

FAN CULTURE WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS:

Participatory Engagement in the Web 2.0 Era

BY

BO WANG

A thesis

submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington

in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Victoria University of Wellington

2019

Acknowledgements

The thesis would not be possible without the help that I have been receiving from my supervisors. I would like to gratefully thank my primary supervisor Joost de Bruin, who has been constantly encouraging and guiding me to develop my academic skills and carry out my research project at Victoria University of Wellington. My work might not have gone this far without his generous support. I am greatly indebted to secondary supervisor Stephen Epstein, whose critical comments and insights into Asian cultures and languages were tremendously inspiring and helpful for writing and the improvement of this thesis. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my other secondary supervisor, Michael Daubs, who shared his expertise in media studies and helped me establish a solid theoretical foundation for this study.

Special thanks to the staff of the School of English, Film, Theatre, and Media Studies as well as the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences for offering me a supportive and friendly environment to do research in. I would also like to thank Anita Brady and Trisha Dunleavy. I have benefitted a lot from your inspiring discussions and lectures. My gratitude also goes to Adél Taljaard, Christina Hyson and Cathy McCullagh, for warm-hearted help during my time in the Media Studies programme.

Additionally, I want to thank Kōichi Inoue, our subject librarian, who constantly helped me acquire very useful and much needed academic sources.

Warm love and gratitude to my family, particularly my mother Wang Caihong, my father Wang Weiliang, my wife Fang Meng, and my uncle Sun Defang. Without your unconditional support emotionally and financially, I would never have made it through the difficult times and completed my research project in New Zealand.

Abstract

This thesis is centred on participatory fan culture in Chinese social media. It investigates how fans gather through social networks, how they produce creative work, and how they use different platforms to circulate their favourite media and fannish texts. By constructing, reshaping and spreading meanings through participatory practices, fans create their own cultures and gradually develop their own discourses. My theoretical approach can be classified as cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh, 2007; Scollo, 2011), and I adopted the snowball sampling method to find interviewees and fan communities in which I have conducted observation to collect data for my analysis. On the basis of John Fiske's concept of "textual productivity" (1992) and Henry Jenkins's notions of "media convergence" (2006a) and "spreadability" (2013), the thesis is based on a platform analysis as well as two case studies about the Chinese reality TV show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and BBC's crime drama *Sherlock*.

The platform analysis examines four platforms that Chinese social media fans use most frequently: Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili. Through the analysis of the sociocultural contexts, user interfaces and primary features of these four platforms, it became clear that the platforms emphasise differentiated content (e.g. microblogging-style posts, instant text/voice messages, continuous updating posts, video clips and flying comments), and that each platform has its own search and recommendation services to guide users to their target content. By comparing five elements of social media including public posts, direct messaging, group chatting, search tools and information recommendation (Yoder and Stutzman, 2011), the analysis offers insight into the different affordances provided by these four platforms and how Chinese fans employ the platforms to develop fan culture.

The two case studies investigate the formation, manifestation and influence of fan cultures on three levels: fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identity. Analysing data collected from interviews and online observation in the Weibo-based fan chat group 刘诺一全球后援会 1 群 (*Liu Nuoyi Quanguo Houyuanhui 1 Qun*; "Liu Nuoyi's Global Fan Community, Group 1") and the Tieba-based forum 爸爸去哪儿康诺吧 (*Babaqunaer Kang Nuo Ba*; "Kangkang and Nuoyi of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Forum"), the case study of *Where Are*

We Going, Dad? demonstrates that the Web 2.0 services that fans use maintain an open structure, which attracts fans to contribute new layers of meaning and value. Discussing the fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identities, the case study of Chinese *Sherlock* fandom demonstrates that Chinese online fans rely on textual productivity to establish their fan identities, and Chinese social media to facilitate the production and spread of fan translation, which not only bridges the language and cultural gap between the *Sherlock* texts (the BBC episodes and the original novel) and Chinese fandom, but also connects different types of *Sherlock* fans online. I also compare the two cases from the perspective of narrative structure by drawing upon Jason Mittell's "centrifugal and centripetal complex" model (2015) and argue that the different narrative structures lead a different sense of self-recognition for fans, gender dynamics, power differences in fan communities, and that they shape fans' cultural citizenship.

Keywords: fandom, social media, Web 2.0, participatory culture, China

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
ABSTRACT	III
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The social context of Chinese Web 2.0 fandom	3
1.2 Fan research	6
1.3 Case studies	9
1.4 Chapter outline	10
1.5 Contribution of the thesis	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	17
2.1 Social media as platforms	17
2.2 Social media in China	21
2.3 Fan studies	23
2.4 Scholarship on Chinese fandom	29
2.5 Slash and Boys' Love fandom	34
2.6 Globalisation, transnational media, and cultural citizenship	36
2.7 Conclusion	38
CHAPTER 3 FINDING FANS AND THE CULTURE THEY CREATE	41
3.1 Cultural context matters: the need for a comprehensive set of methods	41
3.2 Applying digital ethnography to collect data	42
3.3 Explaining the fandom with Critical Discourse Analysis	51

3.4	Who are they: An outline of my fan informants	57
3.5	Conclusion	71
CHAPTER 4. FRAMING CHINESE SOCIAL MEDIA FANDOM: PLATFORM ANALYSIS		73
4.1	Contextualisation of Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili	73
4.2	Multiple platforms, differentiated usage	98
4.3	Conclusion	118
CHAPTER 5. CHINESE ONLINE FANDOM AND THE REALITY SHOW <i>WHERE ARE WE GOING, DAD?</i>		121
5.1	Introduction	121
5.2	A Web 2.0 style fan-platform interaction	122
5.3	The evolving fannish texts	138
5.4	The complexity of fan identity	151
5.5	Conclusion	161
CHAPTER 6. CHINESE ONLINE FANDOM AND BBC CRIME DRAMA <i>SHERLOCK</i>		165
6.1	Introduction	165
6.2	Linkage between multiple platforms: Fan-platform interaction	167
6.3	Fannish texts and globalisation	172
6.4	Fans' skills, power, and fan identity	188
6.5	Conclusion	198
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION		201
7.1	A new mode of Chinese fans' media consumption	201
7.2	Fannish text: A practice of skills, knowledge, and more	206

7.3	Fan identity in the context of globalisation	209
7.4	Directions for future research	213
BIBLIOGRAPHY		217

Chapter 1. Introduction

Web 2.0 fandom, a developing form of media culture that has emerged on social media platforms in the People's Republic of China in recent years, is attracting wide online participation. According to Tim O'Reilly (2007), the concept of "Web 2.0" refers to an updated version of the World Wide Web mostly in terms of characteristics and functionality, rather than technical specifications. Providing more interactive spaces and connectivity, such as content-sharing and social networking, Web 2.0 services facilitate the spread of media products as well as user-generated content. Under these circumstances, a goal of Web 2.0 is to give people the opportunity to feel connected and involved online. Such participatory trends quickly became popular across the Internet in China. Today, the idea of "being a fan" is no longer limited to fandom. For instance, many consumers start to call themselves as fans to demonstrate their affiliation to a product. This grounds some Chinese fans' different understandings of fan identity. Many netizens have started to address themselves as "fans" of people or products they like in order to strengthen a connection to others. While people broadly use, or sometimes abuse, the word "fans" as well as many more specific derivative phrases, the boundaries between fans and non-fans, between amateur and official, and between individual tastes and commercial interests has become vague, which raises a series of questions: How do the Web 2.0 platforms, fannish texts, and fan identity affect each other? How do the Web 2.0 technologies change the structure of a fan community?

In this thesis, through an overarching platform analysis and two case studies, I examine Chinese social media fan cultures, which have moved from the underground to the centre of public life. The platform analysis examines four popular platforms (i.e. Weibo, WeChat, Tieba, and Bilibili) and offers an overview of the Chinese social media landscape. Through the exploration of direct (or private) messaging, public posts, public chatting, search tools and subscription feeds, I draw in this analysis upon Ian Hutchby's (2001) notion of affordances to explain how Chinese social media platforms attract and guide fans to reach, read and circulate the content in which they are interested. The case studies look at fandom for two popular television programmes in China. The first case study considers fandom of the reality show *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, a Chinese adaptation of a South Korean programme; and the second is about BBC's drama *Sherlock*, a media product imported into China. These two cases

reflect trends of globalisation both in media industry and fan participation. As Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) note, transnational media content travels from one culture to another, driven by commercial interests seeking to profit in different markets as well as audiences looking for more access to other cultures. Meanwhile, these two cases also reflect how Chinese fan culture has grown, from absorbing international concepts and ideas of fandom to developing its own forms of discourse. Together, commercial interests and fan practices shape a unique landscape of Chinese social media and Chinese media culture, which I will explore in later chapters. Through the analysis of platforms, fannish texts and fans, I will argue that the seemingly decentred Web 2.0 world does not represent an egalitarian and democratic media environment as internet companies' claim, and that the intimate relationship between media platforms, fannish texts and fans intensifies a power hierarchy in fandom.

In this research project I explore the formation, manifestation and influence of Chinese Web 2.0 fan culture in order to investigate what fans produce and share, how they engage with different platforms and what such participation means for their sense of identity. I will firstly outline the fans themselves: How do individual fans position themselves in relation to fandom more generally? How do different fans establish connections with each other? How does a fan community affect individual fans' ideas or behaviours?

I then investigate how Chinese social platforms propel the growth of fandom, and vice versa: what features and affordances do popular media platforms offer fans? Which features of these platforms guide fans to interact with each other? What do the most frequently used features bring to Web 2.0 fandom? I articulate answers to these questions in the platform analysis, Chapter Four.

I next examine the texts that fans create and the cultural connotation behind these texts. By investigating the fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *Sherlock*, I answer the following questions: what kind of texts do Chinese fans create? How do fans contribute to increasing the meaning to a fannish text? How are these fannish texts circulated and consumed?

Having examined the above aspects, I will explore the fans themselves again and the connection between fans of specific media products and the main theme of their fandom: What do these particular texts mean to fans? How do these fans connect with and, more

importantly, differ from each other? What does it mean to be a fan in contemporary Chinese society?

To answer these questions, I apply digital ethnography to collect data, including broad Weibo searches, in-depth interviews and observation. The data collected through digital ethnography includes how Chinese fans interact with social media platforms and among themselves, the content the fans produce and share online, and how the fan informants understand themselves. Such comprehensive data collection paves the way for the two case studies. Finally I draw on twenty-seven interviews and observation in two fan communities.

The thesis analyses fans' participatory culture from three perspectives – fan-platform interaction, fannish texts, and fans themselves. By exploring this dynamic culture, I argue that Chinese social media reforms the way fans connect and communicate with each other by developing different connectivity across platforms and by offering technical affordances to guide users to be involved in fan culture. I also argue that such media technical evolution helps Chinese fans establish a sense of cosmopolitan citizenship by offering opportunities for crowd participation such as fansubbing and “produsing” fannish materials. In the meantime, fans create texts not merely to express their pleasure in media consumption, but also to show off their knowledge, expertise and understandings of the world, and to present their anxieties about their own identities and, ultimately, contemporary Chinese society.

1.1 The social context of Chinese Web 2.0 fandom

Since the origin of the word “fan” can be traced back to “fanatic” in western languages, western society has often considered fans as a group of passionate or even “geeky” community members, although in the past two decades scholars have challenged such idea (Fiske, 1992; Jensen, 1992; Tulloch, Jenkins, 1995). This negative stereotype of fans is also present in Chinese mainstream discourse, and much Chinese research connects fandom to social psychological problems (Liang, 1994; Wang, 2011). Although Chinese fandom emerges in the 1990s when popular culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan achieved dominance in the People's Republic of China, the form of fandom that we currently observe has developed with the Internet and Chinese online culture (Zheng, 2016). The most popularly used Chinese word for fans now, *fensi* (粉丝, literally a kind of vermicelli noodle), is a phonetic transcription of the English word “fans” and came into public consciousness in 2005, when the Internet

became widely affordable in Chinese urban areas (Zheng, 2016) and the first China-made singing contest show *Super Girl* (*Chaoji Nüsheng*, 超级女声) gained phenomenal success largely due to fans' online practice (Bao Zhenpei, 2013). Chinese fan studies then gradually emerged, in line with the growth of both domestic fandom and Internet technology. Nonetheless, given Chinese fandom's short history and complexity in terms of origins and socio-cultural context, international academia still lacks deep understanding of Chinese fan culture. In particular, the lack of empirical studies of Web 2.0 fandom outside of globally popular platforms makes this research important.

In the People's Republic of China, the nation that now has the world's largest population of Internet users, social media is developing rapidly. It connects individuals and communities, forms people's views toward the world, and shapes values and identities. User participation online reshapes cultural, political and economic realities. For example, in response to the release of the special episode in cinemas *Sherlock: The Abominable Bride* (2016), Chinese fans created fan videos, texts and images on an unprecedented scale. Although the official translation of this episode was widely criticized ("Shentan Xialuoke", 2016), fan participation boosted Chinese box office sales to more than 161 million CNY, approximately 23 million USD, according to China Box Office Online (2016). Under such circumstances, many intriguing phenomena and trends in Chinese cyberspace have emerged. Fan culture, in particular, has come to the spotlight in this new media sphere. Fans gather via social networks, produce creative works, and leverage social media to spread favourite texts, both official and fan-made. In these practices, meaning is deconstructed, re-generated and continuously evolves. Consequently, fans are able to create their own cultures and construct their own discourse. Such fandom boosts cultural consumption, which consequently arouses industry interest in exploring approaches to satisfy fans' tastes and expectations. But when some industry attempts as pandering try to attract fans' engagement, a few fans resist such attempts because industry pandering decreases the opportunities of fan participation.

The fast growth of the Chinese Internet industry and innovation in media technology have each contributed to changes in Chinese fandom. Fan practices became increasingly prominent with the rapid development of Chinese domestic microblogging sites. Microblogs, known as Weibo in the Chinese language, are primarily promoted by two companies, Sina and Tencent. Due to its social influence and market dominance, Sina Weibo is considered the Chinese

version of Twitter, which is currently blocked in China. The company officially changed its name to “Weibo” in 2014. In this thesis, therefore, the term “Weibo” only refers to Sina Weibo. Meanwhile, mobile users increasingly favour the social platform WeChat, an instant-messaging-based mobile app launched by Tencent (Svensson, 2014). Unlike Weibo, WeChat allows the user to build a relatively close network of friends and acquaintances on the basis of offline social contacts. In this sense, WeChat makes it easier for people to group together on the basis of shared social relationships, interests and goals. Beside these two social media platforms, services such as the bulletin board-like Baidu Tieba and video-sharing site Bilibili have also become popular in fan circles. Since bulletin board systems (BBS) largely shape Chinese netizens’ understanding of the internet (Yang, 2012), many fans enjoy discussions and circulation of fannish texts on Tieba, which is derived from Chinese bulletin services. Video sharing site Bilibili features anonymous “flying comments” projected on video play interface as the clip is playing. Fans on Bilibili are keen to participate in chatting in flying comments, and add new information or meaning to the video clips as well as respond to previous comments. In summary, these popular online platforms set up a broad, open, and relatively free stage for millions to engage in a wide variety of social activities that range from discussions of politics and economy, online charity, information updates and help during emergencies, calling for women’s rights, to environmental protection. Indeed, the accessibility of social media fosters the popularity of audience creation and viral spreading of content.

As mentioned above, contemporary fan culture in China took shape in the (late) 1990s when the Internet became available, and the Chinese fan culture has become a culture primarily celebrated by youth. The majority of early fans are college or university students, and the oldest are still in their thirties. (Zheng, 2016) Participants in current Chinese fan culture are thus largely from the 1980s-born or 1990s-born generations, commonly known in Chinese as *baling hou* (80 后, lit. “after 80”) and *jiuling hou* (90 后, lit. “after 90”). Most members of these generations grew up as only children due to China’s institution of the One Child Policy, which was instituted in 1979 and has only recently been dismantled. These two generations grew up in a rapidly developing China after its economic reforms, and witnessed high-speed economic growth and technological progress. Many now take growth and progress for granted. They often have little experience of paper media products such as Japanese manga

or western comic books but have primarily consumed entertainment content on cable television or DVD (Zheng, 2016) Imported content from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the United States, Japan, and Korea took up a large proportion of the television schedule because state-run broadcasters lacked enough locally made content to meet audience demand, and these transnational media contents have become a key reason for the multiple strands of Chinese fan culture. Furthermore, members of these generations started to use PCs and the internet at a young age because national policy increased investments in computer learning in primary school and middle school (firstly in Tier One and Two cities)¹. Therefore, Chinese fans do not “hold a substantial nostalgia towards the paper media as their elders do” (Zheng, 2016, p. 11), yet have been growing up in an environment comprising more vivid digital media. For many of them, “being digital” or “being virtual/online” is more comfortable.

1.2 Fan research

As well-known researchers such as Fiske (1992), Jenkins (1992), Sandvoss (2011) and Hills (2013) have pointed out, innumerable pieces of fan work, which have been created by all kinds of audiences, embody active, enthusiastic, and participatory engagement with media texts. In these fannish productions, fans develop, practice and demonstrate extensive knowledge and expertise about their favourite objects, and such knowledge and expertise help establish power differences in fan communities. Lin, Levordashka, and Utz (2016) notes that fans tend to seek intimacy with the subjects they care about, for instance, by attending concert, meeting celebrities, chatting with them in person, or visiting locations used in the filming of a TV series (Hills, 2002). Scholars have investigated such offline practices since the 1960s, when fan studies began. Yet Web 2.0 technologies increase possible approaches for seeking intimacy. For example, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter or Weibo and WeChat in the People’s Republic of China afford fans opportunities to communicate in online spaces. Video streaming like Bilibili allows fans to enjoy live concerts and commentary in front of their PCs. By employing increasingly easy-to-use computer software as well as smartphone applications, fans can conveniently select texts from myriad sources, paste them

¹ For a long period from 1980s to 2000s, the Tier One cities in China usually refer to the three largest regional central cities, Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Tier Two cities during the same period primarily refer to central cities in eastern and southern China, where the local economy is much more developed.

into their work and give these texts new meanings. Therefore, while pre-Web 2.0 research explores the construction of fan identities primarily on the basis of offline practices such as textual productivity, Web 2.0 fan studies focus more on connections between fandom and media platforms.

Fans build online communities via social media in order to strengthen their intimacy with texts and other individual fans. Additionally, social media also facilitate users' discovery of those who share similar interests. In such contexts, individual fans connect as members of communities. As Bruns (2006) notes, an individual fan can be both a creator of new texts based on media products as well as a consumer of other media content. In other words, roles shift as fans become involved in different participatory activities. Meanwhile, since most fans are amateurs, they do not always produce new, original content; rather, they often re-edit or spread texts, which are often open for others viewers to add to. With the disappearance of boundaries between producer and consumer, between fan participation and commercial production, and even between mainstream media and popular culture, scholars such as Matt Hills suggest a re-consideration of the relationship between fans, fan communities and fandom. In this thesis, I follow Coppa (2014) and Hills (2017) in arguing that fandom should not only describe the same or similar characteristics of fans; instead, scholars need to look at differences between individual fans and hierarchies within fan communities.

According to Zheng (2016), the contemporary form of Chinese fandom began with fan-made translation of foreign media texts, particularly Japanese anime, manga, and video games. The later *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* films also offered Chinese fans a view of Western fandom tradition and ideas. Such transcultural flows provided Chinese Web 2.0 fandom with a rich knowledge and background in developing fan culture. However, until recent years, little research had analysed Chinese social media fandom using current theories and concepts. Bao Zhenpei (2013) notes that fans were seen as "star chasers", and their activities and behaviours were often criticised by the state media, mainly due to conflict between capitalist subcultures and socialist values. Ling Yang and Hongwei Bao (2010) introduce the fan culture of *Super Girl*, one of the first striking examples of Chinese fandom, into international scholarship of fan studies by incorporating insider knowledge into academic research on Chinese fan community and activities. Similarly, with insider knowledge as a fansubber, Wang Dingkun and Zhang Xiaochun (2017) have focused on Chinese fansubbing culture from a perspective of cultural

studies and discusses the wordplay in fan-translated subtitles much of which needs detailed explanation for those who do not know Chinese. Drawing upon theories from British American fan studies and Japanese *Otaku* and *Yaoi* studies, Xiqing Zheng (2016) illustrates the landscape of Chinese online fan subculture and examines the power dynamics within fan communities by looking at a few case studies, including a Chinese fan community “Novoland”, the fandom of Japanese anime *Axis Power: Hetalia*, fannish texts related to the queer-themed films *Beijing Stories* and *Lanyu*, Chinese online fansubbing culture, and the memes and comments culture on Bilibili. All these recent scholars present their views from an “aca-fan” perspective, thus combining academic and fannish interest and offering analysis that straddles academia and fan culture.

This thesis will build on this trend with the aim to discover the intertwined relationships between media platforms, texts and fans as individuals. Since media technology is ever evolving, this research project intends to analyse the unique features of Chinese Web 2.0 fan culture during a specific period (roughly from 2005 to recent years), and aid in understanding the complexities of contemporary fandom in the People’s Republic of China. It is worth noting that gender, specifically masculinity, has become a central issue in Chinese Web 2.0 fandom today (Yu, 2012; Zhang, 2016). Therefore, in this thesis I investigate how fans in China represent and negotiate gender in fannish texts by employing discourse and textual analysis to study fans’ conversations and creative works. I focus on two case studies for this research project – Chapter Five looks at fandom of the Chinese reality television show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and Chapter Six focuses on fandom of the British television drama *Sherlock*. In Chapter Five, I explain that Chinese social and technological contexts shape patterns of fan consumption, and gender informs power differences in female-led fan communities. Through a close look at fannish texts, I show how gender norms and hegemonic masculinity are circulated and reiterated through fandom. In Chapter Six, I analyse gender-themed texts generated in transcultural *Sherlock* fandom and demonstrate how Chinese fans create slash texts and express their understandings of gender, fan identities, and power. In both case studies, gender helps fans to position themselves in relation to historical and global dimensions and engage in a conversation between tradition and modernity.

The Chinese government regularly blocks overseas media platforms and has increased online surveillance in order to restrict Chinese citizens access to foreign online sources, particularly

those which are against the leadership of the Communist Party of China. Unlike in western political systems, China is governed by only one political party. The political context in China arguably makes Chinese netizens more cautious about political issues than westerners. As a result, my fan interviewees do not show much interest in politics – even though it might affect how they can consume fandom. In Chapter Four I explain that fandom in mainland China is enclosed within the social platforms that have been developed by Chinese companies, and that the political context depoliticises online fan culture in China. Under such circumstances, this research project aims to examine the development of Chinese Web 2.0 fandom rather than the political use of Chinese social media.

