

# Research on the “Nongren/Danren” Phenomenon in the Context of Meme Theory

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### Abstract:

“Nongren” and “Danren” are two new memes from China’s internet. These memes are important for young people to express themselves and connect with others. “Nongren” means people full of energy, while “Danren” means people with low energy. This study uses ideas from meme theory and drama studies, and looks at articles, survey results, and social media posts to learn how these memes started and changed, why young people use them, and what they show about society today. Results show these memes spread quickly with special pictures and words. While they help young people form their identities and share feelings, they might make understanding social issues too simple. This research helps see youth cultures and social thoughts in a new way by looking beyond old personality types during the digital age.

**Keywords:** meme theory, dramaturgy, “Nongren/Danren”, identity construction, social media, youth group, labeling

## 1. Research Background

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As internet technology and social media grow, online memes have become important for young people’s cultural expression. Starting from early “crazy writings” to the recent popular “personality labels,” memes are more than just entertainment. They also act like a “mirror” showing changes in society’s mindset. The Chinese meme “Nongren/Danren” uses a simple binary system to show differences among young people in look, buying habits, feelings, and other things, thus creating a unique identity framework. Unlike

MBTI personality types that rely on stable traits, “Nongren/Danren” is a changing cultural symbol made and changed by users online. Its spread follows the logic of copying and changing memes and also shows how young people deal with social pressures.

### 1.2 . Research Significance

This study combines ideas from meme theory and dramaturgy to understand this online cultural event. It goes beyond the typical ways of studying personality, showing how digital identities are created through interaction. By looking at how the “Nongren/Danren” meme changes and its performance traits, this research adds to the study of online memes in

the country. It also offers new ways to apply cultural gene theory in digital spaces.

The “Nongren/Danren” phenomenon is a way young people cope and express themselves due to social pressures. This study looks at the psychological reasons behind it and can give real information on how young people form their identities and control their emotions today. It also offers ideas on handling real problems like managing social media sites and guiding youth culture in a positive direction. This helps build a more welcoming and healthy online space.

### 1.3 . Research Status

Experts studying online memes have gathered a lot of data, focusing mostly on how memes spread like genes by “replication-distribution-change,” and looking at their use in marketing and sharing culture. Research from other countries usually examines how memes move across different cultures. In contrast, local studies often link memes to youth subcultures, such as how they show social attitudes seen in trends like “Buddhist-style youth” (Hu Yong & Liu Chunyi, 2018) and “crazy literature” (Zhu Qianbei & Yan Weina, 2025). There’s still not enough thorough research on new memes focused on identity features, like “Nongren/Danren.”

Dramaturgy, a concept by Goffman, helps explore how people act online. Many studies say users show who they are by managing what is seen and what is hidden. This helps them gain attention and feel good (Dong Chenyu & Ding Yiran, 2018). Research mostly looks at how personality types like MBTI help shape identity (Zhang Hongyu, 2025). However, the idea of dividing people as “Nongren” or “Danren” lacks critical analysis and has flaws.

## 2. Core Theoretical Foundation

In 1976, a British expert named Richard Dawkins talked about the “Meme” idea. He said it is the basic part of how culture is passed on. The main process includes copying, change, and choice. Dawkins compared it to biological genes. He suggested that cultural bits like thoughts, behaviors, and styles spread by copying between people. During this spread, these bits keep changing, and those that fit better with their surroundings last longer.

The widespread use of the internet has created a very fast way to share memes. Online memes are usually pictures, short videos, or text that spread quickly and change as people share them. Scholar Shifman[6]points out three main features of online memes: they invite active user participation, they spread quickly through social networks, and they are a big part of daily online conversations. This study views “Nongren/Danren” as a meme based on iden-

tity, acting not just as a tool for sharing information but also including cultural ideas about how people see themselves and others in society.

## 3. The Evolutionary Mechanisms and Symbolic Characteristics of the “Nongren/Danren” Meme

### 3.1 . Evolutionary Path: Replication-Development-Variation

In late 2022 to early 2023, “Nongren/Danren” shaped as a concept on Xiaohongshu and Weibo within fashion, beauty, and lifestyle communities. It distinguished clothing styles, makeup, and life outlooks. “Nong-style” means bright colors and detailed designs, while “Dan-style” implies muted colors and simple designs. Quickly, this idea grew beyond its start, covering personality traits, emotional displays, social habits, and life views. This change, called “semantic generalization,” is a normal meme change. People add meanings to “Nong” and “Dan” using image posts, short clips, and icons. Its spread shows platform-to-platform sharing and cyclic patterns: a popular “Danren daily life” video layout on Douyin might become picture guides by Xiaohongshu users, short sayings by Weibo users, and then shared again as detailed videos on Bilibili.

