our country remains steadfast in its unwavering commitment to diligently search for me, with the heartfelt desire to bring me back to my homeland. Such a feeling exudes an extremely powerful spiritual inspiration for soldiers currently in service.”

4.3 Artistic Creation and the Memory Inheritance

Literature and film create past images that resonate with cultural memory, allowing memory to flow within symbol systems such as texts, films, documentaries, each with its own distinctive methods of remembrance (Elleström, 2022). Among these, books, as tools for preserving and continuing memory, become the preferred choice for most people to systematically comb through memories of the Korean War with their advantages including “professionalism,” “reliability,” and “credibility”. Interviewee ZN-01 is a loyal advocate of books, expressing a reluctance to gather information about the war from other unreliable sources: “I believe that the content in books is reliable and trustworthy. It has a censorship mechanism, unlike online where anyone can express their own opinions. I’m very averse to some ideas that are put forth without a solid foundation.” Books often adhere to a complete narrative structure that emphasizes truth. When describing the Korean War, rational expressions about battlefield tactics outweigh emotional outbursts of hatred towards war and enemies, making this form of memory more dependable. Interviewee ZN-06 believes that behind the cold and heavy words lies the reality of the battlefield: “I usually read books on this topic.

Sometimes, when I encounter character descriptions, behind every word and every expression is a real life. It's neither merely an adjective, nor cold. Behind it is the genuine history that actually happened, and the words on books might be ten times, a hundred times, or even ten thousand times more serious than actual events. No words can fully capture the scenes of that time." Non-fictional documentaries also play a crucial role in the transmission of memories. Chinese documentaries dedicated to the Korean War fulfill various purposes in conveying this challenging memory—restoring history, extoling heroes, constructing identity, and ultimately contributing to the formation of a collective memory. Interviewee QN-02 expressed admiration for the 2020 Chinese documentary "Chinese Historical Memory: Resisting US Aggression and Safeguarding the Homeland". "This documentary is indeed well-made, based on solid historical materials that evoke sincere emotions among audience. Almost every episode is punctuated with moments that are both touching and shocking to me. The resilience, tenacity, benevolence, and wisdom of the People's Volunteer Army has left a profound and lasting impression on me." Contemporary documentaries not only draw from domestic archival resources and oral histories of the wartime generation but also incorporate testimonies from eyewitnesses abroad. This approach, featuring perspectives from other nations, not only deepens emotional engagement but also fosters a heightened sense of enthusiasm for memory transmission within Chinese nation. Interviewee QN-06 highlighted the impact of the documentary's inclusion of surviving American soldiers' oral testimonies, stating, "Recalling their experiences, an American soldier expressed deep respect and awe for the sacrifices made by the Chinese People's Volunteer Army. Facing extreme conditions, including lack of food and enduring hours in snowy terrains, the soldier admitted he couldn't have endured it himself. Therefore, I think that American soldiers developed a profound sense of respect and even fear for their Chinese counterparts." Films, as one of the artistic forms, strive to captivate audiences by creating commemorative stories that bring them back to the increasingly hazy corridors of history, offering fresh experiences and insights. In films with themes related to the Korean War, although the subjective consciousness of the film production team is inevitably interwoven, the overarching objective of honoring history and transmitting memory remains consistent. A prevalent narrative direction in such films is the focus on "individual", vividly portraying the battlefield exploits of each individual or group soldiers. This approach allows the younger generation to connect emotionally with the fearless heroes of the People's Volunteer Army in the

cinematic world. Interviewee ZN-08, who once served in the army, said, “I feel that if I had been part of the Korean War, my fate wouldn’t have been killed in battle, but rather to succumb to the bitter cold in those thin cotton clothes. Much like the ‘Ice Sculpture Company’ (Chinese soldiers were frozen to death while their guns were still in their hands in Battle of Chosin Reservoir) portrayed in movies, the thought of enduring temperatures plummeting to minus forty or fifty degrees Celsius sends shivers down my spine.” For the audience, the war stories in movies are imbued with heroic hues, portraying the courage of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army on the Korean War battlefield and their unwavering willingness to sacrifice everything for the motherland. This portrayal resonates seamlessly with the values held by patriots.

5. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES: INTERGENERATIONAL PERFORMANCES OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

5.1 Results of the Intergenerational Formation of Collective Memories of the Korean War across Three Generations

This study employed Python to perform word frequency analysis on the interview data of three generations, producing distinct word cloud charts for each generation. This methodology visually elucidates the overall memory patterns within each generational group.

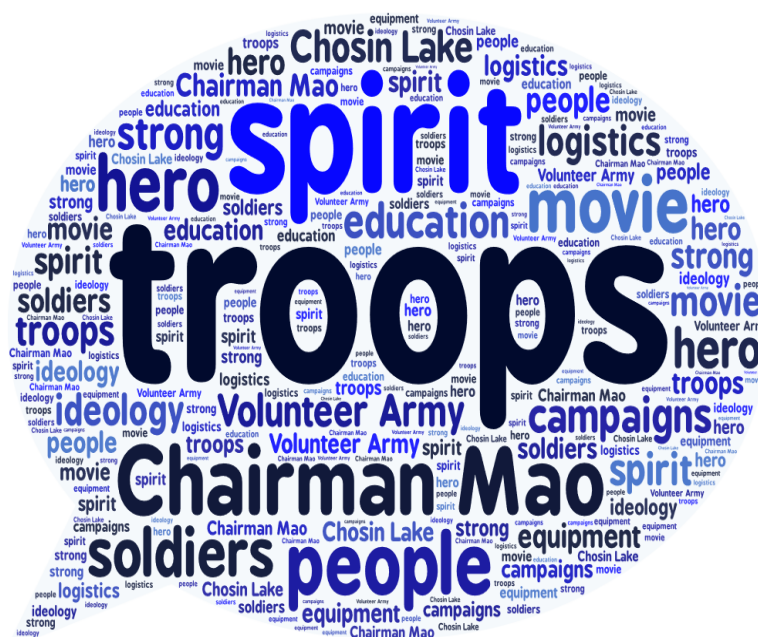


Figure 3: Word cloud chart of the older generation

According to Figure 3, it reveals that for the older generation, the focal points of memory are the troops and Chairman Mao. Meanwhile, film, as a medium of memory, also captivates the majority of the elderly public, continuously shaping their memories of the Korean War and evoking strong emotional identification among them.



Figure 4: Word cloud chart of the middle generation

Figure 4 indicates that the memory focal points for the middle-aged generation center around movie and the country. Movies stand out as the primary catalyst for evoking memories from childhood for the middle-aged generation. Additionally, this generation demonstrates a strong national consciousness, recognizing the profound significance of China's victory in the Korean War.



Figure 5: Word cloud chart of the young generation

As depicted in Figure 5, the central elements for young generation are spirit and movie. Emotionally resonant films play a vital role in crystallizing the hero's sacrifice and the righteousness of the nation. These cinematic narratives adeptly cultivate the patriotic emotions of the youth in a direct or subtle way, allowing them to grasp the essence of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army's spirit and realize that they have benefited from the sacrifices of these soldiers. This heightened awareness serves as a source of inspiration, motivating them to passionately cherish present life.

5.2 Similarities in Memory Cognition Across Three Generations

Examining the memory performances of three generations after the Korean War shaped by media narratives such as history teaching, memorial ceremonies, and literary and artistic works, it becomes evident that the cognition of collective memory of the war demonstrates a consistent pattern across these generations. As a form of historical memory, war memories with rich values and cultural nuances can be interpreted and disseminated through various media channels, thus contributing to the establishment of a shared cognitive framework among generations.

5.2.1 Shared Memory Symbols

Throughout the interviews, the core memory symbols for the three generations regarding the Korean War revolve around meaning, military situations, and heroes. Interviewees consistently showcased a persistent interest in understanding the war's significance. They expressed approval or China's decision to assist North Korea, recognizing it as a "necessary war" and a "founding war of PRC". According to their perspective, this war created the conditions for peace and laid a foundational groundwork for the China's subsequent decades of development. As interviewee QN-16 said: "The war that firstly comes to my mind is the Korean War, which is the founding war of PRC. It effectively erased the shame of being trampled upon by foreign powers." Some interviewees draw parallels with the recent Russo-Ukrainian War, perceiving similarities in its objectives to China's support for the Korean War. In both cases, they see such involvement as a necessary and just choice made in response to threats faced by the respective countries. For Chinese people, this is as a way to seek the right moral guidance, ensuring their memory aligns seamlessly with the factual truth. QN-03: "Ukraine has emerged as a perceived threat to Russia. Historically, when other nations present potential threats, it often signifies intentions of destruction or annexation. This mindset parallels our