1.3 Case studies

One of the main findings of this research is that the Web 2.0 technologies and transnational media encourage a diversity of fan cultures, in which gender becomes a significant issue that fans consume in Chinese social media. I demonstrate this dynamic through two case studies involving fans, fannish texts, and social media. The first case study concentrates on Hunan Television's reality show *Where Are We Going, Dad? (Season 3)*, which is based on the original South Korean reality show *Dad! Where Are We Going?* Hunan TV bought the copyright from South Korea's Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) in 2013 and produced a Chinese adaptation. Featuring five celebrity fathers and their children as they travel to distant places (mostly rural areas and sometimes overseas such as Rotorua, New Zealand, in Season 2), *Where Are We Going, Dad?* has become a massive hit, both in TV ratings and as a Weibo topic. This show portrays how celebrity fathers, who had been too busy to accompany their families before this show, take care of their children and develop a strong bond with them while travelling. Many celebrities are well-educated and some have an international background; the show allows Chinese audiences to see how these celebrities deal with daily issues, how people in different places live and, perhaps most importantly, to understand modern notions of parenting skills. The new ideas demonstrated in the show have encouraged wide discussion in China both online and offline, and fans have been producing a great number of fannish texts that express their interpretation of parenting skills, family, and cultural citizenship in China.

The second case is BBC's recent crime drama *Sherlock*, which is a modernised adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective stories. The drama is set in the present, while some features (such as names, personal characteristics and evidential details) from the original Sherlock Holmes stories are retained. The entire series includes four seasons, one mini-episode (available on Chinese video streaming sites as well as on-demand TV channels), and one special episode released in Chinese cinemas. According to my interviews with *Sherlock* fans, many members of the audience started to watch this drama with fan-translated subtitles before it was imported. Even though Chinese video streaming sites have since bought the rights to air the show from the BBC, many fans choose to watch fansubbed episodes instead of the official translation and consume fan-translated content about the drama and the actors. In other words, *Sherlock* fandom in China was born from fans' online participation, and translation plays an essential role in this fan culture.

1.4 Chapter outline

In this chapter, I have thus far briefly introduced the goal, background and significance of my research project. I began by describing the short history and the status quo of Chinese social media fan culture, and outlined the social context in which such participatory culture has emerged. Contextualising the growth of Chinese fandom, I noted that the initial generations of Chinese fans have grown up with digital media and online participatory engagement of (illegally, to some extent) imported media texts. The rapidly evolving media technologies as well as social context shape current Web 2.0 fan culture in China, guiding Chinese fans to accept and adapt fandom ideas from Japan, Korea, and the West. Meanwhile, the one-child policy makes the only-child generations (born in the 1980s and 1990s) rely to a great extent on online communities to share their thoughts and favourite texts with peers, and such online communal practices help develop their cultural identity. Therefore, I introduced digital ethnographic methods, including broad search for fans and fannish texts, interview and observation, which I used to collect data for this research project. Then I briefly explained that this research projects began with a platform analysis, followed by two case studies: the reality show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* And the imported British television drama *Sherlock*.

After introducing the context and framework of this research project, Chapter Two reviews relevant concepts in the fields of digital media, cultural studies, contemporary Chinese culture,

and fan studies. My discussion of academic literature starts from the definition of “Web 2.0” and scholarship around digital media, providing a foundation for later exploration of Web 2.0 fandom. Next, I bring in such important notions from cultural studies as impression management (Goffman, 1959), flagging and nationalism (Billig, 1995), and transcultural media consumption. I discuss society in fast developing China by looking at relevant policies in terms of population, economy, technology and media culture. Then I revisit the development of fan studies, from Fiske’s textual productivity, Jenkins’ convergence culture and media spreadability, to recent theories that suggest fandom should be defined as more than a “singular” fan community/culture (Hills, 2017). Grounded in the above explorations, I will articulate why Chinese Web 2.0 fandom is unique and how the above factors affect its development.

In Chapter Three, I explain my approach in finding fan informants. To conduct my research, I employed digital ethnography to collect data, including broad Weibo searches, individual in-depth interviews and observation. The data collected through digital ethnography includes how Chinese fans interact with social media platforms and among themselves, the content fans produce and share online, and how fan informants understand themselves. By looking at current research in fan studies, I highlight how the complexity of Chinese socio-cultural context requires me to frame a set of research methods to collect data about fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identity. Then I articulate the three steps of my data collection, broad Weibo searches, interviews and observation. To provide a general picture of the fans on Chinese social media platforms, in the final section of the chapter, I outline how informants see themselves as fans who struggle with identity and self-recognition. I discuss the general characteristics of my interviewees, and then explain fan participant concern over their own fan identities and how they keep a subtle distance from offline social contacts in everyday life as well as researchers like myself due to negative mainstream perception of fans and their desire to manage their identity. In the meantime, I also reveal that these fans establish a power hierarchy of cultural capital, skill, taste, and community administration, while most Chinese fans maintain loose online connections within fandom.

Chapter Four concentrates on the popular platforms that Chinese social media fans use to develop their culture. In particular I contextualise and discuss Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili. Weibo and Tieba users tend to enjoy the service on both PC and smartphones, while

WeChat mainly plays a role as a mobile application and most interaction with Bilibili occurs on its website. Accordingly I discuss features of the web interface and mobile application of Weibo and Tieba, WeChat's mobile application, and the Bilibili website. The discussion on the political context of Chinese media explains why Chinese fans tend to depoliticise fandoms. Then I compare them, drawing upon Ian Hutchby's notion of "affordances" in order to elicit how and why they attract and guide fans to reach, read and circulate the content in which they are interested.

Chapter Five focuses on the Chinese reality television show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* by exploring the manifestation and influence of its fandom. I investigate how the fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* consume the parenting-themed reality show and develop a gendered fan culture in Chinese social media. Analysing fans' mobile lifestyles and their use of Web 2.0 features such as tagging and microblogging connectivity, I argue that social media platforms enable individual fans to establish loose, imaginary connections with one another, with celebrities and with fan communities, help them to build social identities in the Web 2.0 world, and guide them to contributing to participatory online fan culture. Furthermore, fans in the Web 2.0 era play a major role in developing power differences between fans and celebrities, between members of fan communities, and between male and female fans. Therefore, in this chapter I also look at power and gender dynamics represented in fans' consumption of each other's creative work. I particularly explore how traditional gender norms and hegemonic masculinity are reinforced in Chinese fandom after the introduction of alternative sexualities. I also investigate how fans build cultural citizenship by discussing the narratives of parenting themes during fan discussion, in which fans imagine their possible reactions and solutions if fans themselves were to meet the same situation that the celebrities face in the show.

In Chapter Six, I examine Chinese fan culture of the BBC's crime drama *Sherlock* looking at three aspects: fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identity. First, I introduce Chinese *Sherlock* fans' frequent transplatform activities and contrast them to the fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Then I address the socio-cultural differences between China and Western countries, where Arthur Conan Doyle's books have had a much longer cultural presence. This difference makes *Sherlock* an imported Western media product that prompts Chinese fans to engage with fannish texts as well as knowledge of Western fandom across multiple media platforms to better understand the stories; accordingly, fans acquire, improve

and show off the skills of making fannish texts, not only to consume the episodes but also to demonstrate to new fans how to participate in fandom. My analysis of fan identity starts with a discussion of how fans use a range of terms and concepts not only from English-speaking fanbases but also from Japanese *Otaku* culture, and how the fact that these terms and concepts have become part of Chinese mediascapes reflects that Chinese fandom largely derives from transnational media flows. Based on this contextualisation, I then discuss online fansub practices and their cultural influence on contemporary Chinese fan culture. I argue that both media consumers and industry practitioners in China view fansubbing as unpaid labour, but that this sometimes generates wrong expectations. Through fans' consumption of the *Sherlock* episodes as well as their interaction with international fan cultures, gender becomes a medium that helps Chinese fans understand fandom. However, many fan-made texts represent traditional patriarchal norms in slash (or "Boys Love", a term that Chinese fans often use) stories, which reflects fans' imagination of an idealised heterosexual relationship. Through transcultural media consumption, Chinese social media not only facilitate the production and spread of fan-made translations but also shape Chinese fandom.

In the concluding chapter, I revisit the findings in the platform analysis and case studies, compare the two fandoms from the aspects of fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identities, and propose a few possible directions for future studies. Since *Where Are We Going, Dad?* is a localised adaptation from South Korean programme and *Sherlock* derives from Western culture, I argue that the difference between the localisation and transcultural communication of these imported products makes audience and fans consume these media texts differently. By comparing the two cases, I find that Chinese fans not only enjoy engaging with their favourite texts, but also adopt Web 2.0 fandom as an approach that they can use to develop skills, participate in social events, and negotiate with politics. Furthermore, by experiencing imported international media texts and making localised adaptation, Chinese fans gradually form a convergent sense of understanding the ever-changing world and, more importantly, self-recognition of their own identity.

1.5 Contribution of the thesis

This research project contributes to scholarship particularly in three aspects. First of all, I bring a new scope of research and specific new case studies to scholars who seek to understand

Chinese fandom in greater detail. A large language and culture gap exists between China and Western-led research in international fan studies. On the one hand, few researchers writing in English have thus far published work about Chinese fandom (see, e.g., de Kloet, Landsberger, 2012; Jenkins, Ford, Green, 2013; Zhang, Fung, 2013; Zhang, 2016; Zheng, 2016). On the other hand, since the People's Republic of China has yet to see the emergence of a distinct discipline of fan studies or media studies in universities,² Chinese scholars of fandom find themselves on the margins of the academic mainstream and are thus left behind in international scholarship. Accordingly, this thesis reviews international and Chinese research on emerging Chinese online fandom, and introduces to international scholarship case studies that provide useful new data about Chinese understandings of online fandom. For this reason, I chose to carry out this research project from within New Zealand, which has allowed me deeper familiarity with Western research methods and approaches in the humanities and social sciences, which I have then applied to Chinese fandom at a level that few, if any, Western academics have. The distance between the two countries has also enabled me to look at Chinese online fandom in New Zealand with less intervention from fan culture than if I had carried out the project in China.

Second, this thesis explores a new approach to the study of fandom. Since the boundaries between fans and non-fans and between audience and industry have become increasingly ambiguous in social media, my research has employed a diverse set of methods to collect reliable data, including broad searches in social media, snowball sampling, interviews and observation. To unravel the connections between media platforms, fannish texts, and fan identity, I designed a framework that consists of a platform analysis, textual analysis and fan analysis. I also use two case studies to illustrate how Chinese fans manifest themselves and their culture in social media, while most existing fan studies tend to focus on only one case study. A comparison of the findings from the two case studies provides a more complex understanding of how Chinese Web 2.0 platforms provide different affordances that guide fans to create fannish texts and inform their online identity. My research also shows that in

² According to the Chinese national standard of conferring academic degrees approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education and the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council, Chinese universities have not been able to award degree in fan studies, media studies or cultural studies. Subjects of fan studies and media studies can be categorised in the field of journalism and communication studies, and cultural studies have become a part of literary studies.

return, fan activities have urged Chinese social media to improve platform features for better spread of fannish texts. I consider that the methods and theoretical framework I adopted have proved effective, and hope that they may be applicable to further research in the field of fan studies.

Third, this research project analyses four popular platforms (i.e. Weibo, WeChat, Tieba, and Bilibili) in detail that audiences in China use most often to engage with online fandom, but academics have yet to pay much attention to platforms such as Tieba and Bilibili. It is also my hope that my analysis of platforms as well as fan-platform interaction enables international scholars not only to see how the four platforms work and what they mean to Chinese social media fans but also to better understand Chinese Web 2.0 culture more generally.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The discussion in this chapter focusses on six topics that are key to my research project. The first section looks at digital media, by explaining the concepts of Web 2.0, platform and affordances. I discuss how Web 2.0 platforms offer various affordances that enable users to create content on different platforms for particular imagined audiences. The second section contextualises Chinese social media and media culture. I will explain that the rapid growth of the Chinese internet industry informs the unique ecosystem for Chinese online cultures, including Chinese social media fandom. The third and fourth sections examine, respectively, the scholarship on fans internationally and fan studies in China. By making connections with the discussion of Chinese social media, I will look at how fan productivity plays an essential role in Chinese fandom and how it shapes Chinese Web 2.0 fandom into a hierarchical structure. The fifth section discusses how Chinese Boys' Love culture developed and how it became part of Chinese fandom. I also investigate how transnational media flows lead to multiple strands of Chinese fan culture. I explain how during the consumption of and engagement with media products from around the world, Chinese fans gradually establish their identity and a sense of cultural citizenship.

2.1 Social media as platforms

The term "Web 2.0" was firstly coined by Tim O'Reilly (2007). It describes web technologies that are more interactive and collaborative than early internet services such as static websites (e.g. some early individual blogs). Many Web 2.0 services are data-driven and continually-updated, inviting people to consume, remix and share contents from multiple sources, including individual users and institutional content providers such as advertisers, broadcasters and film studios. Web 2.0 services create network effects through participatory patterns, in which users are able to collaborate together to add and edit information and eventually engage in rich user experiences.

As a type of Web 2.0 service, social media allows users to create, share and circulate content they have generated (i.e. user-generated content or UGC), contributing to the emerging "moral economy" (Jenkins, 2006a). The "moral economy" refers to a new relationship between producers and consumers, in which all participants share an understanding in terms

of “social expectations, emotional investments, and cultural transactions” (ibid.). Media producers and fans can adopt a collaborative approach. Such collaboration allows and sometimes encourages audience participation, as Mark Andrejevic (2008) suggests, because in this way fans are rewarded through social networking, and media producers can monetise user-generated content made by fans that are regarded as grassroots advocates.

With the evolution of Web 2.0 technologies, internet companies and media researchers have increasingly adopted the term “platform” to refer to the Internet-based services. Tarleton Gillespie notes that the definition of this word is “discursive” (Gillespie, 2010, p. 348), indicating that internet companies strategically frame their services by offering opportunities for a diverse group of users such as consumers, advertisers, and content producers. Gillespie (2010) clarifies the concept of the platform through four perspectives: computation, architecture, figuration and politics. As he proposes, an online platform should be considered as a multi-layered artefact that enables its users to carry out particular activities, applications or programmes, such as messaging and sharing texts. A platform also lays an adaptable foundation for different users to achieve further goals, for instance, to participate in collaborative work online or to expand their social network. This definition of platform illustrates the complexity of Web 2.0 services and explains why Web 2.0 services can provide rich content.

As discussed above, user participation and user-generated content play an important role on Web 2.0 platforms. Analysing the success of Wikipedia, Axel Bruns (2008) proposes a new model for user-led content creation in the age of Web 2.0 centred on the notion of “produsage”. According to his definition, a “produser” is a user who is also a producer of content operating in a collaborative and participatory mode. Based on collaborative engagement with communities of those who share given interests, produsers are continuously building and extending or improving existing content. This process makes content a shared, always unfinished or “permanent beta” artefact, “produced” in a “continuing process of revision and development” (Bruns, 2013, p. 72). Bruns also points out that this model inevitably assumes relatively permissive legal and moral rights in terms of intellectual property. (Bruns, 2013, p. 74) However, since many media producers still aggressively protect intellectual property, copyright conflicts between amateur produsers and content producers continue.

As Bruns indicates, user-led content production relies on large-scale, open participation and communal evaluation, which increases participatory creation and results in lower barriers to online participation including online fandom. People who own an Internet-connected device and have basic computer skills and specific knowledge in a particular field can easily produce, edit and/or revise online content on open media platforms such as Wikipedia and Weibo. Although an individual produser may cause problems such as changing a media product and thus spreading inaccurate information during community participation because of a lack comprehensive knowledge, a significant number of participants can bring about a more diverse environment in which almost every problem will be recognised and fixed due to the diverse expertise of these people (Raymond, 1999). This is in line with Bruns' idea of the "unfinished text", as the circulation of community participation and problem solving is ongoing; more importantly, Raymond's notion reflects the spirit of "collective intelligence", which Lévy (1994/1997) defines "a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills" (p. 13). Lévy argues that collective intelligence enables individual participants to acknowledge each other and that it enriches individual knowledge (ibid.). This theory is exemplified by Web 2.0 convergence culture, in which the information flow becomes dynamic due to user participation (Jenkins, 2006a).

Since Bruns's produsage model implies that a produser needs specific skills to progress in a participatory culture, Jenkins et al. (2013) argue that consumers in the Web 2.0 era play diverse and valuable roles in different environments and engage in activities such as evaluation, appraisal, critique and recirculation, alongside produsage. While Bruns admits that the open participation in collaborative Web 2.0 platforms is in fact "far from evenly distributed", he also proposes that it still can be seen as a kind of "fluid heterarchy". This implication partly stems from Michael Bauwen's earlier research on peer-to-peer models (2005), which poses that lower barriers, equal opportunities and online liveness in collaborative engagement challenge "fixed forced hierarchies" rather than "authority" more generally. Influenced by Bauwen's theory, Bruns (2008) states that Wikipedia and other similar platforms present a heterarchy rather than distributed hierarchical organisational forms. People take on authoritative roles in situations where they are experts on particular

topics and supportive roles in others, but the power structure/hierarchy is still fixed rather than fluid.

Bruns also discusses the incentive mechanism of the produsage model in a context of communal intellectual property. Since some shared projects are completed within the community, he argues, such content must remain freely available, and individual contributors need to be rewarded with something more than deriving an individual satisfaction. These rewards should be “at least in the form of personal standing within the community” (Bruns, 2013, p. 74) in order not to jeopardise the continuum of unfinished artefacts.

While “collective intelligence” and “produsage” are a part of online experience, the problem of “context collapse” also emerges. As Marwick and boyd (2011a) propose, the notion of “context collapse” on the Internet encompasses how online audiences find it difficult to adjust their presentation of self when the boundaries between different fields, such as the personal and the professional, become vague. On a social media platform such as Twitter, or Baidu Tieba and Weibo in China, a post is very possibly visible to the public if its author does not send the post to categorised groups. Under such circumstances, it is impossible for the author to know who might read the post on social media and what response it might receive as people normally do while having a face-to-face conversation. For example, a fan can inadvertently reveal their fan identity, which is perfectly acceptable and welcomed in one context, which may then overlap with their “professional identity”, where fandom activities might be received less enthusiastically.

In this sense, “context collapse” is related to Erving Goffman’s notion of “impression management”. To explain impression management in people’s everyday life, Goffman (1959) proposes the “frontstage/backstage” theory to support his notion of the representation of the self. According to his theory, during daily life, each person performs various behaviours to fit the norms of becoming a social being, and these behaviours can be categorised into two types: those that present the professional self, and those that one may engage in on casual occasions. As he argues, when people are conscious of the situation in which they are before a specific audience, they will intentionally or subconsciously adjust their behaviour for a better impression, which he calls a “frontstage” performance. When an individual interacts with other social beings more casually and feels less pressure to “perform” in a particular way, the behavioural pattern comes into “backstage”, which Goffman (1959) uses to refer to more

casual situations in which people have much less concern over their behaviour. In other words, when “backstage”, people are less concerned about self-expectations and public expectations, and therefore feel more relaxed, comfortable and, sometimes, that they are their “true selves.” Yet as Goffman states, sometimes people are still aware of social norms and expectations backstage, and practice behaviours in private that they would not publicly engage in.

According to Goffman, a speaker evaluates situations and audiences (including the speaker him-/herself) and how the speaker fits into the situations. Such evaluation becomes necessary when a social being tries to engage in conversation. The self-presentation or how a person portrays him-/herself is therefore always negotiated and performed. But such evaluation and self-presentation can be less certain in social media, because people cannot always recognise and evaluate the expressions of those with whom they are communicating. Because the various situations or contexts are invisible or “collapsed”, as Marwick and boyd (2011a) say, people cannot fully evaluate a situation in order to make adjustments to their behaviour.

2.2 Social media in China

With the development of the Chinese Internet industry, we have witnessed the fast growth of social media in China and how it helps the public to have more voice and power, which also makes the authorities nervous (Svensson, 2014). Weibo and WeChat are two of the most popular social media platforms in China today. Like other renowned microblogging platforms such as Twitter, Weibo features 140-character text posts and allows users to comment, re-post, use hashtags, and add images, audio, video and URLs. WeChat, which is developed by another influential Chinese internet company, Tencent, establishes its platform on Tencent’s massive pre-existing user base of instant messaging services (i.e. Tencent QQ) as well as mobile phone contacts. The current version of WeChat allows both individual and corporate users to share texts, images, audio, video, and URLs on WeChat Moments (a Weibo-like microblogging feature that normally can only be viewed by WeChat contacts) and their Public Subscriptions feed, which enables these users to publish content and provide some user-customized functions such as a content/service index, keyword searching, TV streaming, video-on-demand, and real-time cross-platform interactivity. In addition, the online forum

Baidu Tieba and video sharing site Bilibili have also become Chinese fans' favourite platforms to engage with fandom. I analyse these platforms in Chapter Four.

Discussing the demographics of Weibo users and diffusion patterns, Svensson (2014) indicates that opinion leaders and verified users play an important role in speaking for ordinary citizens and marginalized groups. As she points out, Weibo is not just a cyberspace platform for its users to communicate with, but the service provider is also keen to encourage and guide activities and debates (largely from a perspective of monetisation, through data collection). As Svensson notes, a large number of people in fact lack "voice and impact on Weibo, or in society" (ibid.). In other words, their thoughts and attitudes cannot effectively be transmitted in an open media environment, so they need the "opinion leaders to speak for them" (ibid.), or they need to move into a relatively more closed space such as WeChat, which is able to facilitate personal communication and public debates for such grassroots users. I discuss this further in Chapter Four, the platform analysis.

According to statistics from the Chinese academic journal database CNKI, China-based researchers have published over ten thousand articles discussing Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili in domestic Chinese journals. However, these Chinese researchers tend to carry out studies on social media in relation to practical use (for instance, public opinion monitoring and analysing, social apps as tools for public services, marketing, etc.) rather than ontological research, lacking diversity and interdisciplinary collaboration in terms of research perspective (Guan, 2009; Hu, 2009). As opposed to the prevalence of qualitative research on social media within China, international academia outside of China seems inclined to reveal the fundamental mechanisms of interactivity in Chinese social networks via empirical-data analyses, most of which are conducted by Chinese scholars based overseas (see Huang et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013). I presume the language gap between Chinese and international scholarship has kept the large body of Chinese-language research on Chinese social media out of a wider spotlight, and perhaps the particular research funding system in China leads domestic scholars to focus on pragmatist programmes.

Generally, Chinese scholarship examines social media from the perspectives of communication studies and public relations. Extending the “agenda-setting”³ and “spiral of silence”⁴ theories, some researchers (Wang, 2011; Wang, 2014) describe the communication paradigms of Weibo, and indicate that the development of social media in China is pushed forward by capital more than grassroots users. Some investigate the spread of Weibo/WeChat posts by analysing hot topics in relation to social issues (such as environment pollution, food safety, and blockbuster films), and point out that social media is decentralising, resisting the mainstream discourse of authority, and allows previously marginalised groups such as LGBT individuals or small, non-mainstream fan communities to strive for social understanding and recognition (see Guo et al., 2012).

2.3 Fan studies

Fan scholars consider fandom a type of participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006b). Using texts for different purposes, fans interpret, transform and create meaning from media products (Fiske, 1989). Due to the rapid development of media technology and global media capitalism, contemporary media fans occupy a central position rather than one at the margins, where they were located over two decades ago (Ito et al., 2008).

The study of fans and fandom mostly stems from audience research and cultural studies carried out since the 1980s and early 1990s. Until that time, fans were deemed a passive and mindless audience of “low” and/or “mass” culture. However, cultural studies started to “examine how culture was produced by those who live it, not simply passed down a chute from the cultural industries, and thus early fan studies began to explore fandom as a culture and as an audience formation” (Busse, Gray, 2011, p. 428). This burgeoning research paved the way for the progress of fan studies later.