### 3.2 . Core Characteristics of the Symbolic System

Based on a content analysis of 100 typical samples across multiple social platforms (data collected in October 2025 from highly interactive content under related topics on Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin), this study summarizes the characteristics of the meme’s symbolic system:

#### 3.2.1 . Textual Symbols

Text symbols usually appear as brief phrases and key words, being both short and clear. Words like “Nongren” often connect with “passionate,” “outgoing,” and “good with people,” showing lively emotion. On the other hand, “Danren” pairs with “reserved,” “simple,” and “shy,” showing quiet and keeping away from others. These short symbols lower sharing cost and help users understand and relate better.

#### 3.2.2 . Visual Symbols

Symbolic images show a very different style. Pictures linked to “Nongren” use bright colors, bold designs, and active scenes. In contrast, “Danren” pictures use soft colors, simple layouts, and calm places like desks or quiet rooms. These symbols are easy to recognize and help us-

ers to express themselves.

### 3.3 . Differences from Traditional Personality Classifications

The “Nongren/Danren” meme is different from older systems like MBTI. MBTI shows fixed personality types, but “Nong/Dan” lets people change or mix their identity based on the situation or their feelings. This meme is more about acting in certain ways. It goes beyond just describing personality. It also includes choices in what people buy and how they behave socially. This fits well with young people who like to show their identity in many pieces and pictures online. Some experts, such as Peng Lan in 2020[7], say new media users are showing signs of being connected and influenced by media. Memes like “Nong/Dan” show these signs clearly in cultural ways.

## 4. Psychological and Social Motivations for Youth Adoption of the “Nongren/Danren” Meme

### 4.1 . Identity Construction and Group Belonging

Today’s young people face a hard and busy social world. They use tags like “Nongren/Danren” to quickly find their place. By using these tags, they can find others who think the same in online groups. These include communities called “Nongren Energy Supply Stations” or “Danren Social Corners.” Such digital groups offer emotional help and a feeling of belonging in today’s world. They reduce the loneliness many feel from society, making way for a kind of “digital tribalism.” This idea connects to Jenkins et al. (2013)[8], who explain how “spreadable media” creates meaning and worth.

### 4.2 . Social Simplification and Efficiency Enhancement

In today’s time with too much information, young people often use simple symbols to talk and connect. Terms like “Nongren/Danren” act as social shortcuts, letting people show their social choices. This approach reduces extra interaction costs and aids in better social connections. For example, people using “Danren” can avoid too many social invites by placing this label on their profiles. Meanwhile, those labeled “Nongren” can find others who prefer similar interactions, improving how much fun and quality they experience in their social life.

### 4.3 . Emotional Catharsis and Stress Relief

In a world full of competition and stress, young people of-

ten deal with pressures from jobs, school, and social life. The “Nongren/Danren” meme offers a safe way for people to express their feelings. The lively “Nongren” style helps release emotions, while the calm “Danren” manner shows a way to handle stress without getting overwhelmed. A survey done in October 2025 with 300 people aged 18–30 found that about 68% felt these labels “make it easier to accept how I am now,” and around 57% saw them as “a way to express and reduce pressure.”

## 5. Social Implications and Critical Reflections on the Phenomenon

### 5.1 . Social Mirror: Youth Self-Categorization and Reflection

The “Nongren/Danren” idea shows how young people today group what they think of themselves, handle their emotions, and make life choices. This reflects their mindset in a stressful society. By using these labels, they share their search for different ways to live and gently push back against society’s idea of “success.” The simple lifestyle chosen by “Danren” challenges the idea of needing to buy more, while the unique style of “Nongren” fights against expectations to be the same. Both of these ideas show how young people keep changing what they see as a “meaningful life.”

### 5.2 . Potential Risks: The Oversimplification of Social Cognition

Binary categories might help some people define their identity, but they can also make social understanding too simple. Some users strictly follow the “Nongren/Danren” split, mistakenly thinking “not Nongren means Danren,” which ignores how personalities can be complex and change with context. This simplification might lead to group conflicts and stereotypes, like thinking “Nongren say Danren are boring” or “Danren don’t like Nongren’s openness,” which could harm efforts to make online spaces inclusive and welcoming for everyone.

### 5.3 . The Alienation of Memes: From Self-Expression Tool to Label-Based Constraint

The “Nongren/Danren” meme grows in popularity, and some users show “label alienation.” Young people sometimes change their actions to fit these labels, ignoring their true emotions and desires. This change turns the meme from a way to freely express oneself into a limit that stops self-expression. It might increase loneliness and go against what youth culture originally wanted to promote.

## 6. Conclusion and Future Directions

This study looks into the “Nongren/Danren” meme, a local Chinese internet trend. It shows how this meme spreads, why it appeals to people, and its effects on young people’s social interactions. The results show that this meme is part of the creative culture of young internet users today. It helps them deal with life’s pressures, shape who they are, and handle how they feel. The meme benefits users by helping them form identity, making social interactions easier, and controlling emotions. However, it may also lead to some issues like reinforcing stereotypes and causing people to label themselves too strictly.

Research could explore many paths in the future. First, using methods that follow people over time might show in detail how they use these labels both online and offline. Next, studies comparing across cultures could look at how these memes are alike or different in various social settings. These methods could help us better understand the lively and complex nature of youth culture today, providing better ways to support its growth.

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