approach when we provided assistance to Korea in the past—to prevent the occurrence of such tragic outcomes”. Some interviewees’ memories are intertwined with monumental battles such as “Battle of Triangle Hill” and “Battle of Chosin Reservoir.” Narratives stemming from these grand wars have consistently held a central position in public memory. For instance, ZN-06 stated, “The Battle of Chosin Reservoir showed the tenacity of the Chinese People’s Volunteers Army. Soldiers lay one after another in the icy terrain, freezing alive. Also, Triangle Hill witnessed the fearless spirit of these soldiers, charging forward with grenades in hand.” Many interviewees also noted that these memories are drawn from classic films related to these events. Among various forms of media, movies play a paramount role in transcending time and bridging gaps in public memory, allowing fading recollections to regain clarity through cinematic retellings. As LN-06 said, “I knew about the Korean War early on, but some specific details only became clear to me after recently watching the movie *The Battle at Lake Changjin* (Chosin Reservoir).” Heroic narratives also constitute a crucial element within a nation’s war memories. In the interviewees’ accounts, descriptions of Chinese heroes on the Korean War battlefield have ignited public enthusiasm for collective memory. These heroic memories can be primarily categorized into three groups. The first encompasses well-known heroes such as Huang Jiguang and Qiu Shaoyun, representing a form of remembrance grounded in individual identities. LN-09, an 86-year-old interviewee, still vividly remembers: “When I was a child, there were television programs depicting Huang Jiguang’s heroic act of blowing up an enemy blockhouse. He carried explosives and secretly climbed up the blockhouse to hurl himself against a machine gun slit, sacrificing himself in the end.” The second category is unnamed heroes, with some interviewees expressing gratitude and respect for every individual’s sacrifice, incorporating the deeds of unsung heroes into the collective memory system. For instance, interviewee ZN-07 stated, “There are millions of soldiers in the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army, and tens of thousands had sacrificed... China wouldn’t win the war relying solely on those few well-known heroes. There is a large number of unsung heroes.” The third category mainly focuses on decision-makers with tactics and strategies. The charisma of leaders has earned praise and gratitude from generations represented by figures like Mao Zedong and Peng Dehuai.

5.2.2 The Moral Admonitions of Three Generations

The memory of war is a tapestry woven with both glory and hardship. Over seventy years ago, People’s Volunteer Army made heroic sacrifices

for the enduring peace of the nation for generations to come. The hardships they experienced would lose their meaning if the world is not at peace. Therefore, influenced by media narratives, subsequent generations have integrated pacifist beliefs with their memories of war, becoming staunch anti-war advocates. Interviewee LN-01 believes, "The best thing is to avoid war because once it happens, nowhere is safe." Having learned about the devastating consequences of the Korean War from his grandfather, the interviewee reflects, "Knowing the horrors of the war, understanding the extremely painful cost of people's deaths, one would think that war should not be initiated or instigated." Oral histories from previous generations leave an enduring imprint on the minds of descendants, leading them to harbor profound emotions for the Chinese People's Volunteer Army. The moral philosophy "may the world be free of war" becomes an indelible ethical principle imprinted in the hearts of following generations. Under the influence of history teaching and hero narratives, people further establish a moral value of "cherishing the present moment." "We are robbers," says interviewee ZN-06, believing that they are robbers who have taken the credit of their predecessors. Therefore, the interviewee views cherishing life as a way to atone for this perceived guilt: "In fact, we are robbers now, stealing the happiness earned by our predecessors with their blood, so we should cherish it even more." Interviewee QN-04 expresses a similar sentiment: "The life we have now is earned by our ancestors. They managed to crack a silver lining in the clouds to allow us to walk on sunshine, so we should cherish it." This interpretation labels those who grew up in peaceful and prosperous times as "beneficiaries" while also demanding that these "beneficiaries" actively take on the responsibility of living well. However, memories are inherently dynamic, and the struggle for control over them is intricately related to the political situation. War narratives have become indicators for the public to perceive changes in international political relations, providing a constant moral reminder to the public to be vigilant even during times of peace. For instance, interviewee LN-01 rationally noted, "Although it is very safe nowadays, there is always hidden danger". Expressing dissatisfaction, QN-08 added, "Japan and the United States occasionally provoke China", while ZN-05 discerningly remarked, "The confrontation between countries has long transcended from the previous war mode to a higher level". These statements highlight the public's efforts to find contemporary significance from war memories, thereby emphasizing the increasing necessity and value of preserving such memories.