The development of fandom studies (particularly studies from a textual perspective) may almost be regarded as the history of a debate between advocates and critics of amateur-

³ The theory of agenda setting points out that media, especially news media, are able to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. The theory was developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) in a study on the 1968 American presidential election (pp. 182-187).

⁴ The spiral of silence theory proposes that individuals fear being isolated in a group or society due to voicing opinions which might not be accepted by the majority in that group or society, which results in the remaining silence of the individuals (Noelle-Neumann, 1984; 1991).

driven participatory culture. Many researchers such as Fiske (1992), Jenkins (2006b), and Bruns (2008) argue that grassroots participation contributes to collaborative thought and to the visibility and profitability of media products. In this way, they marginalize expertise and the distinction between amateur and professional production becomes blurred. This argument has faced some criticism, however, especially regarding fans' competence, the evaluation of fans' work, and hierarchy within the fan community. After interviewing a group of editors, for example, Mizuko Ito (2012) demonstrates hierarchies within digital fandom in the era of Web 2.0, stating that "fan cultures are simultaneously becoming more accessible and more exclusive" (p. 281).

In his book *Textual Poachers*, John Fiske (1992) proposes a classic tripartite model of fandom creativity – semiotic, enunciative and textual productivity – which is frequently used by recent scholars in research on "Web 2.0" fandom (Sandvoss, 2011; Crawford, 2012; Hartley, 2012; Salkowitz, 2012). Fiske defines semiotic productivity as an essential characteristic of popular culture (Fiske, 1992, p. 37). He describes how audiences use resources from cultural products as symbols to create new meanings regarding social identities and/or social experiences. Enunciative productivity characterizes meanings, shared or spoken, in immediate, face-to-face social interaction. Thus, "the popular cultural capital it generates is... limited to a restricted circulation, a very localized economy" (Fiske, 1992, p. 39). Textual productivity, he emphasises, is a practice referring to fans who produce new texts and circulate these among the fan community. Fiske suggests that the value of such fan-made texts is as high as that of official culture, and he also argues that the goal of this type of productivity is not profit. The crucial distinction between enunciative and textual productivity is primarily one of mediation. As he proposes, enunciative productivity, which concerns spoken or embodied meanings not mediated, remains locked into its immediate social context, and the textual productivity of fan culture is "narrowcast", rather than a "mass-marketed" broadcast text (ibid.). This might have been true in the early 1990s, when television was the dominant source of people's everyday entertainment. But this notion is no longer applicable because many conversations between fans happen on social media platforms, which makes spoken or embodied meanings mediated and probably visible for others. Therefore, the distinction between enunciative and textual productivities becomes blurred in the context of social media.

Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998) have created a model that incorporates audience research they conducted and Fiske's types of productivity in order to clarify the positions of different kinds of audiences: consumers, fans (or cultists), and enthusiasts (as shown below):

consumers	--	enunciative productivity
Fans/cultists	--	textual productivity
enthusiasts	--	material productivity

Abercrombie and Longhurst argue that common consumers simply talk about media products for a short amount of time and do not create texts, which aligns them with enunciative productivity. They regard textual productivity as a kind of fan practice based on the original media text, and textual activities normally occur in relation to "the pre-existing concerns of everyday life" (Abercrombie, Longhurst, 1998, p. 149). Here Abercrombie and Longhurst also introduce a new type of productivity, material productivity, to highlight fan production of material artefacts. The textual productivity of cultists (or communal fandom) is "a central aspect of the cult activity" (Abercrombie, Longhurst, 1998, p. 150), whilst enthusiasts primarily participate in activities dealing with physical materials.

As some critics have pointed out, however, such distinctions and separations actually do not reflect the distinctions and boundaries between "text", "material" and so on. Cornel Sandvoss (2011) argues that some online fan work can combine enunciative productivity with textual productivity, while Longhurst (2007) links cultists with "social interaction" and enthusiasts with "production of artefacts" that are connected to fannish work (e.g. writing fiction, making pictures and video clips, etc.) respectively. This detailed division makes the original tripartite schema more specific.

With the increasingly rapid penetration of digital technology in recent years, a number of researchers have tried to develop theories of fan studies in relation to online fandom using Fiske's model. In his research on video gamer activities, Garry Crawford (2012) aligns various gamer behaviours, such as "production, mods and hacks, private servers, game guides, walkthroughs and FAQs, fan fiction and forms of fan art" with Fiskean notions of textual productivity (p. 120). Suzanne Scott (2008) suggests that researchers now "must amend

Fiske's description of the 'restricted' circulation of analogue fan talk to incorporate the online forum/message board" (p. 212). She problematically considers digital conversation to be enunciative rather than textual productivity, as she seems to overlook that digital talk in online fandom can be reproduced easily and spread widely. According to Fiske's definition of enunciative and textual productivity, such highly mediated productivity would be more textual rather than purely enunciative. Likewise, Cornel Sandvoss (2011) suggests that "types of ... productivity (semiotic, enunciative and textual) ... inform fans' participation in and appropriation of online spaces in the production and consumption of popular culture" (p. 51), and that the boundaries between textual and enunciative productivity are sometimes ambiguous. Furthermore, Hills (2013) has recently made the point that, in the era of social media, semiotic and enunciative productivity are increasingly "hybridized or generalized textual productivity" (p. 150).

Due to changes in what fans now use to create their own culture, Geert Lovink suggests that textual productivity may be a "software feature" that primarily acts as a revenue stream for service providers (Lovink, 2011, p. 52). In the age of new media, official producers welcome and often invite audiences to speak out in order to increase awareness of media products as well as the brand of the service/content provider. As Lovink claims, this underlying economic principle has also taken audiences into account because they are keen to contribute to "comment culture" online as a kind of self-representation (ibid.). Audience comments and sometimes criticisms do not always just focus on the texts themselves, but also contribute to the popularity of some events.

Since producing and sharing fannish texts become so easy-to-use on Web 2.0 platforms, David Gauntlett (2011) asserts that "creativity is something that is felt, not something that needs external expert verification" (p. 79). This conclusion has aroused intense critiques. From the perspective of a media professional, de Kosnick (2013) notes that most online amateur fans produce nothing really valuable or important, although they are extremely prolific in cyberspace worldwide.

To explain fan participation online, Jenkins proposes another approach to understanding fans and fandom by further developing the concept of textual poaching. Jenkins (2013) describes that fans often actively participate in the production of content with materials from original production that are "useful or pleasurable" to them in order to support what/who they love,

or to protest against mainstream cultural norms or media industries. As Jenkins describes, in the age of Web 2.0, fans showcase and/or circulate their work in fan communities and evaluate their textual products through each other's feedback and recommendations. This evaluation mechanism relies heavily on fans' individual tastes, and generates a ranking in terms of views, likes and comments that marks different positions for members in fan communities. In this sense, taste-based evaluation within fan communities seems hierarchical to some extent, and it is not explained by Fiske's tripartite model.

In his more recent research, Jenkins (2006a) focuses on mainstream fannish behaviour and the "convergence culture" based on "collective intelligence". In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins re-examines mainstream and subcultural discourses and argues that similarities in fan practices and behaviours blur the boundary between conventional fan communities and new industry-driven fans. This argument implies the hierarchy that exists in fan communities, as well as a shift in the "fan-industry" relationship from being opposite to standing together. At least in my observation of the Chinese media sphere, some fans have started to monetize their fannish productivity, while the industry is trying to promote official production in a fandom-like way.

Jenkins's idea of "collective intelligence" has been extended by researchers such as Ian Condry (2013), who introduces the concept of "collaborative creativity" to refer to Japanese anime fan group activity. He suggests that fan-created tribute videos stimulate interest in original anime episodes or films and add new dimensions to collective interpretation as well as appreciation. The result of collaborative creativity enriches the anime experience for many others. As Condry (2013) points out, the (grass-roots) fans' and lower-level anime studio staff members' collaborative creativity propels the spread of Japanese anime not only in Japan but also around the globe, proving the effectiveness and success of globalization from below.

Scholars also have discovered that the motivations and expertise of fans differ quite a bit, and therefore levels of fans participation are also different. For instance, Mirko Schafer (2011) distinguishes two types of fan participation, "explicit" and "implicit". He argues that "Jenkins's understanding of participation primarily deals with intrinsically motivated actions exercised in social formations which share a high degree of interaction, common objectives, and interests" (Schafer, 2011, p. 44). Meanwhile, through establishing a matrix with two axes of involvement and investment, Busse and Gray (2011) attempt to determine more precisely the

position of various types of fans. They indicate that actual viewers have quite different “levels of engagement and emotional and intellectual investment”, and that it is possible that there are lonely fans who participate in an “imagined community of other fans” (Busse, Gray, 2011, p. 434).

Hills (2013) argues that digital fandom’s characteristics and activities indicate a fluidity of semiotic, enunciative and textual productivity, and suggests that nowadays scholars would do better to pay particular attention to the evaluation mechanism within fan communities in terms of textual productivity. In *Fan Cultures*, Hills (2002) points out that fans have different levels of cultural capital, or “the knowledge that a fan has about their object of fandom,” and social capital, or “the network of fan friends and acquaintances that a fan possesses, as well as their access to media producers and professional personnel linked with the object of fandom” (p. 57). Here, the cultural capital of a fan is based on knowledge and skill, but social capital highlights the interaction with other fans, fan culture and, possibly, the media industry. Hills suggests that fan cultural capital and social capital are much intertwined, which leads to a power difference within the fan community and makes media flows in fan communities uneven.

Some scholars (e.g. Gray et al., 2007) point out that the fast spread of Web 2.0 media and the shift in media marketing has turned audiences into active text producers. A large number of fans in fact merely circulate others’ work or official productions on social platforms. Thus, it seems that, on the one hand, fans are becoming an essential link in the industrial chain of media production in this “insider – outsider” (or “official producer – fans as labour”) interactive era (Andrejevic, 2008); they are not merely textual poachers, but also co-authors or even willing distributors of their favourite productions. On the other hand, with the help of social media, the difference in fans’ identities (including age, gender, ethnicity, religion and even the region where they live), continuity, reputation and their fannish practices (e.g. productivity, comments and recommendations) can readily establish hierarchies within communities and across media platforms. In such cases, media convergence and the engagement of fan practice and industry-driven participation effectively attract fans with lower levels of activity, and lead fandom in the age of Web 2.0 to become more hierarchical rather than establishing an egalitarian social structure.

2.4 Scholarship on Chinese fandom

As discussed in the previous section, western scholars consider fandom as the state of being a fan, in which fans establish a connection between beloved texts, understanding themselves as an individual being, and connecting with others in fan communities. If we look at the Chinese case from this perspective, Chinese fan practices can be traced back to literary traditions in the pre-digital era, although the term *fensi* (粉丝, lit. fans) has only come into public view recently. However, traditional cultural consumption in pre-digital China seems to have been dominated by the elite, in contrast with the much more interactive consumption patterns of online fandom today.

In the pre-digital era, Chinese traditional opera had a broad viewership across the ruling class, elite, and the general public. Zhang Shengyun (2014) discusses two types of Chinese traditional opera audiences: *ximi* (戏迷, lit. affectionate audience of traditional opera) and *piaoyou* (票友, lit. “license holders” or aficionados of traditional opera). According to Zhang, *piaoyou* refers to amateurs who do not make their living from theatre stage but study how to practice the Chinese traditional opera. Zhang notes that in this phrase, *piao* (票) literally means “license” and *you* (友) means “a group of companions”. The *piao* (票, license) here is directly connected to the “longpiao (龙票, Lit. Dragon/Royal License)”, a certificate that the royal court of Qing dynasty awards members of the Eight Manchu Banners to carry out non-profit propaganda with traditional opera. Later, people adopt the phrase *piaoyou* to call all the amateur aficionados of traditional opera (Zhang, 2014, p. 116). As Zhang (2014) states, aficionados of Chinese traditional opera appreciate key elements such as style, concept, skills, and/or scripts of their favourite performances through long-term and repeated viewing and imitation. These aficionados may have enjoyed or felt attached to the same performance, yet the distinction between different classes remained (pp. 116-118). In pre-modern Chinese society, intellectuals only constituted a very small part of society,⁵ let alone those who could write or amend traditional opera scripts. In other words, only the elite class could participate

⁵ According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization report in 2014, the People’s Republic of China reduced the number of its illiterate adults by 130 million (71%) over two decades (UNESCO 2014:71). The statistical data implies that there were at least 180 million illiterate adults in mid-1990s and much more illiterate population before the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

in the textual productivity of Chinese traditional opera because they possessed the relevant cultural capital. This consequently restricted the scale of audience-text interactions, hindering audience or aficionados from becoming networked fans.

Participation through textual productivity for Chinese media consumers became more visible in the Cultural Revolution. Paul Clark (2008) explores how Chinese literature and theatre developed in both official and unofficial (or “underground” 地下, *dixia*) ways during that era. From the late 1960s to the 1970s, unofficial novels, poetry and other literary works were created, circulated, and copied among “sent-down youth”,⁶ who primarily had received middle or high school education. Since official literary publication in mainland China during the Cultural Revolution was narrowed to serve the state and maintain the purity of the communist ideology, the creation, reception and spread of non-officially approved literary works could only take place underground. Many of these works were circulated and duplicated in manuscripts and mimeographs, which enabled the copiers to change “a particular [unsatisfied] ending or the treatment of a character... in the next version” (Clark, 2008, p. 227). In this sense, textual productivity emerged when readers intended to keep material texts for repeated consumption, and the boundary between consumers and producers became blurred in the process.

Intellectuals played a leading role in the consumption of underground literature, as either the creation or the spread of these literary works requires knowledge, skills and experience, which not many people had in those days. Clark comments that during the Cultural Revolution, intellectuals who worked in government institutions as well as those who were sent down to rural areas organised *wenhua shalong* (文化沙龙, cultural salons), which facilitated the production of new-style literature works (Clark, 2008, p. 230). Wang Yao (2013) states that these cultural salons brought young intellectuals together and enabled them to exchange unauthorised western books, providing alternative narratives and knowledge that was different from the mainstream communist ideology during the Cultural Revolution (pp. 7-9). These cultural experiences helped producers and readers generate an imagined relationship

⁶ The phrase “sent-down youth” refers to the educated young people that either willingly went or were summoned to the rural areas in the 1960-70s. To deal with the economic crisis in that period, the Chinese government organised and called on a large number of young people living in cities and towns to build the socialist economy in the rural areas (Cao, 2003; Wen, 2013). These sent-down youth are also called *zhishi qingnian* (知识青年, lit. educated youth) or abbreviated phrase *zhiqing* (知青) in Chinese.

with the world outside China, which had cut off its connection to the modern world in that period for political reasons.

Admittedly, an individual reader of underground literature feeling strongly attached while engaging with or reproducing a text does not immediately qualify as fandom. The government's strict ideological control and the undeveloped media technologies at the time limited the spread of amateur texts or practices, therefore neither the audience's feelings nor their productivity such as making manuscripts regarding underground literature established a commonly recognised fan identity. According to Wang (2000), cultural salons gradually faded out of Chinese writers' circles in the 1980s, because the previously unauthorised sources became available after China's opening up, and cultural production became more diverse in contrast with the situation during the Cultural Revolution (p. 32). The social connection between readers was so weak that they did not form a community that can be compared with fan circles today; the collective activities of readers in that period do not equate to fan identity. However, the way in which the sent-down youth tried to incorporate personal ideas in existing texts and aimed to connect the traditional culture to the modern world may have continued in later media consumption and particularly in fannish practices when China aimed to focus more on the economy rather than ideological struggle.

In Chinese scholarship, the current form of fandom and fan communities arose in earnest during the first decade of the twenty-first century. In the 1980s and 1990s, as Bao Zhenpei (2013) notes, fans were seen as "star chasers", and their activities and behaviours were often criticised by the state media, mainly due to the conflict between capitalist activities and socialist values. Fandom remained underrepresented in Chinese mainstream discourse until 2005, when the first China-made talent show *Super Girl* gained phenomenal success (Yang, Bao, 2010). Although the conception of "fan" has recently been extended to a few new areas other than entertainment including politics and technology (for example, some social media users voluntarily become fans of government officials or digital products and services), most Chinese scholars consider fandom as a special kind of popular culture.

At about the same time that fan culture came to be widely accepted by mainstream media in China, broadband, bulletin board systems, blogging, video sharing, and early social networking sites also became popular. Digital media in the age of Web 2.0 has greatly propelled the growth of fandom and fan communities in China, and has also made popular

culture more influential. As Gao Xuanyang (2006) argues, popular culture is promoted by advertisements and mass media and thus changes rapidly, continuously and with a wide diversity of different styles. According to his definition, popular culture is creative but can also be controlled by government or capital. Following the Marxist “cultural production” theory, he believes that mass culture is disseminated extensively and primarily through the mass media, whilst elite culture is reserved for or exclusive to the social elites and is primarily associated with the established hierarchy in a society. In his opinion, a clear boundary exists between mass culture and elite culture but popular culture, he says, blurs this boundary and becomes a material and ideological form that represents the social identity of individuals, a constant site of struggle between the people and the elites.

For the purpose of this thesis, I understand popular culture as a type of mass-produced commercial culture that originates from and for the masses, and that is widely or well favoured (Fiske, 1989; Storey, 2012). John Storey (2012) argues that popular culture is always contested and negotiated—it originates from the common audiences but, as noted above, it is also manipulated by capital and sometimes by governmental authorities. Although grassroots users attempt to create their own discourse with diverse materials, a large amount of the resources they draw on are provided by (mass) media producers. Particularly in an era of social media, when boundaries between opposing categories (such as consumer and producer, grassroots and elite) become increasingly vague or can even disappear, the definition and characteristics of popular culture are much more complex.

Although some researchers (e.g., Fang, 2009) note that contemporary popular culture provides unprecedented opportunities for audiences to exhibit their personalities and creativity and thus reject the lifestyle advocated by some traditional values, a large proportion of popular culture studies in China focuses on its impact on traditional culture, values and morality. For instance, Wang Xiaoqing (2005) and Bu Desheng and Mu Qianwei (2007) acknowledge that popular culture can play a positive role in social development, but also make an elitist point that popular culture is lowering the aesthetic taste of the public. Wang even claims that in order to build a strong Chinese national culture, the government should primarily encourage elite culture and restrain the growth of popular culture since, in the usual opinion of elites, the latter is considered cheap and shallow (2005). In addition, hundreds of articles on the topic of “popular culture on college campuses” are published yearly in China,

discussing how to minimise the impact of popular culture or utilise it to improve the moral education on college campuses (see Guan, 2009; Guo, Su, 2012; Xu, 2008).

Chinese scholarship on popular culture has mainly concentrated on audience activity and behaviour, foreign popular culture, language and media culture. A few researchers (Hu, 2009; Tao, 2009; Xiang, Xu, 2005) discuss the close relationship between popular culture and fan activities from a social-psychological perspective. However, a large proportion of these studies are general descriptions of the appearance of fan groups and of popular events, rather than thorough investigations of fandom itself (e.g. how a specific fandom emerges, how fans relate to each other in a fandom, how a given fandom can influence culture or society). Some studies (e.g., China Youth & Children Research Center, 2003; Wen, 2008; Zheng, 2008) analyse the reasons for and influence of the prevalence of foreign media products (e.g. pop music, TV shows, anime, manga). Most employ the methods of cross-cultural communications and comparative studies; some argue that the large influx of foreign media will likely impair the growth of domestic culture industry, yet they believe that a certain amount of imported media products stimulates the evolution of the domestic Chinese culture industry and popular culture.

As Gao (2006) and Wang (2011) note, mass media generate and greatly promote the spread of popular culture. In fact, one could even argue that popular culture would not and could not exist without the media. Thus, a large number of scholars investigate subcultural phenomena in relation to pop music, film, TV, video games and the Internet (Jia, 2010; Wang, 2007; Zheng, 2010). More and more scholars who devote themselves to research in this field have realised the significant (sociocultural as well as economic) potential of Chinese popular culture. Jia Leilei (2010), notably, appeals to policy-makers to elevate popular culture as a kind of national strategy in order to upgrade the soft power of China.⁷ Taking the examples of the Hollywood films *Avatar* and *Kung Fu Panda*, he extends Richard Dawkins's theories about memes and cultural evolution and argues that popular culture (typically, popular art) that succeeds in the market can fit in cross-cultural transmission and promote the ideas and ideologies behind media products. Similar to the meme discussions by Klaas Chielens and Francis Heylighen

⁷ Joseph Nye coined the term "soft power" in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, and extends the meaning in 2004. The "soft power" is used to describe the ability of a country or culture to attract and co-operate with others rather than using "hard power" such as military and diplomatic force.

(2005) and Jenkins (2009; 2013), Jia also believes that myriad memes are competing with each other at present and aim to reproduce themselves as widely as possible to avoid extinction due to lack of “spreadability”.

At the same time, the progress of the feminist movement in China has largely laid the foundations for women to lead the way within fan culture. In the 1950s, women in China had won equal rights by law in the fields of politics and economy (Yang, 2015). Furthermore, a large portion of Chinese women chose to develop their career and become financially independent and are calling for fair and equal treatment. As various forms of new media become readily available and affordable, female users take a larger part in terms of usage of social media and online interactions. (CNNIC, 2015)

Although Hills (2002) argues that “the cult fan-text attachment is far from being gender-specific” (p. 126), gender discrimination is still present in fan culture. For instance, while fandoms with a male majority (e.g. sports fandoms) are viewed as normal by mainstream, some fandoms with a female majority (e.g. slash fandoms) are marginalized (Tosenberger, Steal, 2014). Witnessing that female fans in China are eager to maintain their fan communities and promote what they are fond of, it would be inadequate to neglect how gender is reshaping the landscape of social media fandom.

2.5 Slash and Boys’ Love fandom

A notable type of fannish work in which gender plays an important role depicts male-male romance or adapts characters from original media products to develop new homoerotic relationships. One such type of subculture is known as “slash” in English, and as BL (boys’ love) in East Asia,⁸ and has become highly visible with the arrival of social media. Slash fan culture, which origins can be traced back to the 1970s, developed rapidly in China, especially in the first decade of the 21st century, when Internet and online-transmitted fan works became popular. As Kumiko Saito (2011) concludes, in this subculture, male-male romances are usually based on equal relationships between heroes. The stories can be seen as a kind of self-

⁸ There are a few terms in relation to fan-made male-male romance fiction, including “yaoi”, “tanbi”, etc. A further comparative discussion will be developed in the thesis.

projection of female readers/writers onto male characters, and these tales represent female opinions on gender, patriarchal society, or heterosexuality (Saito, 2011).

To find out the connection between slash fan fiction and gender of fans, Henry Jenkins (1992) compares female fans of *Star Trek* to male fans of *Twin Peaks*, argues that women's reading strategies are different from men's. Jenkins (1992) claims that female fans pay more attention to "the elaboration of paradigmatic relationships" and "character psychology" (p. 109). For example, female fans of *Star Trek* tend to be more interested in "emotional realism", relating the plot and/or scene in the television programme to fans' own general lived experience. In contrast, male fans of *Twin Peaks* tended to appreciate the author's textual mastery of narrative techniques. But this study of Jenkins has recently been questioned by a few scholars. For example, analysing the fan fiction about *The Lord of The Rings*, Daniel Allington (2007) shows that slash fiction reflects a complicated reception process of different discourses. As he argues, for many viewers, such textual consumption does not merely happen in imagination, but also can be seen as a long-term engagement with the text itself.

Since Chinese BL fandom has been primarily introduced from Japan and is greatly influenced by Japanese *doujinshi*⁹ culture, Japanese scholars' discussion of male-male romance in BL fictions is helpful to my research. Saito (2011), for example, analyses how gender impacts fans' relationship to the mass media, connecting the female BL author's identities of being a woman and writing fan fiction. Saito examines gender in BL fictions and notes that the bond between two (or more) male characters composes the central theme in these stories. Such a bond is primarily built on their equal relationship (e.g. close battle/competition ability, and sometimes similar stance). Under this premise, the original relationship between two males "transforms into parodies that emphasize interactive psychological tactics to overcome and surpass each other" (Saito, 2011, p. 180) and matures into mutual affinity. However, as Japanese researchers and fans widely agree, the characters in these stories do not accurately reflect the lives of gay men. Rather, they are mostly idealized female projections of desired romance. Notably, the sexual and domestic roles of these figures "are often constructed as

⁹ The term "doujinshi" is referred to Japanese self-made production including magazines, manga or novels. These works are often produced by amateurs, although a few professional artists sometimes participate as well in order to publish material outside the regular industry. Quite a number of doujinshi works contain sexual narratives.

masculine and feminine, and these roles are usually irreversible within the same story — although different writers may choose different pairings” (Saito, 2011). In this sense the norms and roles in heterosexual relationships still exist in the BL world and, as Saito notes, the narrative tactics “simultaneously reaffirm the conservative gender system” (ibid.). Therefore, no matter how different such BL culture seems from (or even opposite to) mainstream culture in Japan (and China), it is inadequate to assume that BL culture is meant as a genuine challenge to the dominant discourse.

At the same time, some researchers have pointed out that female fans of male/male fantasies enjoy the process of manipulating the male characters to have special relationships (see Jenkins, 1992; Mizoguchi, 2003; Nagaike, 2003). For most of these female audiences, participating in slash fandom is the most available, feasible and effective approach to reflect the sexual oppression of males, to resist the subordinate status of females themselves, and eventually to acquire the equal discourse power in socio-cultural activities. This idea, in fact, is not contradictory to what Saito argues, because fan and official culture are always in a state of negotiation. In many contemporary cases (such as BBC’s *Sherlock*, as will be discussed in Chapter 6), fans’ slash/BL fiction and official media are collaboratively corroding the border between slash/BL culture and mainstream ideologies. In Chinese social media fandom, these popular cultural productions increasingly adopt slash-like relationships in heterosexual romance (i.e., the potentially romantic friendship or brotherhood based on matching abilities and competition) due to the influence of Japanese fan culture as Saito notes. The representation of slash/BL texts as well as fans’ circulation on social platforms increase the visibility of BL fan production (Booth, 2015, p. 124).

2.6 Globalisation, transnational media, and cultural citizenship

Globalisation becomes a commonly used term now in China as international trade takes an important role in China’s economy. Scholars identify globalisation “the intensification of worldwide social relations” (Giddens, 1990, p. 64) linking human activities across regions and continents. Jenkins (2006a) suggests such “spatio-temporal” (Held et al., 1999, p. 15) human activities happening in great distance may influence each other due to transnational business interests and the implementation of new technologies. As Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013)

argue, business interests of overseas market profit, audience demands, and fan participation make media texts internationally spreadable, representing a current trend of globalisation.

In their book *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) note that both large commercial interests and small media businesses are keen to increase profit from a larger international consumer base by developing strategies to make their media texts more spreadable and to get audiences more involved in this process. Meanwhile, media platforms also seek new models to generate revenue from (both individual and corporate) users circulating media texts. These two types of commercial forces encourage media texts to travel internationally, presenting a top-down pattern of media flow.

However, media texts are often spread transnationally much due to audience participation. Koichi Iwabuchi (2002) proposes the idea of “pop cosmopolitanism” to describe fans in one culture embracing a media text that represents a very different culture. These fans, as he suggests, search foreign contents that may be commercially unavailable in their country/area and enjoy experiencing the cultural difference. In doing so, these fans escape the parochialism of their own culture, and generate a sense of “being a cosmopolitan” (Jenkins, Ford, Green, 2013).

When a media text travel from one culture to another, their meaning and value often change as a result of audience consumption. Mary Louise Pratt (1991) proposes the concept of “contact zone” to refer to the situation where transcultural communication happens. In the contact zone, audiences in different locations may interpret the text in various ways, and the new meanings in these interpretations are based on the audiences’ social identities as well as knowledge and experiences. Thus, there is hardly a “universal” or standard understanding to a travelling media text. Similarly, Arjun Appadurai (1990) argues that the original meaning a transnational media text is sometimes “diverted” or stripped off by powerful groups during international communication. He explains that media companies give the text alternative interpretations or a new regime of value which may be very different from its original culture for business profit. Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) further develop this argument, pointing out that such diversions may happen in fan practice of transcultural media too, such as

fansubbing.¹⁰ As Jenkins et al. (ibid.) suggest, fans alter the original meaning or create new meanings to a travelling media not for profit, and their engagement does not infringe the intellectual properties of the media companies if this media product is unavailable in the culture where these fans live. In fact, the diversion generates the motivation to consume media content from another culture because of the differences in terms of social context and fan identity between the current and original cultures.

For many Chinese fans, when they discuss a travelling media text (e.g. BBC's *Sherlock*, which I will discuss in later chapters), they also gradually develop a sense of self-recognition and identity in the context of China's society as well as in relation to globalisation. How these fans recognise and interpret their favourite texts reflects an important aspect of cultural citizenship. Graham Murdock (1999) notes that cultural citizenship is dependent on how people represent and negotiate with cultural difference through media and popular culture, "which people utilize to make sense of their lives and social positions" (de Bruin, 2011). Hermes (2004) suggests that discussing the cultural citizenship of media fans helps investigate how fans connect with each other and establish social formations, and allows researchers to explore how specific media texts function during the construction of fan identities. Here, media play an important role in bringing people together. As Hartley (1995) notes, television shows (but this can be extended to a broader range of media) as original texts involve people who have different backgrounds in a shared sense of community. This type of communal sense is based on participation within specific fan communities or, relevant in the context of this thesis, taking part in fannish engagement on social media platforms. Social media become a shared cultural space, where people can find their similarities that help them come together, and discover differences that define them as a group in relation to others.

2.7 Conclusion

Web 2.0 fan culture is complicated, as it weaves social media platforms, fans as citizens and media texts objects of fandom into an intertwined network. Because of the very short history of Chinese fandom and the specific socio-cultural context, Chinese Web 2.0 fan culture is

¹⁰ Fansubbing describes a series of process about fan-translated subtitles. Opposed to an officially licensed translation done by professionals, in fansubbing, it is fans that translate subtitles into a language usually other than that of the original one.

arguably difficult to understand for international scholarship. Therefore in the above sections, I discussed bodies of literature on social media platform, fan behaviours and fan identity, all from international and Chinese perspectives. Having built up the theoretical framework for my research project, the next step is to discuss a set of methods appropriate to finding fans in social media, and to conduct my analysis of Chinese Web 2.0 fandom.

Chapter 3 Finding fans and the culture they create

To effectively conduct the research project, I primarily used qualitative research methods. Aiming to increase the depth of understanding of Chinese social media fandom, I will discuss the cultural context that underpins this fandom in two cases, the locally made reality TV show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and BBC's crime drama *Sherlock*. I employed digital ethnography to collect data and used a variety of methods to gather information such as broad Weibo search, individual in-depth interviews and observation. The data collected through digital ethnography includes discussion of how Chinese fans interact with social media platforms and among themselves, what kind of content fans produce and share online, and how fan informants recognise themselves. Such comprehensive data collection ensures the later analysis on the two case studies more in depth.

In this chapter I will explain the approach I adopted to find my fan informants for this research project. By looking at current research in the field of fan studies, I will firstly discuss my framing of research methods to collect data about fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identity. Then I will articulate the three steps of my data collection (broad Weibo searches, interviews and observation), and the mutual connection within this three-step process. I will also explain the problems and obstacles I met during data collection. In the final section I will outline how informants talk about themselves as fans, in order to provide a general picture of fans on Chinese social media platforms. After discussing the general characteristics of my interviewees, I will investigate why fan participants show concern over their own identities as fans and keep a subtle distance from offline social contacts in everyday life as well as researchers like me. In the meantime, I will also attempt to reveal how these fans establish a power hierarchy of cultural capital, skill, taste, and community administration, and that most Chinese fans maintain loose online connection within fandom.

3.1 Cultural context matters: the need for a comprehensive set of methods

As Hills (2002) argues, it is risky when researchers “cut themselves off from the transmedia and multimedia consumption”, because fans perform fannish practices by following the “wider consumption patterns” within the cultural context of fans’ social construction. He points out that fandom “is grounded in the fan’s (supposedly) pre-existent audience

knowledge and interpretive skill” (ibid.). Under such circumstances, a comprehensive understanding of fan culture must be based on a comprehensive methodological framework.

Chinese academic research on fan culture has experienced a shift from offline behaviour to online engagement in recent years (Lu, 2017; Yang, 2006; Zhang, 2009). Many scholars (Huang et al., 2013; Lu, 2017; Yu et al., 2011) investigate fan culture by means of the questionnaire or quantitative method. However, these approaches only lead to a general picture of groups of fans and their activities online. International scholarship in media studies and fan studies often look at specific fandom with qualitative methods. For instance, on the basis of data collected from online conversation, Marwick and boyd (2011) investigates celebrity-fan interaction on Twitter through platform analysis and discourse analysis. Jenkins (2012) and Sandvoss (2013) analyse the texts that fans produce and share online to explore the fan activities by carrying out individual interviews and/or observation in online communities. Therefore, following such qualitative methodological traditions in fan studies, in this study I have used digital ethnography to collect data. Since fan-made texts are basically all user-generated content, I first searched keywords related to fandom of the two case studies and discovered relevant fannish texts on Weibo, the most popular microblogging site in China. In this way I got in touch with fans who share fannish texts on Weibo and invited them to in-depth interviews. During interviews I asked which online fan communities they are following and/or engaging with, and acquired consent from these communities to carry out observation as an additional source of data about fan behaviours. In order to identify the patterns of how Chinese fans engage with Web 2.0 fandom, I have undertaken thematic analysis for data coding, and simplified the six-stage process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) into four steps. I also have applied a method set inspired by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Janks, 1997) to get insight into Chinese Web 2.0 fandom.

3.2 Applying digital ethnography to collect data

Most research in the field of fan studies employs ethnography as the primary method to record fan behaviour. I first searched fannish texts on Weibo in order to find related content for potential participants for later analysis. Then, after obtaining consent, I carried out interviews and collected some fannish texts they shared or produced for later analysis. During the initial search and the interviews, I found online fan communities and obtained permission

to do observations in these communities to collect additional data in terms of fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identity. Therefore, the fan informants I interviewed, the fannish texts I collected for analysis and the fan communities where I engaged in observations are all mutually connected.

3.2.1 Broad Weibo search

This research project aims to investigate Chinese fan culture in social media, therefore the participants in this study needed to be both fans and social media users. Weibo, one of the most popular social media platforms in China, was my first choice to recruit interviewees. When some interviewees I found via Weibo mentioned that they also use Tieba and Bilibili, I tried to contact more fans through private messaging on those two platforms, however, I did not receive many responses. This is perhaps because social media platforms design/develop the affordance of immediate online conversation very differently, a notion which I will explore in the next chapter. I could also not find fans via WeChat as the social network on WeChat is based on existing mobile contacts, and chat groups as well as content shared on WeChat are not visible to the public. As a result, considering the efficiency of recruitment, I only used Weibo to find fan participants.

This recruitment method enabled me to find “visible” fans who utilise social media to engage with online fandom, yet I must admit that fans would have been invisible to me if they do not often use Weibo. Many of my interviewees, for instance, consider WeChat as merely an instant messaging application rather than a platform that can facilitate a distinct form of fan culture (although the content visibility and media affordances of WeChat are quite different from Weibo, Tieba or Bilibili, which will be examined in the next chapter). Therefore, the recruitment method limited the analysis of WeChat-based fans and arguably makes WeChat seem less important for fandom than the other three platforms.

Weibo’s search engine helped me locate fan-produced texts related to *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *Sherlock* posted on the Weibo platform that demonstrate fans’ creative practices. A **broad Weibo search** enabled me to find active fans as interviewees, whom I then asked for help to introduce me to more participants in the project.

Keywords related to the third season of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, which finished in October 2015, were used to find these relevant fannish texts. These terms fall into four categories. The first and most fundamental phrase is *Baba Qunaer* (爸爸去哪儿, lit. “where are we going, dad?”), the name of the reality show. With this search keyword, I found texts such as Weibo posts including this specific term, and content posted or shared by the reality show’s official Weibo account @Baba Qunaer (@爸爸去哪儿).

A second category of keywords consists of the string *Baba Qunaer*, plus the names of celebrities and children who participated in the show, such as *Baba Qunaer Liu Ye* (爸爸去哪儿 刘烨), Liu Ye being the name of a celebrity from the show.

A third category pays more attention to character pairs. As the celebrities and their children participated in the show together, many fans became keen to create their preferred pairs of characters. For instance, the term *Kang Xia* (康夏) in the keyword *Baba Qunaer Kang Xia* (爸爸去哪儿 康夏) selects one Chinese character from each name Kangkang (康康) and Xia Tian (夏天) to bring together two celebrity children who took part in the show. Chinese fans apply this terminology of character pairing throughout online fandoms.

The last category of keywords are hashtags related to the programme such as “#Gaishi Hao Xia#” (盖世皓夏, lit. “supreme Kangkang and Xia Tian”) and “#Jun Ye#” (“#军烨#”, “Hu Jun and Liu Ye”). Weibo users are able to create a topic by using double hashtags (i.e. #SUBJECT#). All the hashtags I used for broad Weibo searches are connected to desired pairs of characters shared by fans and fan communities.

Table 1: Keywords used for broad Weibo search related to *Where are We Going, Dad?*

Category	Keywords (pinyin)	Keywords in Chinese hanzi	English meaning
Fundamental	Baba Qunaer	爸爸去哪儿	<i>Where are We Going, Dad?</i>
name of the show +	Baba Qunaer Liu Ye	爸爸去哪儿 刘烨	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Liu Ye

name of a specific celebrity participant	Baba Qunaer Hu Jun	爸爸去哪儿 胡军	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Hu Jun
	Baba Qunaer Xia Keli	爸爸去哪儿 夏克立	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Xia Keli
	Baba Qunaer Lin Yongjian	爸爸去哪儿 林永健	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Lin Yongjian
	Baba Qunaer Zou Shiming	爸爸去哪儿 邹市明	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Zou Shiming
	Baba Qunaer Nuoyi	爸爸去哪儿 诺一	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Nuoyi
	Baba Qunaer Nina	爸爸去哪儿 霓娜	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Nina
	Baba Qunaer Dajun	爸爸去哪儿 大俊	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Dajun
	Baba Qunaer Xia Tian	爸爸去哪儿 夏天	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Xia Tian
	Baba Qunaer Kangkang	爸爸去哪儿 康康	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Kangkang
	Baba Qunaer Xuanxuan	爸爸去哪儿 轩轩	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Xuanxuan
The name of the show + a fans-preferred pairing	Baba Qunaer Nuoxia	爸爸去哪儿 诺夏	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Nuoyi and Xia Tian
	Baba Qunaer Kangxia	爸爸去哪儿 康夏	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Kangkang and Xia Tian
	Baba Qunaer Kangnuo	爸爸去哪儿 康诺	<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> and Kangkang and Nuoyi
Hashtags	#Hao Xia# or #Kangkang Xia Tian#	皓夏 or 康康夏天	Kangkang and Xia Tian

	#Nuo Xia# or #Nuoyi Xia Tian#	诺夏 or 诺一夏天	Nuoyi and Xia Tian
	#Kang Nuo# or #Kangkang Nuoyi#	康诺 or 康康诺一	Kangkang and Nuoyi
	#Kang Ni# or #Kangkang Nina#	康霓 or 康康霓娜	Kangkang and Nina
	#Jun Ye# or #Hu Jun Liu Ye#	军烨 or 胡军刘烨	Hu Jun and Liu Ye

According to Zhiqing Wang (2006), Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock* stories have been translated into Chinese since late 1890s, and the translation of the names in *Sherlock* stories were quite different in the early time. Although scholars are still researching early Chinese readers' preference of *Sherlock* transliterations, the names "Xialuoke Fuermosi" (夏洛克·福尔摩斯, "Sherlock Holmes"), "Yuehan Huasheng" (约翰·华生, "John Watson"), "Maikaofu" (麦考夫, "Mycroft") and "Moliyadi" (莫里亚蒂, "Moriarty") have become well accepted by readers over the past century. These names are widely adopted by subbers of BBC's *Sherlock* today, and are mentioned in Chinese fannish texts about the drama.

In order to distinguish this drama from earlier television adaptations of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock* stories, Chinese fansubbers have translated the title of *Sherlock* as 神探夏洛克 *Shentan Xialuoke*, which literally means "Amazing Detective Sherlock". This transliteration intimates another popular Chinese television drama 神探狄仁杰 *Shentan Di Renjie* (lit. "Amazing Detective Di Renjie"), which is based on the detective fiction of Di Renjie, a magistrate in Tang Dynasty. The transliteration soon became accepted by all fans.

For the case study of *Sherlock*, I applied the same search strategy (see Table 2 below) to find fannish texts and potential interviewees in relation to *Sherlock* fandom on Weibo. But differently from the first case I used the nicknames of the characters given by fans instead of the official translated names in Chinese. For instance, Chinese fans prefer the nickname "Juanfu" (卷福, "curly Holmes") rather than the transliterations "Xialuoke" (夏洛克, Sherlock) or "Fuermosi" (福尔摩斯, Holmes) to refer to the character Sherlock in the episodes. Instead,

“Juanfu” describes the iconic curly hair of the character, which differs from previous classic images of Holmes. A similar example is “Maige” (麦哥, lit. “brother Mycroft”) referring to “Maikaofu” (麦考夫, “Mycroft”), the official Chinese transliteration of Mycroft (Holmes). Chinese fans prefer this nickname as it also indicates that Mycroft is Sherlock’s older brother in bringing together the first syllable of Mycroft plus a syllable from the Chinese word for “big brother”).

Table 2: Keywords used for broad Weibo search related to *Sherlock*

Category	Keywords (pinyin)	Keywords in Chinese hanzi	English meaning
Fundamental	Shentan Xialuoke	神探夏洛克	<i>Sherlock</i>
<i>Sherlock</i> + the name/nickname of a character in the episodes	Shentan Xialuoke Fuanfu	神探夏洛克 卷福	<i>Sherlock</i> and Holmes
	Shentan Xialuoke Huasheng	神探夏洛克 华生	<i>Sherlock</i> and Watson
	Shentan Xialuoke Maige	神探夏洛克 麦哥	<i>Sherlock</i> and Mycroft
<i>Sherlock</i> + a fans-preferred pairing	Shentan Xialuoke Fuhua	神探夏洛克 福华	<i>Sherlock</i> and Holmes/Watson
	Shentan Xialuoke Fumo	神探夏洛克 福莫	<i>Sherlock</i> and Holmes/Moriarty
Hashtags	#Fuhua#	福华	Sherlock Holmes and John Watson
	#Fumo#	福莫	Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty

Search tools provided by social media encourage users to discover content that interests them amidst the abundant information on the platforms, and each platform designs the use of search tools differently according to its primary features. I will discuss this in the next chapter of platform analysis.

3.2.2 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to “achieve a comprehensive understanding of the interviewee’s point of view or situation; it can also be used to explore interesting areas for further investigation” (Berry, 1999). As Dillon et al. (1994) point out, the interviewer must follow six fundamental rules to make in-depth interviews effective:

- The interviewer must avoid appearing superior or condescending and make use of only familiar words
- The interviewer must put questions indirectly and informatively
- The interviewer must remain detached and objective
- The interviewer must avoid questions and question structures that encourage “yes” or “no” answers
- The interviewer must probe until all relevant details, emotions and attitudes are revealed
- The interviewer must provide an atmosphere that encourages the respondent to speak freely, yet keeping the conversation focused on the issue(s) being researched

These principles ground a basis for the interviews, yet I found it difficult to probe “all relevant” detail. As Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue, interviewees sometimes “are motivated, largely unconsciously, to disguise the meaning of at least some of their feelings and actions” (p. 26) to protect their most vulnerable aspects from being touched by researchers, while confronting some questions regarding their sensitive experiences. Indeed, some interviewees protected themselves with indirect answers to my questions. For example, they outlined the fannish behaviours more generally instead of providing detailed self-reflection on their experience. Both situations happened in my interviews often.

Since online fans live across the People’s Republic of China, it proved difficult to interview my target informants in person, and I carried out the interviews online via QQ and WeChat, the most popular instant messaging services in China. I used recording software to keep video copies for analysis. Interviews normally lasted about 45 minutes and were structured by topic

lists that ranged over watching experience, fan identity and activities, fan communities, fannish texts, the use of social media, and fan-platform interactions. During interviews, the participants had the opportunity to talk about their experiences and opinions in relation to watching the show and sharing/producing fan work.

I designed a topic list instead of a pre-structured questionnaire for each case study. Each topic list started with my self-introduction which aimed to warm up the upcoming online conversation. Then I tried to let the interviewees gradually recall occasions on which they watched the show or episodes and asked them about their watching experiences. The next topic was about their interaction with fannish texts on social media platforms. In this phase I intended to invite the fans to describe their own experience of making or sharing fannish texts, what text impressed them the most, and how they consumed these texts. The next topic was how the fan interviewees use social media platforms. Through this topic, I had a chance to explore what features of these platforms are emphasised and preferred by fans and why. Then I asked interviewees to recall their experiences of interacting with other fans and celebrities. This led to the next topic: how fans perceive fan-made character pairing or slash texts about celebrities and the roles they performed. In the final phase, I asked the fans to provide some general demographic information about themselves. The topic list worked very flexibly, and I did not necessarily follow a fixed order in asking questions. During interviews, I sometimes invited my participants to tell their stories via their own logic chains, and I asked additional questions about interesting details they provided. Sometimes certain topics, such as slash texts, could be ignored if my fan participants did not have such experience or seemed reluctant to talk about the topics.

To avoid appearing superior to my fan informants, every interview began with a description of my own experience of fan production. In this way, I tried to ease a possible tension between the interviewees and myself, and hopefully, my interviewees heard details they were familiar with that could develop our conversations. An interesting fact is that, when I introduced myself, some interviewees were curious why I chose to do research on Chinese fan culture in New Zealand. I explained to them that I made this decision for several reasons and most essentially, New Zealand provides a very good environment for me to catch up with the western research tradition in the humanities and social sciences, which is very different from

Chinese scholarship in the same area. In doing so, I tried to encourage my interviewees to talk more freely, considering the great distance between New Zealand and China.