5.3 The Different Paths of Emotional Expression Among Three Generations

5.3.1 Old Generation: Survival and Perseverance

The old generation grew up in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the social environment, characterized by the imperative for comprehensive development, instilled in them a profound appreciation for the revolutionary foundation laid by their predecessors. Given that the war memories of the elderly generation are rooted in firsthand narratives passed down by word of mouth during their childhood, it carries distinct characteristics related to life and cultural significance. This is notably manifested in their emphasis on thrift and frugality, as expressed by interviewee LN-02: "Young people waste a lot of things. They throw away food they can't finish... because they haven't experienced the times of food scarcity. Like the time during the Korean War, those soldiers were truly suffering." From their perspective, the improvement in quality of life over the seventy years since the end of the Korean War is remarkably evident. As conveyed with joy by interviewee LN-09, "During the Korean War, life was very difficult, with insufficient food and low productivity. One mu (the Chinese version of acre, 1 mu is around 0.17 acres) of land yielded only two to three hundred kilograms of grains. So, now, having such a good life makes me happy!" The elderly generation's interpretation of the significance of hardship is filled with compassion for the revolutionary predecessors, and this compassion permeates various facets of their daily practices. The elderly generation remained loyal to this wartime legacy throughout their lives, dedicating their lives to preserving it and endeavoring to shape future generations by sharing memories and fostering a national sense of identity. Interviewee LN-06 expressed lofty aspirations for the millions of Chinese people: "I hope our descendants remember this period of history, do not forget our predecessors protected the territories with their blood, and also safeguard our nation. I also hope for the reunification of Taiwan to be achieved at the earliest opportunity, completing what should have been accomplished over 70 years ago." Similarly, interviewee LN-09 also conveyed positive expectations, "I advise my grandson to study hard so as not to squander the improved opportunities provided by our country. China went through a lot in the past, and in the future, he should repay our country properly when given the opportunity." Shaped by their living environment and oral histories, the emotions of the elderly generation are quite pure. They integrate the sacrifices of their predecessors into their individual identity system, fostering unwavering patriotic sentiments. As a generation that

grew up in challenging times, they quietly uphold this legacy of memory.

5.3.2 Middle Generation: Experiences and Transmission

The middle-aged generation came of the times following reform and opening-up, experiencing relatively less survival pressure compared to the elderly generation. According to the life-cycle approach, the middle-aged generation is currently in the transitional phase between the first and second halves of life. With the enrichment of life experiences, their emotions toward the Chinese People's Volunteer Army in the Korean War exhibit a trend of deepening, so that this generation emerges as a formidable force in transmitting this collective memory. Many middle-aged interviewees described this emotional evolution, describing a shift from relative indifference during childhood to profound sentiments as they matured. Interviewee ZN-06 mentioned that in childhood, there was a lack of awareness regarding the meaning of death. However, as grew older, the interviewee found the sacrifices made by the People's Volunteer Army deeply moving, "As a teenager, I had no concept of death at all. So when they made me recite *Who is the Loveliest Person* (an essay by the Chinese writer Wei Wei, setting against the backdrop of the Korean War, which praises the Chinese People's Volunteer Army), I just felt very painful... But as my life became richer, and my emotions became more refined, reading this article later in life truly makes me impressive." Similarly, Interviewee ZN-08, with accumulated life experiences, gradually realized the greatness of the volunteer soldiers: "When I hadn't experienced death, I had no concept of it. It was only when facing the loss of family members can I understand its profound pain. Later entering society and getting to know there exist deceit in human relationships, I reread books related to the war and discovered that it was truly touching because these soldiers could sacrifice themselves for their comrades, hometown, and the motherland, for an unseen future." Based on this kind of emotional transformation, the middle-aged generation places great importance on the war narrative that has being developed since their childhood. They integrate their individual identity with war culture, emerging as active transmitters of this memory. Interviewee ZN-06, a vlogger in we media, has been dedicated to producing videos on the Korean War since 2021, stating, "We should do this to transmit the historical events. It is necessary that there is someone needed to take over the cause from the previous generation. Otherwise, our nation will face problems when these memories are forgotten." Interviewee ZN-07, an ordinary citizen, voluntarily created a trilogy of topic models on the Korean War, hoping to immerse more people in