Snowball sampling was the primary approach I followed to find participants. As a technique for finding research subjects, snowball sampling requires one subject to give “the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on” (Vogt, 1999). When I initially carried out textual searches on Weibo, I invited a small number of fans to participate in my study. After interviewing them, I asked for their assistance in identifying online companions with similar interests. Then I tried to reach and interview the nominated participants and continue to the next interviews in the same way. Some informants did introduce me to other fans they know; however, many referred fans were not interested in being interviewed through video chatting, because they preferred to keep their “virtual life” and “reality” separate. As a result, more interviewees came from Weibo searches rather than snowball sampling, and technically, the sampling method of my research project became half snowball sampling and half random sampling.

3.2.3 Observation

Observation, as Marshall and Rossman (1989) define it, provides “the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts” in a socio-cultural context (p. 79). Among different type of observation methods, observation is widely used in “learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants” (LeCompte, Schensul, 1999, p. 91).

My observation consists of two parts: observation and participation. Observation provides a “written photograph” of the situation under study (Erlanson et al., 1993), and participation means involvement in a group practice. In this project, observation involved joining in, taking part in limited online activities, and observing fannish practices in fan communities.

I found and joined different online fan communities of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *Sherlock*, and I asked for consent to conduct observation. For *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, two fan communities allowed me to carry out observation. The first is “Liu Nuoyi Quanqiu

Houyuanhui 1 Qun” (刘诺一全球后援会 1 群,¹¹ “Liu Nuoyi’s Global Fan Community, Group 1”), a Weibo-based fan chat group. This group is organised by Nuoyi’s fans and affiliated with the Weibo page of Liu Ye, where one can find 540 similar chat groups. The second fan community, “Baba Qunaer Kang Nuo Ba” (“爸爸去哪儿康诺吧”, “Kangkang¹² and Nuoyi of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Forum”), is an online forum based on Baidu Tieba, and seems more likely a discussion board for fans fond of the interaction between Kangkang and Nuoyi. This community is running well thanks to the administrators’ work in sharing quality content to Weibo and deleting irrelevant posts. Therefore this online forum became the primary community in which I collected data for analysing *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom.

For the second case study, *Sherlock*, I was allowed to do observation in “*Juanfu Ba*” (“卷福吧”, Curly Holmes Forum), which is forum, also Tieba-based, that attracts fans of the character Sherlock in the episodes as well as fans of the actor Benedict Cumberbatch. Since so many Chinese fans got to know Benedict Cumberbatch by watching *Sherlock* episodes, for many fans Juanfu (“curly Holmes”) has become a well-acknowledged nickname of the actor, although Sherlock Holmes is only one of the characters that he has acted. This community has attracted about 16,000 members who have contributed approximately 1,700 themed posts and more than 58,000 comments by the end of 2017. Most of the posts are in direct relation to the actor or characters he acts, while a few other posts discuss the management of this online forum.

3.3 Explaining the fandom with Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative method frequently used by scholars in the field of fan studies and cultural studies. Examining three interrelated dimensions of discourse, Fairclough (1989; 1995) proposes the model for CDA with three interrelated elements of analysis:

1. the object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts);

¹¹ Nuoyi is the elder son of Liu Ye, a well-known Chinese actor starring in a few internationally award-winning films such as *Lanyu* (2001). In 2015, Nuoyi and Liu Ye participated in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Season 3.

¹² Kangkang 康康 is the nickname of Hu Haokang 胡皓康, the son of Hu Jun, a famous actor in China. In 2015, Kangkang and Hu Jun participated in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Season 3.

2. the processes by which the object is produced and received
(writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects;
3. the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes.

This analytical method enables me to focus on how a fannish text is structured, and how other fans interact with this text. It also requires me to look at the socio-historical determination of the text and the key elements that make up the text in order to understand how all the conditions are connected and weaved into the text. In other words, the CDA echoes Fiskean “text poaching” and “textual productivity” theories, which point out that fans actively engage with (and sometimes “manipulate”) texts, and also indicate that “texts are instantiations of socially regulated discourses and that the processes of production and reception are socially constrained” (Janks, 1997). The CDA method is helpful to my analysis because it fits the situation of my research project that has “multiple points of analytic entry” (ibid.). The three objects of analysis for my case studies – fan-platform interaction, fannish texts, and fan identity – are thus interconnected and mutually explanatory.

The interviews and observations generated a huge amount of data in relation to the Web 2.0 fandom in China. To code and analyse this data, I drew upon Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method of thematic analysis and used a four-step workflow. The first step is **familiarisation with the data**. I read the transcripts as well as the texts found in observation for several times to make sure that I become familiar with the content for analysis. Secondly I tried to **identify codes** in line with the research scope: fan-platform interaction, fannish texts, and fan identity. At this step, I generated codes that demonstrated meaningful features of data and/or connection to my research questions. The third step was **data collation**. In this phase, I examined the codes and selected the codes which I found most significant, and then I tried to find the codes that lead to these significant ones. This cycle repeated until I could group codes into themes in which aspects of the codes were shared, e.g. online fans use PC and/or smartphones to consume content. This method helped me establish the importance of codes (as the following table shows) and find out the pattern of fandom consumption. The next step involved **analysing the codes**. This process involved investigating fans’ linguistic and/or semiotics use of the codes, the connection between different codes, and the relevance to the research questions.

Table 3. An overview of codes and themes regarding the Chinese social media platforms

Scope	Theme	Code	Relevance
Platforms	Context	Development history of platforms	The absence of globally popular platforms in China makes their Chinese counterparts more controllable for the government and reduces the visibility of Chinese fans and their works for people outside of China. Therefore Chinese Web 2.0 fandom becomes enclosed in the Chinese context.
	Platform interface	Layout of content	The first step to understand Chinese social media and the fandom in this context.
	Important features	Public posts; Direct messaging; Group chat; Search tools; Information recommendation	The examination of these features provides a close view of the platforms fans used, laying the foundation for further discussion on fan behaviours.
	Affordance	Multitasking	Allows fans to switch different tasks while consuming online content.
		Visibility of UGC	Fans can discover each other and their interested content if UGC is visible in social media.
		Immediacy of communication	Generates a sense of presence and participation in an on-going event, through which fans feel connected.
		Connectivity among fans	The online connection breaks through the limitation that fans used to physically meet up or have face-to-face conversation for fandom in the pre-digital era.

		Quantification of text circulation	The views, comments, and circulations of fannish text are all quantified in social media. It becomes easy for fans to assess the power difference of each other or communities.
--	--	------------------------------------	---

Table 4. An overview of codes and themes regarding to fan-platforms interaction

Scope	Theme	Code	Relevance
Fan-platform interaction	Scenario of using social media for fandom	University dormitory or rental property	The places where most of my fan informants using social media for fandom
		Video streaming instead of television broadcast	The major way in which my fan informants consume the two television programmes
		Smartphones	My fan informants' most used devices to get involved in fan-platform interaction
		Laptops	The second most used devices
	Fan behaviours	Video streaming	The foundation of consuming the two television programmes and fanvids.
		Share to social media	Text sharing allows fans to demonstrate and circulate fannish materials, making the uploaded content visible for other fans.
		Individual or group chatting	The premise of develop social network in fan communities.
		Online tagging	Describes how a fan connect with other fans, communities, and celebrities.
		Screenshot	Many fan informants capture screenshots to record important text or

			reproduce individual digital conversation that cannot be seen by others.
		Photo editing	Most interviewees mentioned how they edited photos to add new meaning. This makes fan production easier.
		Bilibili flying comment	Every interviewee mentioned the experience of consuming fandom on Bilibili. This type of comment offers another way to generate a sense of being connected.
	Consequences	Fragmented texts and viewing experience	The use of mobile devices and social media create a sense of virtual presence in online activities and connection with other fans.
		Power difference among fans	The (physically) individual scenario of using social media as well as fragmented texts limit fans' attention to the content they are interested in, and therefore the level of individual fans' influence becomes different. Management within fan community also reflects the power difference.
		Offline practice	Since the digital conversation online is visible, offline practice become important for some fans.

Table 5. An overview of codes and themes regarding to fannish texts

Scope	Theme	Code	Relevance
Fannish texts	Context	Terms for fandom from multiple cultures	Reflect the cultural communication in a global context.

		The situation of “context collapse”	The visibility of UGC for different fandoms or fan circles on Web 2.0 platforms makes it easier to misunderstand fannish texts.
	Text	Ever evolving text	Fans upload, circulate and discuss about the fannish texts, turning texts into topics in social media.
		Reflection of value	Fans’ discussion and manipulation of texts reflect their values in terms of media production and individual identity.
		Memetic content	Some content that share similar interest or value of fans become memetic.
	Gender issues	Idealised boy-girl relationship	Shipping between celebrity boys and girls in <i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> fandom
		Beyond boy-boy friendship	Shipping between celebrity boys in <i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> fandom
		Imagined male-male romance	Shipping between celebrity fathers in <i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i> fandom and between male characters in <i>Sherlock</i> fandom
		Connect fan-fictional same-sex relationship to the reality	Fans discussed masculinity demonstrated in the television episodes as well as in the shipping-themed fannish texts. Due to the political and technological context, gender politics therefore become a primary issue of Chinese Web 2.0 fandom.

Table 6. An overview of codes and themes regarding to fan identity

Scope	Theme	Code	Relevance
Fan identity	Individual fan	Cultural capital	Measurement of being a fan as well as the power difference among fans
		Cultural citizenship	Emerges during interactions.
	Fan community	Group work (e.g. fansub)	Connections between fans become stronger in group works.
		Sentimental and irrational behaviours in fan groups	Arguments among fans were frequently mentioned in the interviews.

Through the four-step coding procedure, the meaning structure of Chinese Web 2.0 fandom becomes clear. Fans construct their fan identity via producing and consuming fannish texts, and their behaviours are largely guided and shaped by the features of different platforms. In other words, Web 2.0 platforms lay a foundation for fans to interact with each other, circulate the content they like, and further establish their fan identity and culture; and fan culture also influences the process of identity construction, the type of fannish texts, the way in which fans produce or circulate such texts, and moreover, the appearance of media platforms. Therefore, the findings are reported as follows: I firstly analyse the platforms that Chinese fans most often use in order to have a solid base for discussion of two case studies of fannish texts. Each case study will start with the investigation of fan-platform interaction, followed by a textual analysis of fan productions and then exploration of fan identity. I also discuss the historical, socio-cultural, and economic context of mainland China, which help to better understand how Chinese fans consume fannish texts, interact with each other as well as platforms, and develop their own culture in social media.

3.4 Who are they: An outline of my fan informants

Using Weibo's search engine and snowball sampling, I found and interviewed seventeen fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* However, due to concern over the precision of their ideas in

the interviews or their unwillingness to be exposed in video records, three requested to withdraw from the research project after the interviews. A similar situation arose in the case study of *Sherlock*, in which I eventually had thirteen informants, including two informants also are *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans. As a result, I conducted twenty-seven valid interviews, and a total number of twenty-five fan interviewees participated in this research project. Twenty-two out of the twenty-seven valid interviews have been analysed in this thesis, as the other three interviews were relatively short, less informative and fragmented due to too many network interruptions. In this condition, the three interviews could not well reflect how these fans participate in Web 2.0 fandom and eventually were not analysed.

Anxiety about being a research subject appeared to exist among the withdrawn interviewees. They were not sure if they wished to identify as fans either when they accepted the interview requests, or when they were asked to recall details of what they had done regarding fan productivities. Commonly, those who withdrew may have interacted with other social media users, but such interaction often happens randomly. Moreover, it is also possible that they had other reasons to withdraw beyond uncertainty about fan identities. For example, they might be unhappy with their online activity. In this sense, they regarded themselves as unsuitable subjects for my research project, as they did not consider them as “typical” fans.

It is also notable that the fan informants in both case studies share certain demographic characteristics in terms of age, gender, education, and the regions where they live. In this section, I will describe my informants from the perspectives of fan identity and their self-recognition of identity.

3.4.1 A general picture of my interviewees

I found thirty-two interviewees and conducted seventeen interviews for both case studies, as two interviewees happened to be fans of both *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *Sherlock*. Yet three interviewees decided to withdraw from the *Where Are We Going, Dad?* case after they read the transcription of their interviews, and four withdrew from the *Sherlock* case for similar reasons. All informants requested a copy of the interview transcription. After reading the transcripts a few days after the interviews, a total of seven participants withdrew on the basis that their expression seemed either not good enough or inappropriate. This is possibly because the way we express ourselves orally is very different from how we express ourselves

in writing. As a result, two out of the seven withdrawn informants doubted that they could actually be categorised as fans. In a way, these informants quit this research project because they concerned that they were not “real” fans, which is similar to what many fan participants reckoned during the interviews (I will discuss this in the next section). Therefore these withdrawn informants also reflect a general thought of Chinese social media fans, that is, fan identity is established on the basis of productivity.

All these fan interviewees were solicited through Weibo. Of these twenty-five participants, eighteen were female fans and seven were male fans. Twenty-three informants were in the 18-30 age range, and only two were over 30 years old. Twenty-four out of twenty-five interviewees received higher education, including five who were completing or had finished postgraduate programmes. Five fan informants had experiences of studying abroad or were planning to study abroad. All the interviewees study or work in urban areas. To sum up, the recruited interviewees represent a group of young intellectuals in the People’s Republic of China.

Since all the interviewees were recruited on Weibo, the demographic data of my fan informants reflects the characteristics of general Weibo users more than that of the fans for each fan culture. The Weibo’s official statistics points out that it had 222 million monthly active users by September 2015; over 70 percent of its total users received higher education, and 79 percent of Weibo’s users are in the 17-33 age range. (Data Center of Sina Weibo, 2015, pp. 7-8) The data generated through my interviewees does not reflect the fact that *Where Are We Going, Dad?* raised a much broader discussion in the society rather than just within a group of young intellectuals living in urban areas. To some extent, a large number of fans who might be active on other platforms than Weibo were not involved in this research project, although it is difficult to recruit or find this type of fan interviewees with other methods.

If we zoom in to look at each fandom separately, twelve informants for *Where Are We Going, Dad?* were in their twenties and two were about to turn twenty. Most are single children as a result of China’s “one-child policy”, and only one fan claims to have a brother. Seven were undergraduate students, and six had started a career after graduating from university or completing the postgraduate programmes. All are Han Chinese and live in cities or urban areas. In the case of *Sherlock*, most interviewees were in their twenties as well and three claimed to be around twenty years old.

For a better understanding of the current generation of Chinese youth, awareness of the social and demographic conditions in which they came of age is necessary. The Chinese government introduced “one-child policy” in 1979, in order to curb the population, adapt to economic reform, and improve people’s living standards (Zhu, 2003, pp. 463-464, cited in Hesketh et al., 2005, p. 1171). Since then, the number of three-person families (two parents and one child) has increased enormously (Feng et al., 2014, p. 19). Meanwhile, as China has urbanised, land from private houses has been collected by the government and converted into residential communities that often consist of multi-storey apartment buildings. A majority of urban families now live in such communities. This change of living condition has led to more fragmented surroundings for “one-child policy” children. In this social context, fandom, especially Web 2.0 fandom on the basis of social networking and a convenient search engine, offers a space for these youth to engage in imagined connections and participation.

The offline surroundings have been changing so rapidly that China’s “one-child” generation seek to develop their power through online self-expression and participatory engagement with like-minded people in cyberspace. When I asked my interviewees to describe how actively they participate in online fan communities, many seemed to put effort into presenting a very calm and rational impression to me.

Nisan: I used to be really active in fan circles... and now I don’t have so much time on [making] fannish texts. I need to find a good job after my graduation.

Kevin: I watched the show when I had plenty of time, but now I am preparing for my postgraduate study.

Some participants claimed they used to be active in fan communities for *Where Are We Going, Dad?* as well as other topics; however, they have gradually curtailed their involvement. Similar answers appeared in the interviews for *Sherlock*. Indeed, third-and fourth-year university students in China generally pay more attention to their study than fan productivities, because they face fierce competitions in examination and the job market and have less free time than before. However, some participants tried to manage their sense of the impression created on me or, more precisely, on academic research on fan culture. I will discuss this in more depth in the next section.

Female fans make up a much larger proportion of viewers of both shows, and they also show greater enthusiasm for participating in fannish activities. The overall characteristics of the interviewees reflect statistics of Weibo users published by Sina Weibo in December 2015. According to Weibo's reporting, female users between seventeen and twenty-five years old use the service more often than males of the same age (Data Center of Sina Weibo, 2015, p. 8). Interestingly, the percentages of male and female registered Weibo users are equal at 50 percent, yet I found male users were much less keen to produce or share texts in relation to *Where Are We Going, Dad?* on Weibo, and only had four male interviewees participate in my project. As for *Sherlock* fandom on Weibo and Tieba, more male *Sherlock* fans repost other fan's creative work or participate in discussions about shipping, and four male fans accepted interviews.

3.4.2 "I am a fan, but I am not a real fan."

In interviews, participants fit themselves into two categories – active and inactive fans. It is very interesting to note that they themselves set up a binary pattern that describes how people consume the show or any other media products. One of the most common words in the conversation is that "I am actually not a *real* fan of this programme".

KK: I don't think I'm an enthusiastic fan, because I haven't any experiences of writing fan-fiction, editing video, etc.... I was like... just simply writing things on Weibo and sometimes WeChat, and haven't received much commentary or likes... I don't have enough time to create more sophisticated work.

Cola: I merely wrote my feelings and thoughts about the show on Weibo. Sometimes I also put them on WeChat.

Notably, the definition and use of the word "fans" or *fensi* (粉丝) has been broadly extended in China. In current Chinese discourse – both formal and informal – it not only refers to a group of very enthusiastic supporters devoted to something or somebody in the fields of entertainment or sports, but also can be used to describe supportive users of a product or a brand such as iPhone or SONY. In this context, politicians and state media like China Central Television and Xinhua News sometimes also use the word to showcase the government's closeness to the people (Zheng, 2016). Likewise, people can call themselves "fans" of something or somebody to enunciate their tastes. According to Shih et al. (2014), for example,

many users of the Chinese smartphone manufacturer Xiaomi are keen and sometimes proud to tag themselves *Mifen* (米粉). This phrase is short for *Xiaomi Fensi* (“Fans of Xiaomi”), but the literal meaning of *Mifen* before this fan culture is rice noodle. The use of *Mifen* here seems in line with Chinese fans’ terminology that fans tend to connect specific fandom to food through wordplay. As a result, “being a fan” in contemporary China is much less marginalised or “scandalous” than something that has to oppose “proper” ideology or cultural capital (Jenkins, 1992; Hills, 2002). In other words, fans in such contexts do not need to be “fanatic”, with the larger implication that they are not necessarily irrational about someone or something.

However, the broadened idea of “being a fan” in China does not lead to a less hierarchical structure of fandom; instead, such an expanded “fan-base” perhaps creates fan cultures with more layers than in the Pre-Web 2.0 era, because the larger scale of “users/viewers who have interests” or “audiences with enthusiasm” in social media are counted. In other words, when it is no longer a shame to be a fan, audiences can be more active in speaking their feelings and thoughts, and consequently may be able to contribute a larger number of fannish materials to social media platforms. In fact, as Hills (2002) indicates, fans on these platforms “share common interest while also competing over fan knowledge, access to the object of fandom, and status” (p. 46). This kind of competition is both the reason and outcome of Web 2.0 fandom hierarchy, which not only reflects fans’ different tastes but also multiple levels of knowledge of fannish texts, devotion within the fan community, as well as the quality and quantity of fan production. The later factors then become the basis on which fans recognise their identity and evaluate others’.

Throughout interviews and observation, my informants deemed themselves active “real fans” or not mainly according to the standards mentioned in above three extracts and other similar words. In their opinion, an active fan should be much more enthusiastic than common audiences.

Question: How do you define “enthusiasm” or “being enthusiastic” in this case?

Cola: An active fan should be able to get information about the celebrities [or their children] as soon as possible, or take part in activities organised by fan

communities, or have relevant expertise [such as writing fannish articles, making video clips and editing photos] and work on creative practices in relation to the show.

XiaoA: I think doing something creative is very important. You can find so many Weibo users telling you their feelings, thoughts and expectations while they are watching the show, and of course some of this stuff is interesting; but on Weibo you will not find that much fan work that can provide new value or at least new perspective to the episodes... I reckon I just merely enjoy the show as well as writing my watching experiences with Weibo, but hardly contribute new things on the basis of the original content. So I think I may not be considered a genuine fan; instead, I probably can be an enthusiastic audience member.

Here the participants view “social interaction” and “production of artefacts” (Longhurst, 2007) as measuring the enthusiasm of a fan. Cola ranks the ability to acquiring the information of what a fan loves first, followed by participating in community activities and finally fan productivities. A few other participants’ answers present a similar order of fan behaviours. The logic behind this order is simple. Searching for information is a more individual activity, particularly in the context of personal use of social media platforms, and may just benefit the fan him/herself and require only very fundamental skills. In contrast, taking part in community activities involves more fans and a larger audience. Producing fannish work is considered as adding value to the original media texts with much more advanced skills, and therefore is regarded as serving a larger audience for the programme.

Some self-professed “less active” participants insist that they ‘simply record’ rather than intentionally create fan production on Weibo, emphasising their individual identity. They tend to regard this kind of behaviour as more “semiotic-enunciative” (Fiske, 1992, p. 37). As Fiske explains, semiotic productivity is a more generalised characteristic of popular media culture, while enunciative productivity can assist in constructing social identity, and “occur[s] only within immediate social relationships” (Fiske, 1992, pp. 37-39). But on Weibo, users’ immediate comments, the trace of their Weibo reposts and timelines are kept and displayed on the platform, and other users can reach them via Weibo’s search engine. In other words, Weibo archives its users’ immediate (virtual) social relationships, and such features can also be seen on a few other Web 2.0 platforms. Therefore, the openness of the platform turns their posts into textual productivity. Through searching keywords with Weibo’s search engine,

others can easily reach these authors of “simple records” and interact with them. When individual fans post writings on Weibo, they are, consciously or not, contributing new content to a potential “virtual community” based on the platform. As a result, individual fans are connected, and their “simple records” are no longer merely the representation of “personal interests” but become fan-produced artefacts with new value. Here, “media convergence” (Jenkins, 2006a) not only represents the current development trends of media technologies and the form of new media, but also changes the way people consume media texts. Importantly, such media convergence blurs (or dissolves, to some extent) the boundaries of Fiskean notions of fan productivities.

Notably, participants who considered themselves “inactive” often expressed concern about what they speak about during the interviews, because they thought their online contribution looked quite “normal,” “not special enough” or “probably would make no contribution to the research project.” Due to such self-understanding, they did not believe that they were worth of study. On the other hand, a few participants who were more active when they consumed the show were eager to share their experiences of fannish products as well as what they knew about the circles of “real fans.” Some of them discussed how fan communities organised, what members of these communities did, and how the industry collaborated with fan communities in order to promote the visibility and popularity of topics about their preferred show. These participants also tended to be more open to providing their thoughts on social media fan culture.

3.4.3 Concerns over identity and impression management

During the interviews, I could see every interviewee trying to be calm and objective while telling me their stories of being a fan. Such management of their personal impression to me, the interviewer, is very common in various type of interviews (Dwyer, 2007; Fox, Spector, 2000). To explain impression management in a social context like an interview, Erving Goffman (1959) proposes his notion about the representation of self with a “frontstage/backstage” theory. He points out that each person, as a social being, performs various behaviours during daily life, which can be categorised into two types: those that present the professional self, and those that one may engage in on casual occasions. When people know that they may be before a specific audience, they will intentionally or

subconsciously adjust their behaviour for a better impression. This is Goffman's idea of "frontstage" performance. In my cases, when interviewees accepted my requests for in-depth interviews, they consciously adjusted how they narrated their fannish experiences to me, and situated themselves as a bit distant from involved fandom in order to make their provided information appear objective and reliable. But within fan communities, which the fans considered part of everyday life, interviewees interacted with other community members more casually than in the interviews. Here communities become a kind of "backstage", as Goffman (1959) refers to more casual situations in which people show much less concern over their behaviour as they know that nobody is looking or, at least, that nobody can tell if there is a performance or who is performing. People do not worry so much when "backstage" about social norms or expectation from selves and public, and they therefore feel more relaxed, comfortable and sometimes, that they are their "true selves." But as Goffman states, people are also aware of social norms and expectations backstage, and this encourages them to practice behaviours in private that they would not publicly engage in. The awareness of the frontstage/backstage difference not only exists in interviews, but also leads to fans' management of their own impressions while using social media. I will discuss this in the following paragraphs.

Moreover, some of my interviewees mentioned that they talk about fan practices with their friends via voice chat or in person. Many have had the experience of deleting posts on Weibo and WeChat Moments, at times in relation to their consumption of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *Sherlock* series and the fandom. These fans have been confronting a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, they wish to invite more enthusiasts into the fan circle to enlarge discussion and encounter fresh new ideas about *Sherlock*; on the other hand, they do not want themselves to be overexposed in public, particularly in acquaintance circles like WeChat Moments or more open platforms such as Weibo and Baidu Tieba.

Chuxia: I don't post many things on WeChat Moments. There are only several posts on that (my WeChat Moments) by now. I used to post a lot on Weibo, but later I deleted many of those posts, and only have about 100 Weibo posts left now. One day, while looking at my old posts, I suddenly felt that I talked too much. If other people searched for me, they would find out so much on my Weibo... and think "this person is such a chatterbox" and have a bad impression of me.

Naonao: I think showing off my fan identity is not such a good thing.

For many fans like Chuxia and Naonao, WeChat Moments seems an imperfect place to demonstrate a fan identity because it is difficult to extend their connection with other unrecognised fans, but also the platform becomes a “frontstage”, in Erving Goffman’s terms, of fans. I will examine WeChat and other most frequently used platforms in the next chapter by analysing their different features and affordances in more detail.

When my interviewees delete WeChat Moments posts, they show awareness of being performers (to their WeChat contacts) on the stage of WeChat Moments, a social space where people share moments from everyday life. My platform analysis chapter will demonstrate that WeChat’s contacts are based on offline social networks. The offline-based contacts shortens the distance between the “stage” and the “seats”, and details can be amplified in such short distances. So, fans naturally manage their image even more carefully when they use WeChat Moments than with other platforms that feature customised user avatars. Meanwhile in China, as I proposed in the previous section, fans are often treated as enthusiasts irrationally chasing celebrities, thus my interviewees also expressed concern that their fannish behaviour performed on the frontstage potentially presents a negative impression to important others, such as parents, co-workers, supervisors or customers. Many interviewees said that the impression of a fan identity would affect how they would be regarded in professional life. As a result, on WeChat Moments these fans pick up “proper” texts to share and/or delete some fannish content.

In light of Goffman’s theory, platforms that allow users to set their avatars (e.g. Weibo, Tieba, and Bilibili) can be seen as backstage spaces, as it is difficult to connect an online avatar to a person in everyday life. But it is interesting to note that fannish practices on such platforms become more complicated, as fan users understand that their behaviour is being watched by other users and so they strive to better connect with other fans. In this situation, the boundary between frontstage and backstage blurs. Also, these fans believe that fannish performance is more comfortable and secure when protected by an avatar. Therefore, fannish texts are more visible on Weibo, Tieba and Bilibili than on WeChat Moments.

However, as Chuxia mentions in the interview, she and some other fans also delete content on Weibo due to concerns over privacy.

Lamo: This is not about fandom. I just don't want to showcase my emotions or feelings to people who know me in person [on WeChat].

This quote and others like it that I gathered present interviewees' worries about privacy on social media. The notion that uploading too much information about updates, thoughts or tastes is dangerous hints at controversies over privacy and visibility. The interviewees express concern over privacy issues from the perspective of security of personal information. In other words, they do not want to risk running afoul of *renrou sousuo* (人肉搜索, lit. "human flesh search engine," that is, cyber man-hunting). Downey (2010) identifies such behaviour as crowd-sourced detective work carried out online that seeks to mete out offline punishment. He states that it is a kind of online vigilante justice where Internet users hunt down and punish those who greatly offend others. Epstein and Jung (2011) note that the Web 2.0 technologies empower netizen detectives to participate in cyber man-hunting in Korea (and China) where the local culture heightens belief in moral obligations and social solidarity. In my research project, many fans have experienced online debates or arguments about social media fandom and have seen how unreasonable some fans can be in such situations. Therefore, they choose to delete clues that can be traced to their offline daily life, to avoid revenge from fanatic people in the way of *renrou sousuo*.

The exploitation of social media platform is another concern. Jose van Dijck (2013) and Graham Meikle (2016) point out that social media platforms like Facebook prompt users to upload more and more personal information, but also exploit and sell the continuously updated data and information shared by users to win enormous revenue. Such a business model also applies on Chinese platforms, including Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these platforms recommend content such as popular topics, advertisements, and similar topics for users on the basis of what they share.

3.4.4 Loose connection within fandom

As fans have been problematically represented in both academic works and news stories as an extremely emotional crowd (Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992), it is not surprising that most of my participants in interviews claim they are different from these negative fan stereotypes, and their connections with other fans seemed to be not as close as some researchers have presumed.

Saonian: I usually just search for relevant topics [about the shows] and don't follow other fans on Weibo. I can get abundant up-to-date search results in this way, so it's not necessary to follow other people who very possibly don't produce interesting posts constantly.

Lian: Sometimes my Weibo posts get forwarded or commented, but I don't think we [as fans of *Sherlock*] are closely bonded even though we have discussions together. I don't believe I can have a close connection with people that I only have some interaction with on social media. In fact, I think the connection between people in real life may be loose, as we meet so many different persons every day.

These quotes are part of similar answers to questions on their attitude toward developing and maintaining participatory engagement with *Sherlock* fandom online. These participants do not believe that their posts or forwarding of posts contribute new value to the original fannish text, and so categorise their work as "worthless" information, in other words, not as fan productivity. However, I propose that they actually have engaged in fan productivity simply by circulating and exchanging different texts within a broad virtual community on Weibo. Admittedly, these posts often are merely texts with 140 character limits, and some forwarded posts do not have any comments attached, and most importantly, the participants do not appear to post them specifically to contribute to fandom; the mechanism of Weibo Search allows other users to see these posts and make the fannish text much visible. These posts constitute part of fandom as well as suggesting what popular topics are in a given period. As discussed previously, online *Sherlock* fans in China rely heavily on fan productivities to define their identities, to develop their fandom, and to maintain connection with other fans. In this case, the mismatch weakens their understanding as fans, reduces their expectations of connecting others, and finally leads to a loose connection among fans scattered on Weibo.

Importantly, the loose connection is not only an issue of fan cognition, but also a result of commercial intervention. Fandom, as many scholars and fans note, has indeed become industrially normalised and part of marketing strategies (Ross, 2009; Hills, 2012). When business interests increasingly come into fandom, some fans become suspicious of the authenticity of fandom and turn to a resistant position.

Kevin: Fandom has been exploited to be part of marketing strategies... you don't know which is genuinely fan-made and which is camouflage of the marketing agency. So I choose to step aside and enjoy watching everything quietly.

This participant demonstrates his reluctance to accept that fans are considered “essential components of the capitalist system within which official producers operate” (Hills, 2002). As Hills states, cult fans can be hostile towards commercialism and commodification due to an innate anti-commercial ideology within fandom. The viewpoint inherits Jenkins’ notion about the separation between fan labour on a commodity and the labour of a commodity’s official creators (Jenkins, 1992). According to Jenkins, if a commodity needs to be polished by fans (to add value), then the official producers are to blame for not exploiting the commodity’s potential. The participant Kevin here states that in following marketing strategies, official producers often suppress the potential of *Sherlock* episodes (in terms of story setting, plot development, and even the length of the series), which then invites fans to develop the stories; sometimes marketing agencies even pretend to be fans to call for more participatory engagement (Mo, Yang, 2014). This situation seems an upgraded and more devious version of the exploitation of fans discussed in the previous section (van Dijck, 2013; Meikle, 2016). These factors make fandom a gaming-like situation where official producers play the role of rival relative to fans. Fans like Kevin then resist cooperative participation in this “game” and rather choose to wander in the field randomly with a few associates. As a result, some fans do not connect with many other online fans, as they do not wish to be exploited by the industry.

3.4.5 Within fan communities

Although social media platforms like Weibo allows individual fans without membership in fan communities to access a huge amount of fannish texts created collaboratively, these platforms are happy to facilitate the growth of different groups in order to attract users and maintain large-scale activity on their social platform. These online communities on the basis of social media therefore have more complicated structures, especially when business interests are involved.

Some fans upload their works within communities on Baidu Tieba or WeChat. If their work receives positive feedback from other members, the community administrators will post the

texts publicly on Weibo in order to make them more visible. In this way, fan communities can improve their reputation because of the quality of their fan-made work or expertise in particular areas (for instance, finding celebrities' stories, making fanvids, translations, etc.) and then draw attention from broader audiences, individual fans and even celebrity agencies. As fans gather as groups and establish online communities, their power emerges. Several interviewees mentioned how community leaders administrate the Tieba forum, when I asked them how their fan communities function.

Ying: In my experience, no matter what the fan community [based on Baidu Tieba], the administrators and leaders of fan communities are elected by the members... Every community has a similar structure – a general online forum for all fans of a specific topic, teams with different tasks (for example, organising offline activities, editing images, making fanvids, writing articles, etc.), and an administrative team that sets the rules and regulations of the community. The administrators also take charge of editing content posted on the online forum by fans. If they think is not in line with the regulations, they delete posts or take stricter measures.

According to Ying's description, the administrators of a fan community not only organise fan activities, they possess "legislative authority" and "enforcement power" within this micro-society. They are originally selected to manage the online spaces of the fan community, but with the amount of volunteer work they do within the community, they gradually attain more power as well. Consequently, their personal interests affect the topics of online posts and the atmosphere of the online community.

A taste hierarchy emerges as well due to administrative rights in fan communities. Some interviewees admitted that the taste of community administrators plays a role in what work produced by community members gets shared.

PangPang: In fact, if the topic of a post is closer to the community leaders' taste, it will be easier to receive positive feedback from these leaders and be promoted within the community or on Weibo.

Ying: Sometimes I send my work to the administrator or people in the celebrity's agency company via WeChat, and they decide how and/or when to promote it online.

In an open online space, the more feedback a text receives, the higher visibility it will achieve. On Weibo, for instance, a text or a comment on a text that attracts a number of likes, shares and comments will be automatically set as a 'stickie' at the top of the list of updates on an online forum, only being replaced by other texts if the level of feedback it attracts drops. Such recommendation mechanisms also exist on platforms like Baidu Tieba and Bilibili.com (a Chinese video sharing site that features video streaming with real-time text commentaries projected on the video play interface). Therefore, most active fans are keen to let others see their works, and try to find fan communities that have similar taste or slightly adjust their style in producing their fannish work in order to increase possibilities for acknowledgement within the community and heightened visibility of their work. For example, "Baba Qunaer Kangnuo Ba", a fan community in which I carried out observation, focuses on fan fiction about two of the children in *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, and many fans who enjoy the topic gather here to share their work. Once a post receives positive feedback, the community leaders share the text and a link to this post on Weibo, in order to attract more fans, particularly individual fans scattered on Weibo, to this Tieba-based community. If fan members are productive and share what they create frequently, their status also rises within the community.

When a fan community's productivities become popular, agency companies will try to reach them and talk about collaborations. As suggested above, the entry of business interests makes Web 2.0 fandom more complicated and hierarchical. These agencies often call on fan communities to participate in online and offline campaigns, and to create fannish content, along with topics designed by the agencies before a new episode's release. In return for these contributions, the agencies offer prizes such as official paraphernalia, small gifts supplied by sponsors, and insider information.

3.5 Conclusion

In its unique sociocultural context, Chinese social media fandom develops rapidly and forms a complicated landscape. Scattered fans gather in social media, showcase their works on different platforms, and generate different recognition of fan identity. Regardless of the dilemma between being a fan and self-acknowledged fan behaviour, or consciously managing the online impression by selecting and exposing fannish texts, or establish loose connections

and power hierarchies in fan communities, Chinese social media platforms play an important role in these fandom-related issues. The differentiated platforms and their features constitute the technological surroundings for Chinese fan participation. In the next chapter, I will investigate the features of the platforms fans most frequently use (Weibo, WeChat, Tieba, and Bilibili) and explore how these platforms help prompt Chinese social media fandom.

Chapter 4. Framing Chinese Social Media Fandom: Platform Analysis

In the Web 2.0 era, fan practices are facilitated by software and applications that are increasingly easy to use (Manovich, 2005; Marwick, boyd, 2011b; van Dijck, 2013). Software applications, mobile apps, and social media all offer tools for producing fannish texts and channels to share them. Since my informants talked at length about their extensive experience of using four different platforms – Weibo, WeChat, Baidu Tieba and Bilibili – to engage with fannish practices, in this chapter I will discuss the features of these platforms and then analyse how and to what extent they propel Chinese fan culture.

The term “platform” has become popular both in the internet industry and academic research, although its definition remains quite broad or, as Tarleton Gillespie (2010) notes, “discursive” (p. 348). Gillespie (2010) examines the concept of the platform from four perspectives: computation, architecture, figuration and politics. He explains that an online platform, as a multi-layered phrase, should be considered as a human-made structure that enables its users to carry out particular activities, applications or programmes, such as messaging and uploading texts, and also lays an adaptable foundation for additional uses such as advertising.

In this chapter, I will contextualise and analyse the popular platforms outlined above – Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili – that Chinese social media fans use to develop their fan culture. Weibo and Tieba users tend to enjoy the service on both PCs and smartphones, while WeChat mainly plays a role as a mobile application, and most interaction with Bilibili occurs on its website. Accordingly, I will discuss the features of the web interface and mobile application of Weibo and Tieba, WeChat’s mobile application, and the Bilibili website. Then I will compare them, drawing upon Ian Hutchby’s (2001) notion of “affordances” in order to elicit why and how they respectively attract and guide fans to reach, read and circulate the content in which they are interested.

4.1 Contextualisation of Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili

My interview participants indicated that Weibo and WeChat are the forms of social media they most frequently use. While current academic research, both Chinese and international,

on Chinese social media primarily looks at specific areas of Weibo and WeChat such as information transmission, information verification and the application in the fields of marketing or team building (Gao et al., 2012; Wu, Yang, Zhu, 2015; Feng, Johansson, 2017) it has yet to comprehensively analyse the platforms' overall interfaces and functions. Research on Tieba and Bilibili is even less visible in Chinese and international academia. Therefore, I will first contextualise the development of these platforms by discussing the history of their parent companies, including the platforms' business background and development.

4.1.1 Weibo: The earliest online public sphere

In 2009, Weibo (微博, literally meaning “microblogging”) was launched by Sina, one of the largest online content providers in China. Initially, Sina focused on news and blogging services but now also involves services such as video sharing and mobile gaming. The company's history has influenced the development of following services (or platforms), including Weibo. In fact, at the same time that Sina Weibo was launched, several other similar microblogging services were developed by other companies, yet only Sina Weibo eventually succeeded and it now has a monopoly on the microblogging market as well as the name of “Weibo”. At present, Weibo is more like a media platform that integrates social networking features, ranging from likes, commenting, re-posting and hashtags. According to Weibo's official report (Weibo Data Center, 2017), the most active content categories include *meinü shuaige* (美女帅哥, “pretty girls and handsome boys”), anime/comics, entertainment/celebrities, beauty/cosmetics, fashion, TV drama, finance and economics, music, humour, and photography, which resemble the categories of Sina News and Sina Blog. In this sense, Sina's previous major businesses laid a solid foundation for the rapid growth of Weibo later.

Weibo connects its users primarily based upon their personal interests. Weibo users likely have some shared interests with people they are following because it does not make sense for a user to follow another unless that person shares content in which the user is interested (Miekle, 2016, p. 8). However, a social network may not entirely rely on personal interests. In fact, many Weibo corporate accounts require individual users to follow their official accounts before they can participate in online promotions on Weibo. Based on my observation, for instance, some microbloggers often have Weibo campaigns that invite Weibo users to follow them and re-post the campaign information to win attractive prizes such as the latest model

of a popular cell phone.¹³ In this case, these Weibo users can gain thousands of new followers, but it seems unlikely that each and every follower shares the same interests, and this also indicates how weak the connection between the Weibo users can be.

Weibo features user-generated content (UGC); however, UGC is not the only content that the users are fond of on Weibo. For example, many individual users follow news publishers. In these cases, the flows of information on Weibo are often one-way because it is unlikely corporate users want to have conversations with each of their followers. Users who follow the same people on Weibo may have few interactions with one another, and the connection between them can be weak and fluid. In this context, Weibo's user network builds upon information itself, and the user interface plays an important role in helping Weibo users to reach and consume the content they have interest in.

Weibo also allows users to switch languages. The interface of Weibo will be displayed in English if users switch language, but much content is still in Chinese (see Figure 1 below).

¹³ For example, Chinese smartphone manufacturer Xiaomi often calls for Weibo users re-post the campaign information about its latest model and has a Weibo-notarised lucky draw when the campaign ends.

a) The user interface of Weibo



Figure 1. Weibo's user interface – English webpage (part 1)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Main search bar | 8. Group in which the Weibo post can be seen |
| 2. Classified content | 9. Search updates of people you follow |
| 3. User's Weibo page | 10. Customised user categories |
| 4. Notification | 11. A Weibo post |
| 5. Current popular topics | 12. A quoted Weibo post |
| 6. Write a new Weibo post | 13. Response to the quoted Weibo post |
| 7. Attachments for a new Weibo post | 14. People you may know |

When users log on and open the page of Weibo, the interface displays as shown in the screenshot above (see Figure 1). Overall, the webpage is a three-column structure. On the top is a pinned navigation bar which consists of the main search bar, categorised content (including popular topics, games, and videos), the user's personal Weibo page, and notifications. The left column lists all the categories that a user "follows", the middle column displays all the Weibo post updates from followed users, while in the column on the right side, the system provides the recent trends on Weibo, for example, new connections of a user's companions (see Mark 18 in Figure 3 below), the Popular Topic List (see Mark 16 in Figure 2

below) and the lists of current most active celebrities and most popular music and movies (see Mark 17 in Figure 2 below).

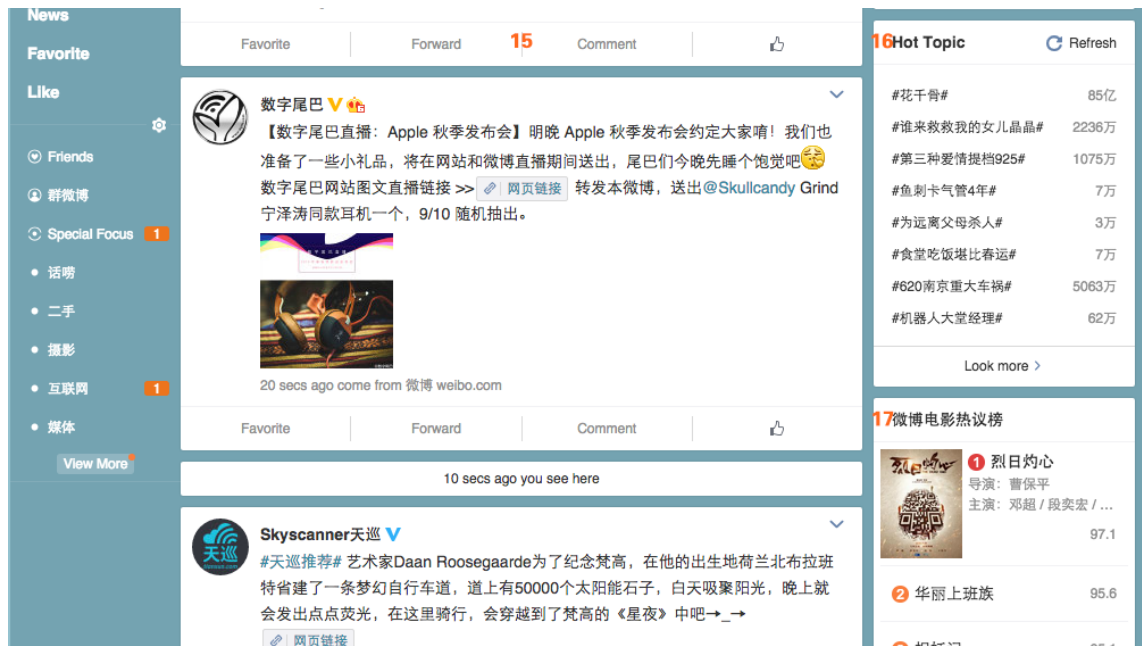


Figure 2. Weibo's user interface – English webpage (part 2)

15. Response to a Weibo post
16. Popular topic list

17. Most-mentioned films on Weibo



Figure 3. Weibo's user interface – English webpage (part 3)

18. New connections of user's companions

On Weibo, people that a user is following are called *haoyou* (好友), that is, “good friends”, while in the official English interface, these people are called “follow”, which is potentially quite confusing for English speakers because it is not clear what this category refers to. Weibo’s wording suggests that the connection between Weibo users can be stronger than they think. But since Weibo users need not to follow one another mutually and, from my observation, many do not meet in offline life, *haoyou* is an exaggerated term. In Chinese, *haoyou* consists of the character *hao* (好, “good” or “nice”) and *you* (友, “friend”, “acquaintance” or “companion”). Recently, based on my observation, people increasingly use *you* (友) in extended situations such as *youshang* (友商, “business companion,” a more positive term for “business competitor”) and *wangyou* (网友, “net friend,” that is, one’s “fellow internet user(s)"). Therefore, “companion” is perhaps a more precise term for the connection between Weibo users and those they follow.

b) Multimedia text and rich interaction of Weibo posts

Like other microblogging platforms such as Twitter, Weibo features 140-character text posts (which can convey much more information in Chinese than 140-characters would in English, because a Chinese character has semantic or grammatical weight and stands for a syllable whereas on Twitter each character is simply one letter of the alphabet and users need several characters to make a word) and allows users to use hashtags and emoji. It also allows users to refer to other Weibo users via an @ symbol followed by the ID of another user, for instance, “@ABCD”. The referenced Weibo ID then becomes a hyperlink leading to the “tagged” user’s Weibo timeline page. Users extend their social connections on Weibo primarily in this way. Moreover, by inserting a word between two # marks, Weibo users apply hashtags as a convention to create and join in discussions about a certain topic. Users can also add up to nine images, audio, video and URLs (see Marks 6 and 7 in Figure 1 above).

Weibo allows users to re-post another Weibo post with an added comment, with the original post being quoted and visible for all the users. Once a Weibo post is re-posted, its comments, the likes and numbers of re-posts are kept (see Marks 11, 12, and 13 in Figure 1 above). In this way, Weibo provides the affordance of viewing interpersonal conversations as much as possible to encourage users to interact with each other.