historical scenes through 3D models, evoking deep emotions and a passion for memory. Furthermore, Interviewee ZN-09, a Secretary of Youth League in an enterprise, often shares the stories about the hardships encountered by the Chinese People's Volunteers on Communist party days. Through this way, this interviewee aims to cultivate the determination of younger generation to make progress. History will not be automatically passed on. There is a need for someone to actively pass on it, only in this way can future generations regard the past as valuable (Mwambari, 2021). The middle-aged generation stands as a group of actively engaged memory inheritors, striving to pass on this memory in their own ways. They even carry a sense of mission, eager to permanently preserve these memories, transforming them into an eternal bond between the future generation and the wartime generation.

5.3.3 Young Generation: Life and Reflection

The young generation grew up at the turn of the old and new centuries, lacking the time sedimentation for memories of the Korean War. Their impressions on this war predominantly formed through sensory experiences in their relatively happy lives. In an era characterized by material prosperity, the youth exhibit eagerness to comprehend history through active participation in commemorative activities, visiting memorials, and exploration of media projects. Through this process of intuitive memory exchange, they generate positive emotions such as inspiration, respect, a sense of belonging, and identification. Concurrently, they draw comparisons between their contemporary living environment and that of the wartime period, prompting reflective behavior. In terms of specific influences, their reflection is self-directed. As the memory of the war deepens, the younger generation gradually integrates this war culture into their own value system, which, in turn, guides their life choices and development. Interviewee QN-03 passionately expresses a strong commitment to sacrificing for the country, saying, "If other countries invade China now, I will not hesitate to go to the battlefield like my grandfather did back then." Also, interviewee QN-11 internalizes hero culture as an unwavering life creed, "When encountering adversities, I will tell myself not to retreat and even actively take actions." China's young generation, living in a prosperous era, exhibits a robust impulse to achieve self-efficacy and self-value. They are often inspired by hero culture, leading them to engage in regular self-reflection. Through such reflection and self-exploration, the youth would gradually construct their own war memories, evolving into bearers of this memory that coexists with the shared

admonition of “we should never forget predecessors’ sacrifices.”

6. CONCLUSION

The passage of time will not change the fact that the Chinese nation will forever derive benefits from the contributions of Chinese People’s Volunteer Army in the Korean War. Different generations following the war have reexamined the value of this history through various media narratives, facilitating the transmission and preservation of interconnected collective memories across the generations. Overall, this study, through a thorough analysis of interview data by using the grounded theory, has summarized the generative mechanism and intergenerational performances of collective memory of Korean War. Furthermore, it has delved into the similarities and differences in this memory across generations, examining the mediation effect of media. Memory and forgetfulness have always been interconnected themes, and media consistently demonstrates powerful intermediary potential in combating forgetfulness and transmitting memories, providing effective pathways for intergenerational transmission. For example, as a medium for the inheritance of family spirit, the body connects intimate relationships within the family and provides numerous dim memories, capable of bridging gaps in intergenerational recollection. Print media, a medium for transmitting national and historical memories, helps solidify memories, vying for space in the next generation’s consciousness. As medium for the transmission of artistic works, film and television eliminate literacy barriers, with they serving as a potent code for memory transmission. As a medium for transmitting diverse and intertwined forms of memories, online media offers a freely accessible space, bringing people together in social networks and providing a future direction for intergenerational memory transmission. Meanwhile, in the face of memory loss, distortion, and confusion brought about by the new media environment, it is imperative for media to focus on rescuing endangered memories, aiming to rejuvenate the memories of the Chinese people regarding the Korean War. However, there are still some limitations. This study is a qualitative research based on in-depth interviews, yielding content that may appear fragmented which makes this study stops at the surface-level. Also, this study did not delve deeply into investigating the role of media in the memory processes of each generation, and the representativeness of the interview sample still requires careful consideration. Exploring the intergenerational transmission of collective

memory is a complex endeavor, and future research could benefit from combining qualitative and quantitative methods to enhance the reliability and validity of results. Continued exploration is needed to identify optimal solutions for achieving intergenerational memory transmission.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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