If users intend to share more information within a longer post, they can click the “blog” button and edit a blog-like article (as Figure 4 demonstrates below). In a so-called “long Weibo” post, users are allowed to engage in some basic typesetting such as choosing a font and alignment. However, some users still prefer to send longer texts with third-party applications, which can transfer the text into an image. This is because “long Weibo” is only available on the web interface while using a PC, but for users who prefer Weibo’s mobile application on handset devices, third-party applications are more convenient. For example, some note-taking applications such as “Smartisan Note” allow mobile users to edit texts and images, and share the blog-like post as an attached picture with elegant typography. Those third-party applications meet the demands of various users, facilitate Weibo’s information flow, and make the space of Weibo vivid.

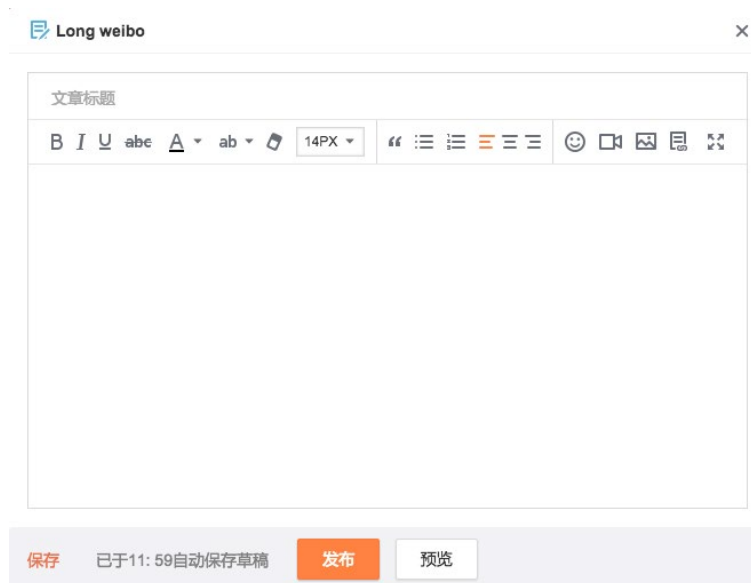


Figure 4. The interface for editing a ‘long Weibo’



Figure 5. A long Weibo post (with a preview of an HTML article)





惠山野人_XMQ

我发表了文章 2015年9月9日

收起

2015年9月9日

2015年9月9日

惠山野人_XMQ 发布于2015年9月9日 08:31

测试文本

测试文本

测试文本

• 测试文本

1. 测试文本





@惠山野人_XMQ

新浪资讯台



我认为你得出的这个印象是错误的

00:31 / 07:08

看了《爸爸去哪儿》，都是明星孩子参与，最终都是红了明星的孩子，明星的孩子成了“小明星”，自然可以改变命运，财源滚滚。而且随着爸爸去哪儿的热播，各地电视台纷纷制作类似节目，但内容大同小异，无非是围绕明星大腕们的子女们转悠，却没有一部改变一下视角，关注一下普通老百姓家庭及子女的节目。那光彩的形象，奢侈的生活，像奶糖一样，吃多了也会腻的。而且老百姓看了更会感到子女的不幸，心态的失衡，只有感叹艳羡的份。

赏

收起

4 mins ago come from 微博 weibo.com

Favorite

Comment



Figure 6. A long Weibo post (with a full HTML article)

80

The three screenshots above demonstrate what the interface looks like when a user is editing a blog-like Weibo post, and its final layout displayed to viewers. In the post above, the user customised the font size, font colour, subheading, and quoted text, and inserted an image and a video clip, features similar to a blogging service.



Figure 7. A typical Weibo post

Translation of comments:

@Li Yaya: LOL I would just like to ask who/what Skye is
 //@QuanShijieZuiYingjundeRen: I want to know if there are particular people at Marvel Studio that take charge of organising the connections [between superheroes]...
 //@XiamuJiadeXiaoshiGe: My eyes do not function well now. Can you guys help me organise the network [of interpersonal connection]? //@RanhouXiamianJiuMeile: 🙄
 //@MDawangJiaoWoLaiXunshan: the network of interpersonal connection between Marvel superheroes is legendary...

[Original post]

@AhuaSiji: Any meaning of being alive? I choose to die.

[Uploaded image]

As Figure 7 shows, Weibo users can choose complex names that draw on in-jokes. For example, the user names *QuanShijieZuiYingjundeRen* 全世界最英俊的人 literally means “the most handsome guy around the world”, and *RanhouXiamianJiuMeile* 然后下面就没有了 literally means “then there is nothing below”, an in-joke that, for Chinese netizens, connects “those who do not tell the ending of a story” to eunuchs.¹⁴ Other names are so complex as to be virtually untranslatable.

Weibo also allows users to embed another user’s post within their own, which lets their followers acquire the information more directly. Users can comment on a string of Weibos to produce a single lengthy message, comment on their own quoted posts, and are even able to upload a picture as a comment (which will be shown as a hyperlink) while they are using Weibo’s mobile App. The 140-character limit is still applied when users write their commentary, so sometimes only a few layers of comments can be seen. The original quoted post and the responses that it has received can always be seen unless the original post is deleted by original author. Therefore, Weibo maximises the visibility of users’ updates as well as their comments; importantly, this content is visible to other Weibo users via the platform’s built-in search engine. In this sense, all these features are designed to facilitate user interactions.

c) “Discover” everywhere and information recommendation

On Weibo’s user interface, people can find many search bars and popular topic feeds (see Marks 1, 2, 5, 9, 16 and 17 in Figures 1 and 2). These suggested popular topics and search keywords are updated continuously. The system, in this way, tries to guide users to follow up on what is happening while they are using Weibo, and to encourage them to participate in online discussions in order to prompt interactions on Weibo.

¹⁴ The word *xiamian* 下面 (below) often refers to *xiawen* 下文 (lit. “the following paragraphs”) as people reading online, whilst *xiamian* is also an obscure way of saying of “human genitals” in informal language. The phrase *RanhouXiamianJiuMeile* 然后下面就没有了 thus becomes a pun that can possibly describe someone who tells an unfinished story (in which “the following paragraphs” disappear) or eunuchs (i.e. someone whose “human genitals” have been cut).

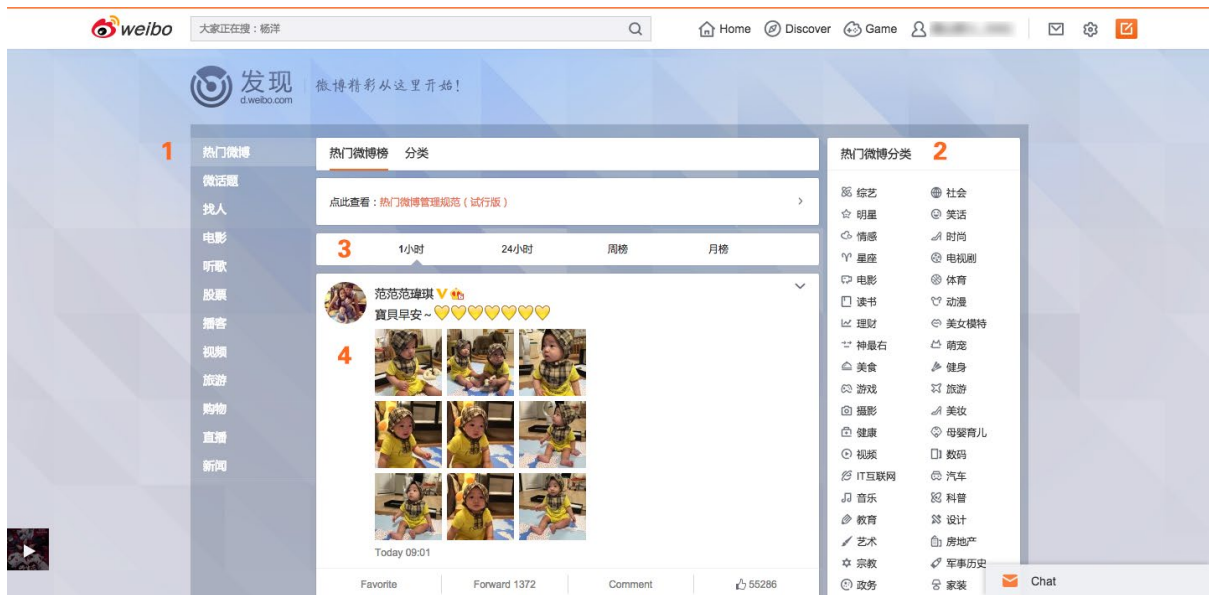


Figure 8. Weibo's "Discover" page – the most popular Weibo posts

1. Types of search content
2. Categories of popular Weibos
3. Time range for Weibo search
4. Search results (of most popular Weibos)

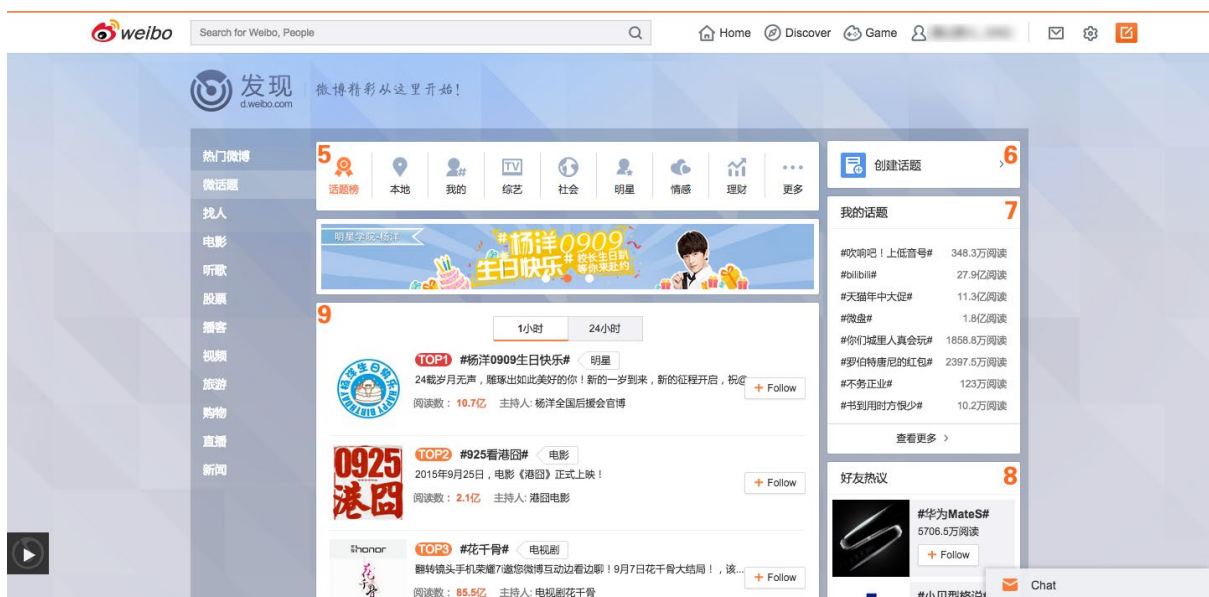


Figure 9. Weibo's "Discover" page – popular topics

5. Categories of popular topics
6. Create a new topic (through using a hashtag)
7. My topics (or hashtags)
8. Popular topics that friends are looking at
9. The detailed popular topic list

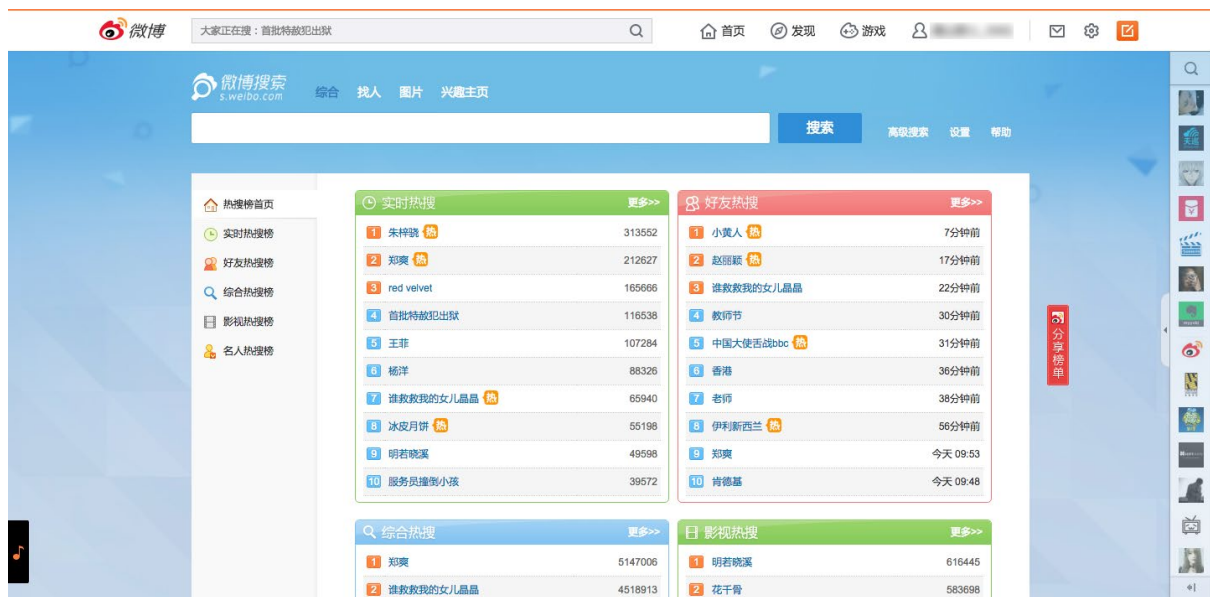


Figure 10. Search trends on Weibo

As Figures 8, 9 and 10 demonstrate, Weibo provides a wide range of search categories (e.g. celebrities, local news, TV drama, films, etc.) for users to reach content that might interest them. It is notable that a large proportion of categories relate to entertainment, because many celebrities have an enormous fan base and corresponding influence online. For example, the Chinese actor Liu Ye attracts more than 50 million followers at present. The size of such a fan base on Weibo is largely due to constant and direct celebrity-fan interaction and the high visibility of these interactions provided by Weibo's microblogging system.

A primary reason for this development is that since the era of the blog, Sina has emphasised its close ties with the entertainment industry and invited celebrities to use its platform as an interactive online space to develop a fan base; when the concept of microblogging emerged, the brand Sina took advantage of it. Soon, the original celebrity bloggers become influential Weibo users, and original fans on Sina Blog became Weibo fans. When smartphones, mobile broadband internet and wireless access became increasingly affordable and popular, even more fans and casual users started to use Weibo as a social networking service. In this way, Sina Weibo has successfully attracted more users to participate in online discussion and fandom.

Weibo's default configuration can also push information updates to smartphone or tablet users who use Weibo mobile apps. The topics of these data pushes include information closely related to the current popular topics to which most users are paying attention; new posts

from people in individual users' "Special Focus" groups on Weibo; and new posts sent by those with whom the user often interacts. Such services remind Weibo users not to miss any updates from their companions on this platform, and to keep users active online.

4.1.2 WeChat: From replacing SMS to connecting everything

WeChat is another popular social media platform widely used in the People's Republic of China as well as among Chinese diaspora communities. In 2011, China's internet giant, Tencent, launched WeChat, an instant messaging application that can run on smartphones. With 902 million daily active users who send 38 billion text messages and engage in 205 million voice calls and video chats every day (WeChat, 2017), it is considered as the most influential social media platform in China.

WeChat combines functions of several different media. Considering that most people use WeChat to replace the SMS on their mobile phone, instant messaging is WeChat's core service, while other services or functions are designed to facilitate communication on smartphones or to extend the application's use beyond the smartphone. For example, people are increasingly using WeChat payment in offline occasions such as everyday shopping or dining in restaurants. These extended features represent a major difference between WeChat and parallel services elsewhere like WhatsApp and Kakao Talk. WeChat users can send text messages, images (both static images and animated gifs are supported, including .jpg, .png and .gif files), stickers (a category of memetic emoji), sixty-second voice messages, short video clips, and location indicators directly to another user or within a chat group. In addition, the application also supports voice chatting and video chatting for free. Many users thus use the data-based functions instead of conventional telecommunication services.

Through recognising mobile contacts, WeChat establishes a social network mostly based on the user's offline social relationships. Beyond that, a WeChat user can also add contacts via WeChat chat groups, scanning a QR code, other users' recommendations, the contacts of Tencent QQ (Tencent's PC-based instant messaging software), and even the users shown in its location-based service (if WeChat users turn the function on, they can see other users nearby who have also turned on this function). That is to say, a WeChat user does not necessarily already need to know a contact in person, but WeChat contacts often presuppose a reason for conversation.

a) The user interface of WeChat

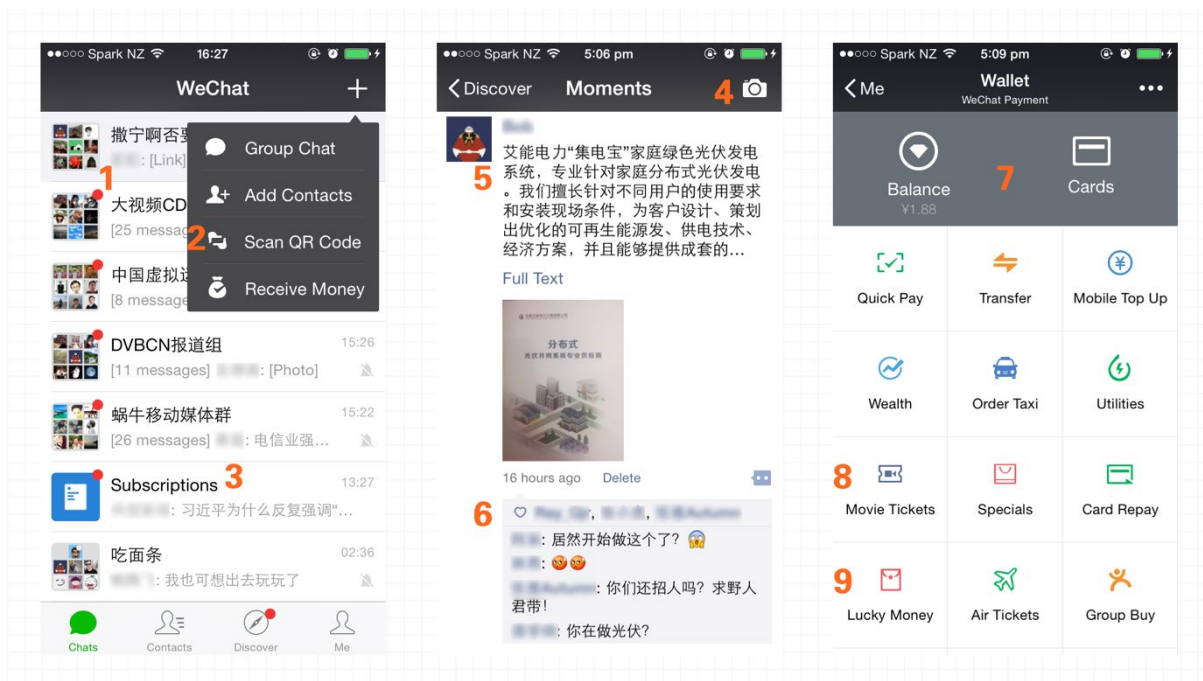


Figure 11. The user interface (in English) of WeChat

1. Main interface
2. Scan QR code
3. Public account subscriptions
4. Create a new WeChat Moment post
5. A WeChat Moment post
6. Response to a WeChat Moment post
7. WeChat Payment interface
8. Use WeChat to buy film tickets
9. *Hongbao* (红包, lit. "red packet", that is, a monetary gift)

When users open the WeChat app, they will see the interface as the screenshots show above. A navigation bar is pinned at the bottom of the cell phone screen, and through tapping the four icons on the bar, users can view four different interfaces: Chats; Contacts; Discover (including WeChat Moments, an Instagram-like feature integrated into WeChat); and Me (i.e. personal profile and extended services). The left screenshot demonstrates WeChat's layout of chat records. The middle screenshot is the interface of WeChat Moments. It resembles both Weibo and Instagram, yet WeChat users cannot search for another user who is not a WeChat contact. The screenshot on the right shows the extended services of WeChat. According to a WeChat announcement, the company has set up collaborative partnerships with many other companies to make WeChat a portal to services such as topping up a mobile account, booking a taxi, and buying movie tickets.

b) A more private scenario, a closer connection

WeChat establishes its social networking services on Tencent's massive pre-existing user base of its featured instant messaging services (i.e. Tencent QQ) as well as mobile phone contacts. This makes WeChat a media platform which has a massive pre-existing user base.

WeChat allows both individual and corporate users to share text, images, audio, videos, and URLs (excluding hyperlinks from certain business competitors in China like Alibaba) on WeChat Moments and Public Account Subscriptions (see Mark 3 in Figure 11). As the middle screenshot in Figure 11 shows, users are able to share text, images and 10-second videos on WeChat Moments.¹⁵ However, unlike Weibo, this content cannot be directly shared, and can only be viewed and commented on by the author and their mutual WeChat contacts. In other words, the interaction in WeChat Moments takes place in a much more private scenario. Therefore, because WeChat restricts the visibility and circulation of personal Moments content, the user interaction is more focused within separate chat groups.

WeChat Public Account Subscriptions provide individual and business users with a new way to offer subscription feeds. Administrators of the Public Subscriptions are able to set custom menus in accordance with their needs or those of their potential subscribers. Subscribers can receive responses (such as a content/service index, keyword searching and redirect links) with custom menus. Some Public Subscriptions for media companies offer online services such as live television streaming, video-on-demand and real-time cross-platform interactivities. For many fans, however, this function is regarded as a way to read updated feeds produced by media corporations. Fan communities tend to carry out online activities on Weibo and Tieba, which I will discuss in the following section.

4.1.3 Baidu Tieba: The online forum in the era of "Web 2.0"

In 2003, another internet industry titan, Baidu, which operates the largest Chinese-language search engine, launched its online forum platform called Baidu Tieba, also known as Tieba for short. The word *tieba* (贴吧) in Chinese, means "bars/pubs for posts". *Tie* (贴) is the term for an internet posting, and *ba* (吧) is a transliteration of the English "bar" meaning a room where

¹⁵ On the Chinese language interface, this feature is called *pengyou quan*, ("friend circles").

people gathering for social activities, e.g. *jiuba* (酒吧, “liquor bar” i.e. a pub) and *wangba* (网吧, “net bar” i.e. internet cafe). Thus, a *tieba* is a (virtual) space where people can read and update posts. Tieba allows its users to create a specifically themed online forum, also called *ba* in order to attract and gather people who share similar interests, particularly when they search keywords in relation to the topics of these bars with Baidu’s search engine. The platform architecture of Tieba is simple and thus easy to understand for average internet users. Moreover, it used to have the capability to automatically generate a forum when people searched a keyword on Baidu, but the function has been cancelled due to the rapid increase of junk messages such as spam adverts. For example, if you search for “BabaQuNaer” (爸爸去哪儿) on baidu.com, the search engine displays all results related to the keyword; simultaneously, Tieba formerly generated a forum named “BabaQuNaerBa” (爸爸去哪儿吧) if nobody had founded that yet. Such a mechanism allowed Tieba to expand its coverage of themes within a very short period. Therefore, it soon attracted many users. According to the latest China Internet Network Information Center’s (CNNIC) survey, approximately 34.4 percent of Chinese internet users visit Baidu Tieba (CNNIC, 2017), making it the most popular online community in Mainland China.

a) The user interface of Tieba



Figure 12. The user interface of Tieba

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Main search bar (Tieba-wide) | 5. Navigation bar |
| 2. Avatar of a themed Tieba forum | 6. Search bar (within the themed Tieba) |
| 3. "Follow" button | 7. A Tieba post |
| 4. "Sign in" button | 8. Advertisement |



Figure 13. The interface in a Tieba post

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 9. Title of the post | 13. The avatar of author or commenter |
| 10. "Display the author's updates only" button | 14. Update to the post |
| 11. "Bookmark" button | 15. Responses to the update |
| 12. "Reply to the author" button | |

As the above screenshots show, Tieba maintains the structure of a typical online forum, which consists of many posts arranged in a certain order (e.g. by the time of updates) on a specifically themed discussion board. In each post, the author sets a topic and may update the post according to other users' responses. Similar to Weibo and WeChat, Tieba also supports diverse forms of content, ranging from text and image to video. The screenshots

above demonstrate that emoji and images play a central role in the online discussions, suggesting that current Tieba users are already used to carrying out conversations that incorporate multimedia elements. Meanwhile, each post in a Tieba forum can be considered as separate because users only see the title of the post and a couple of images originally posted while entering the forum. Further responses and updates to a post are not visible unless users click the title of a post, which hyperlinks to a separate webpage. It is notable that all posts within a Tieba forum must be relevant to the theme of the forum, as the forum administrator deletes irrelevant ones regularly to maintain a focused and organised space. The following quote from Erji Ba (耳机吧), a Tieba forum focusing on Hi-Fi headphones, demonstrates how Tieba administrators keep the online discussions relevant to the theme of communities:

耳机吧是以讨论耳机、音频播放器以及相关周边设备为主的技术交流型贴吧，贴吧分类是“数码家电”。所以在耳机吧发帖请尽量与耳机主题相关，禁止毫无意义与营养价值的水贴等与主题无关的主题帖。如有违反，视情节严重程度采取删帖，封禁处理，水贴情况过于严重者将加入贴吧黑名单。

Text translation:

Erji Ba is a Tieba forum featuring technical discussions about headphones, audio players and relevant devices, and falls under the Tieba category of “Digital & Appliance”. Therefore, please make sure that your post is related to the theme. Pointless and irrelevant posts are prohibited. The administrators will delete irrelevant posts or temporarily prevent the author from posting depending on the severity. Authors who frequently send irrelevant posts will be blocked.

b) Focused discussion, in a focused online space

Tieba not only allows users to comment on each original post, but also on another user’s comment on or update to a post (see Figure 13). In other words, this feature is designed for Tieba users to have a discussion more specifically around a certain topic. Because of this, Tieba, structures discussions as multi-layered conversation threads, and this can make a popular post potentially too long to be read.

To solve such problems, Tieba allows users to tag one another with the @ mark, as in microblogging services. People can refer to other users or invite them to join online discussions within a post, which used to not be visible unless the other user clicked on and viewed the post. In this sense, the platform tries to break the boundaries between separate posts and to offer more possibilities for user interaction.



Figure 14. Interface of a Tieba post in 2009

The concept of an online forum like Tieba is not new, as we can trace its origin back to bulletin board services from the early era of the internet. Guobin Yang (2012) points out that university bulletin boards such as Tsinghua University's BBS SMTH shaped early Chinese netizens' understanding of the Internet (in the late 1990s and early years in the 21st century) and informed their user habits, which influenced the feature design of Chinese Internet services later. As Figure 14 above shows, Tieba used to have a very basic design in terms of user interface and features during its early years. At that time, people did not need an account to take part in discussion, and it was quite easy to register to become involved. This openness unavoidably brought up several problems, however. For one thing, since everyone could post or comment without an account, it was easy to attack other people anonymously and take no responsibility.¹⁶ Therefore, there were no repercussions for language violence and hostile

¹⁶ For example, on 28th July 2013, a fan of K-pop star G-Dragon posted inappropriate content toward football players Cristiano Ronaldo as well as Lionel Messi on Tencent Microblog. The post and arguments about it soon provoked anger of football fans across Weibo and Tieba. Then the fans of Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Real

attacks against others on Tieba. Some Tieba forums thus became chaotic virtual spaces. Furthermore, spam advertisements emerged and impacted the user experience. Because of such circumstances, Tieba now applies identity verification; each user has to bundle the account with a mobile phone number, which one needs to register with an ID to acquire.

To an online forum service, the real challenge is perhaps not abusive language or spam advertisements, but the impact of “Web 2.0”. Web 2.0 technologies help people to connect and interact with each other so closely that many conventional services (including the aforementioned SMS texting and bulletin boards, for instance) have gradually been replaced. Tieba has also had to adjust its development strategy. Now Tieba integrates many features of social media into its system. For example, since the 15th of June 2011, Tieba users can use the @ mark to refer to or directly address other users like Weibo (Baidu, 2017). Tieba allows the administrator of a Tieba to customise the avatar and background picture for the themed forum, and different Tieba forums can be connected through link exchange. The system also brings in the idea of member rank, which relies on user activities. For instance, forum members can receive three points daily by signing in to the forum (points double if the user signs in on mobile app), and adding a comment allows the user to acquire extra points. Via this mechanism, points assign a relative rank and become a symbol of a user’s “cultural capital” in the themed forums. Ranking encourages members of a Tieba forum to accumulate online hours and participate in online discussion. Tieba also allows users to share content in Tieba to other social platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, in order to attract more potential users.

4.1.4 Bilibili: A practice of real-time commentary on video clips

Bilibili is a popular video sharing site in China, featuring real-time comments superimposed over video clips. It was founded in 2009 and initially did little more than imitate similar services such as Japan’s Niconico and China’s ACFun, which both feature video sharing with “flying comments” (see below). Similar to Niconico and ACFun, Bilibili focuses on several categories of video content, including anime, video games, music videos, fan-made videos, TV drama and, more recently, live streaming. A number of videos on Bilibili come from other video sharing platforms such as Youku and YouTube. Some Bilibili users may find the content

Madrid F.C. and FC Barcelona updated a huge number of spam posts in *Quanzhilong ba* (权志龙吧, a Tieba forum built by the fans of G-Dragon), causing the webserver of this Tieba forum crash down.

interesting and download video from these sites by using an online video downloading application and a VPN to circumvent the Great Firewall and reach YouTube so they can share it on Bilibili. In recent years, however, Bilibili has begun to collaborate with many content providers including broadcasters (e.g. China Central Television and Tokyo Television) and video streaming websites (e.g. Youku, iQiyi, Tencent Video), and purchased a large number of copyrights to documentaries, TV dramas, reality TV shows and, above all, Japanese anime (Bilibili Fanju, 2017).

a) The user interface of Bilibili

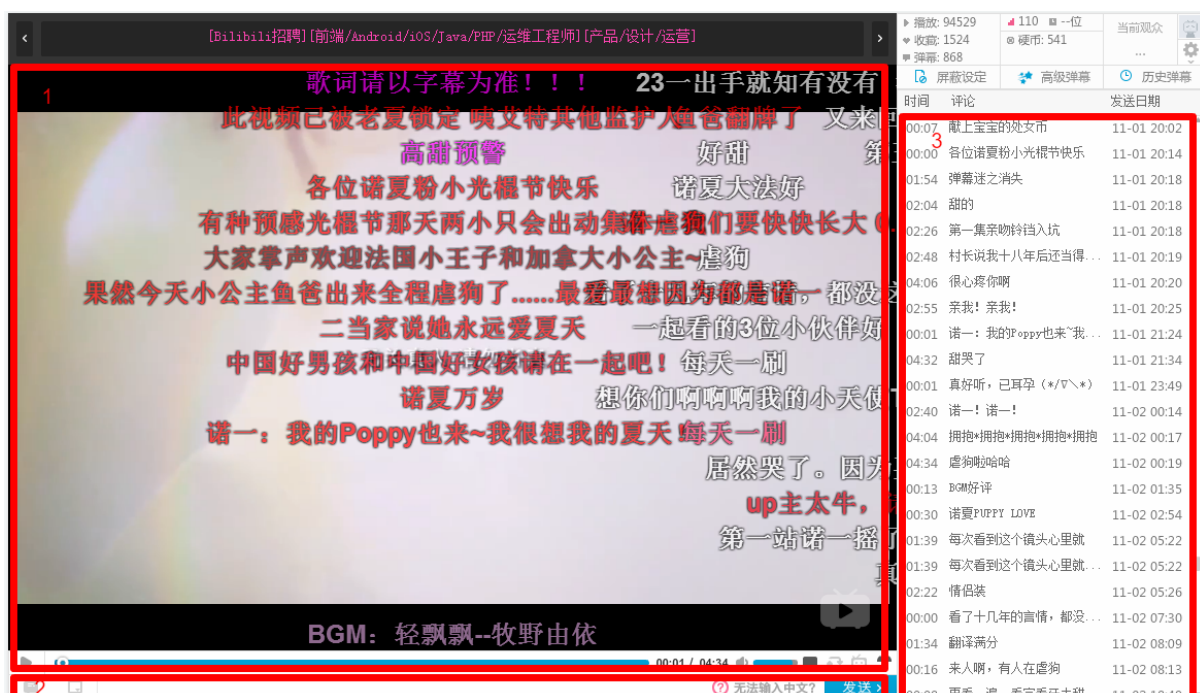


Figure 15. The user interface of Bilibili

1. Video play interface
2. Text editor for sending a flying comment
3. List of all flying comments

b) A brief history of flying comments

The idea of flying comments projected on video clips is derived from Japanese video sharing site Niconico. As opposed to static comments displayed below the video such as in the user interface of YouTube, this feature projects all comments as the video is playing. For example,

if a user adds a flying comment at the 1:00 mark in the video, other viewers will see the comment showing up when the video plays at the same mark. Layer by layer, the flying comments generate a virtual scenario as if all the other commenters are simultaneously watching the video as well, which turns watching a video, even if alone, into participatory engagement in a virtual way.

In China, many people enjoy this feature and call it *danmu* (弹幕), which literally means “barrage” (Wang, 2015; Fu, 2016). This phrase, originally a military term, refers to intensive artillery fire, and is applied in a humorous way to the intense virtual interaction of flying comments.

Bilibili allows its users to send three types of flying comments: scroll-caption style, subtitle style (on the top), and subtitle style (at the bottom). Users can set the font type and font colour while sending comments and they can adjust the transparency when they are watching a video to avoid having the comments cover too much video.

At present, only registered members on Bilibili can send flying comments, but registration requires applicants to pass a test consisting of 100 multi-choice questions, examining the potential user’s subcultural knowledge about anime, comics, video games, and knowledge of history, biology, chemistry, and information technology. It is very difficult to pass and successfully register membership. Through this procedure, Bilibili tries to ensure that members have a similar level of background knowledge and can understand each other better while sending or viewing comments anonymously.

4.1.5 The political context of Chinese Web 2.0 platforms

As mentioned in the previous section, the Chinese government keeps some popular western Web 2.0 platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube, Instagram) outside the Great Firewall (GFW) to ensure that online content can be effectively controlled.¹⁷ Admittedly while the GFW filters cross-border terrorism, its primary target is to restrict Chinese citizens to access foreign online sources that are against the Chinese socialist system and the leadership of the Communist Party of China. I use the verb “restrict” here as neither the GFW nor the

¹⁷ The GFW is not applicable in Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions because the two regions have their own administrative and legal system in line with the “One Country, Two Systems” principle.

Chinese government can completely prohibit netizens' access to the aforementioned platforms. Instead, the Chinese government acquiesces a certain level of circumvention if such activity does not go against the communist party's objectives. For instance, netizens in mainland China (including some of my fan informants) can use foreign proxy servers or VPNs to bypass the GFW. According to the state media ("Shanzi 'fanqiang'", 2017), however, individual use of these tools is illegal and under the surveillance of the internet regulator.

The blocking of western political ideas and values through the GFW leads to the fact that China has cut off the connection to popular or mainstream media platforms such as Google and Facebook. This political context offers an opportunity for China's domestic companies to develop their own media ecosystem, and internet giants such as Tencent and Baidu have successfully done this thanks to the huge scale of the Chinese population and the domestic market. For instance, Chinese social platforms such as Weibo and WeChat highlight interconnectivity and become one-stop services. The ability to gather user data and information through Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili enables the Chinese government to access user data and make online surveillance much more efficient than it would have been on western platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Qiu, 2016).

Some scholars (Jenkins, 2012; Sandvoss, 2013) suggest that western fans utilise politicising fandom to better understand political discourse. Jenkins's (2012) study investigates how fans of the community "Harry Potter Alliance" participate in political activities (e.g. international charity, free press, and LGBT rights) with the help of fan cultural metaphors. Sandvoss (2013) suggests that political enthusiastic practices not only share many aspects in common with fandom but also reflect a close connection with fandom. Similar to fans, political enthusiasts are involved in textual productivity as well as emotional, self-reflective investment in given objects (e.g. political leaders, parties, values). It is important to note that these political activities develop in and serve electoral politics, which encourages voters to participate in group decision-making processes of choosing government representatives. As Sandvoss (2013) notes, in western societies, the internet and fandom, therefore, form a public sphere in which citizens are free to practice political debates or produce texts to exercise their political voice.

Unlike the political system in the West, the People's Republic of China is governed only by one dominant party, therefore the political context in China leads to a different type of media

consumption. Chinese citizens are able to vote for the chiefs of villages, towns, districts and counties, while representatives at higher levels (i.e. cities, provinces, and the National People's Congress) are nominated and elected by the respective local People's Congress. Such a system may not arouse citizens' enthusiasm for politicised everyday use of media as in the case of western democracies. Consequently, fandom as a type of media consumption is hardly reflected in the political discourse in China.

As Chinese media platforms achieve high market penetration in mainland China, the government control of information flows becomes easier (Svensson, 2014, p. 170). The popular social media platforms are subject to government censorship. For example, spreading messages about the labour movement in social media will draw the government's and police's attention (Qiu, 2016, p. 624). According to the Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate of China, if a Weibo post classified as rumour or fake news gets more than 500 forwards, the user who posted this message can be sued for libel (Svensson, 2014, p. 171). Online surveillance and judicial interpretation make media platforms and internet users more aware of the consequences of speech rather than the freedom of speech in western societies, and that results in self-censorship, particularly for the political content.

Some Western studies (Gary King et al., 2013; Qiu, 2016) point out that Chinese censorship demonstrates some tolerance towards criticising the government. Sounding out such tolerance, a few pro-west Chinese public intellectuals (*gongzhi*, 公知) have introduced the latest western political ideas to netizens in social media. But Chinese netizens gradually find that some of these opinion leaders critique Chinese society through fabricated evidence and biased news (Sun, 2015, pp. 50-51). Doubts towards online public intellectuals reduce netizens' interests in public discussions about western political ideas in Chinese social media.

Under such circumstances, due to censorship in online spaces and scepticism towards online public intellectuals, Chinese fans usually separate their political ideas from their interests in online fandom, or they only contribute to creative practices that are politically "light". As for content in which political events or leaders are not involved (e.g. *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *Sherlock*), Chinese fans tend not to interpret the original texts or create fannish content from a political perspective. In this way, their politically light practices can safely pass the government censorship, and their fan culture can survive and continuously develop.

4.2 Multiple platforms, differentiated usage

Although Weibo, WeChat, Tieba, and Bilibili are each powerful enough to develop fan circles independently, all of my interview participants used more than one platform during their fannish practices. As Yoder and Stutzman (2011) propose, the interface of a social media platform usually consists of several types of elements: public posts, direct messaging, group chatting, search tools, and information recommendation. Of the key platforms relevant to my research, Weibo and WeChat can be considered as social media while Tieba inherits its core feature of bulletin board services, and Bilibili is primarily a video sharing site. That means that, although all these platforms do have several interface elements of social media, the elements can be represented in very different ways and take different part in each platform. For fans, such differences guide them to employ the platforms in combination. In this section, I intend to draw upon Ian Hutchby's (2001) affordance theory to analyse the four platforms and explore how the different features can work together to shape a fandom-friendly environment.

Communication on social platforms is generally executed through a range of interface-driven interactions. All of the platforms, for example, feature direct (or private) messaging, public posts, public chatting, search tools and information recommendation services (a technology that can transmit information in which users may be interested based on their posts and search history). This section of the platform analysis will describe and compare the user interfaces between these platforms. I will outline their functions and services by looking at the five features mentioned above.

1. Public posts includes reposts or forwarding posts (as comments),¹⁸ comments, likes, and subscriptions to public accounts. Public posting is a crucial feature of social media. In this section, I will discuss the differing patterns of public posts between Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili in order to set a foundation for further discussion about

¹⁸ From its inception, Weibo has allowed users to re-post others' posts as is, or with comments [if I understand you...]. Such comments still need to conform to the 140-character limit of a Weibo post, and the quoted original can always be seen unless its author deletes it. Therefore, people usually can see the original Weibo with several layers of reposts as comments.

how fan communities adopt differentiated strategies on the basis of the feedback I collected during the online interviews, online group conversations and observations.

2. Direct messaging can be considered as a basic function of social media. I will demonstrate how these platforms use messaging services differently, and explore what roles they play in the context of the four platforms.

3. Group chatting includes Weibo's comments and reposts, WeChat's group chatting and WeChat Moments (a Weibo-like service integrated in WeChat platform), chat forum on Tieba, and the real-time comments on Bilibili video clips.

4. Search services allow Weibo users to extend their personal social networks using the search tool. Search engine users are only able to input keywords to look up a chatting record or find public accounts; Tieba adopts the search rules of Baidu and allows users to discover content across Tieba forums and the internet; in contrast, Bilibili users prefer enjoying online discussions through the feature of flying comments, its search function thus only leads users to the video clips within the website. I will investigate how the differing search strategies between Weibo, WeChat and Tieba guide user habits on the platforms, and further influence communication patterns of social media fandom.

5. Information recommendation services are a feature that every aforementioned platform tries to improve. Weibo provides users not only with visualised information about themselves, but also information on people they are following, such as their new connections, unread reposts, and likes. In this way, the Weibo system attempts to draw upon big data to boost interaction among its users (Weibo Data Center, 2017). Based on the description of this feature, I will investigate users' actual usage of these services later in the case studies. I will explore whether such services can indeed promote the growth of fan communities on the Weibo platform. The examination will be centred on my proposed argument that, in this 'insider - outsider' (or 'official producer – fans as labour') interactive era (Andrejevic, 2008), fans are not merely textual poachers, but also co-authors or even willing distributors of their favourite productions.

Table 7: An overview of the four primary online services in China and their affordances

	Weibo	WeChat	Baidu Tieba	Bilibili
Primary service	Microblogging	Instant messaging	Online forum	Video sharing, real-time comments
Public posts	Weibo posts (non-categorised) Can be viewed or searched by registered users, some are only visible to categorised users	WeChat Moments Visible within mutual contacts and categorised user groups	Tieba posts and all responses Can be viewed or searched by all Internet users, and only registered users are able to interact with other users	Anonymous flying commentary, forum discussion Most content can be seen by all visitors, while some are only available to paying users
Direct messaging	Private message	One-to-one message	Private message, but not widely used	Private message, but not widely used
Group chatting	Re-post, commenting	Group chatting	Forum discussion	Anonymous flying commentary, forum discussion
Type of contacts	People who share similar interests	People who have close connections offline	People who share similar interests	People who share similar level of cultural capital; semi-cult
Search tool	a) Main search bar: search other users and interested contents in general	a) Search WeChat users by the user ID or phone number b) Search within chat records, subscription feeds	a) Search a Tieba forum b) Search within a Tieba forum c) Search across Tieba forums	a) Search within Bilibili b) Search within any specific Bilibili user's post updates

	b) Search bar on any specific user's Weibo page: search within the post updates c) Search bar on the Popular Topics page: search current popular topics	or WeChat Moments	d) More search results on Baidu	
Information recommendation	a) Recommended popular topics b) Recommended follows c) Most popular response	Recommended contacts based on mobile contacts	a) Most popular comments b) Advertisement	a) Most popular video shown on the homepage b) Most popular comments

4.2.1 Public posts

Most social media platforms include the function of posts, or wall posts, as a basic feature that allows users to demonstrate themselves in the online space. Post updates in social media create continuous information flows, which attract views and interaction because information flows form the foundation for further user gratification. For example, through analysing Facebook, which can be seen as a counterpart of Weibo, Alhabash et al. (2014) propose that posts are greatly motivated by a few key social demands such as entertainment, self-expression, information sharing, self-documentation, and escapism. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) also note that for social media users, updating and viewing posts on social networking sites (SNS) is a way to share information and feel connected with friends and society. In their quantitative research, Chang and Zhu (2011) argue that Chinese social media users maintain and extend their social network with SNS services and, notably, are much more keen to acquire information on these platforms through viewing and searching friends' updates than social media users in the United States and South Korea (p. 34). In other words,

Chinese users deem social media an important avenue of receiving the latest information. Therefore, each social media platform encourages its users to keep posting content.

Each platform has its own core business and featured functions, but the content type of posts on these platforms can be very different. On Weibo, which is essentially a microblogging service, users can send text, images, built-in emoji, video clips and URL links. However, uploading copyrighted content such as music and video is restricted. Beyond that, due to Weibo's dominance in Chinese microblogging service, many other websites allow their users to share content on Weibo, so it is common to see video clips, music, and articles linked from other platforms such as Baidu Tieba and Bilibili. As an online forum platform, Baidu Tieba has the most similar features compared to Weibo, although their primary services differ greatly. Tieba also supports a wide range of content types including text, images, built-in emoji, video clips, and URL links, but, unlike Weibo's up to 140-character posts, the length of a Tieba post does not have any limit, and users can edit font and layout. This feature enables Tieba users to post much longer texts than on Weibo, which enhances fans' preference to write fannish articles on Tieba rather than Weibo, although Weibo does offer flexible solutions like "Long Weibo" for longer posts. The lack of a character limit is thus a feature of Tieba that affords users the ability to create fannish articles more freely.

WeChat features instant messaging as its core function, and all other extended applications such as WeChat Moments are developed around this core. WeChat Moments, as a built-in service of WeChat, allows users to post text, images, short videos, subscription feeds and URL links. Similar to Weibo, many other services allow users to share their content such as music and video to WeChat Moments due to WeChat's popularity. Although there is no word limit for a Moments post, users cannot edit the font and layout. These features restrict the range of content types, while highlighting the affordance of immediacy for mobile users.

Since Bilibili features flying comments on video clips, both video and flying textual comments can be considered as the "wall posts" on this platform. In my interviews with fan participants for this research project, many Bilibili viewers explained that watching video with flying comments is enjoyable, but sometimes too many comments flying across the screen covering a large part of the video make the watching experience less pleasant than expected (see Figure 16 below). To avoid this issue, Bilibili provides a solution that allows viewers to adjust the transparency of the comments. This feature, which is a compromise between watching a

video play and reading comments, affords a user more interaction with the video and thus better connects comments with video content.

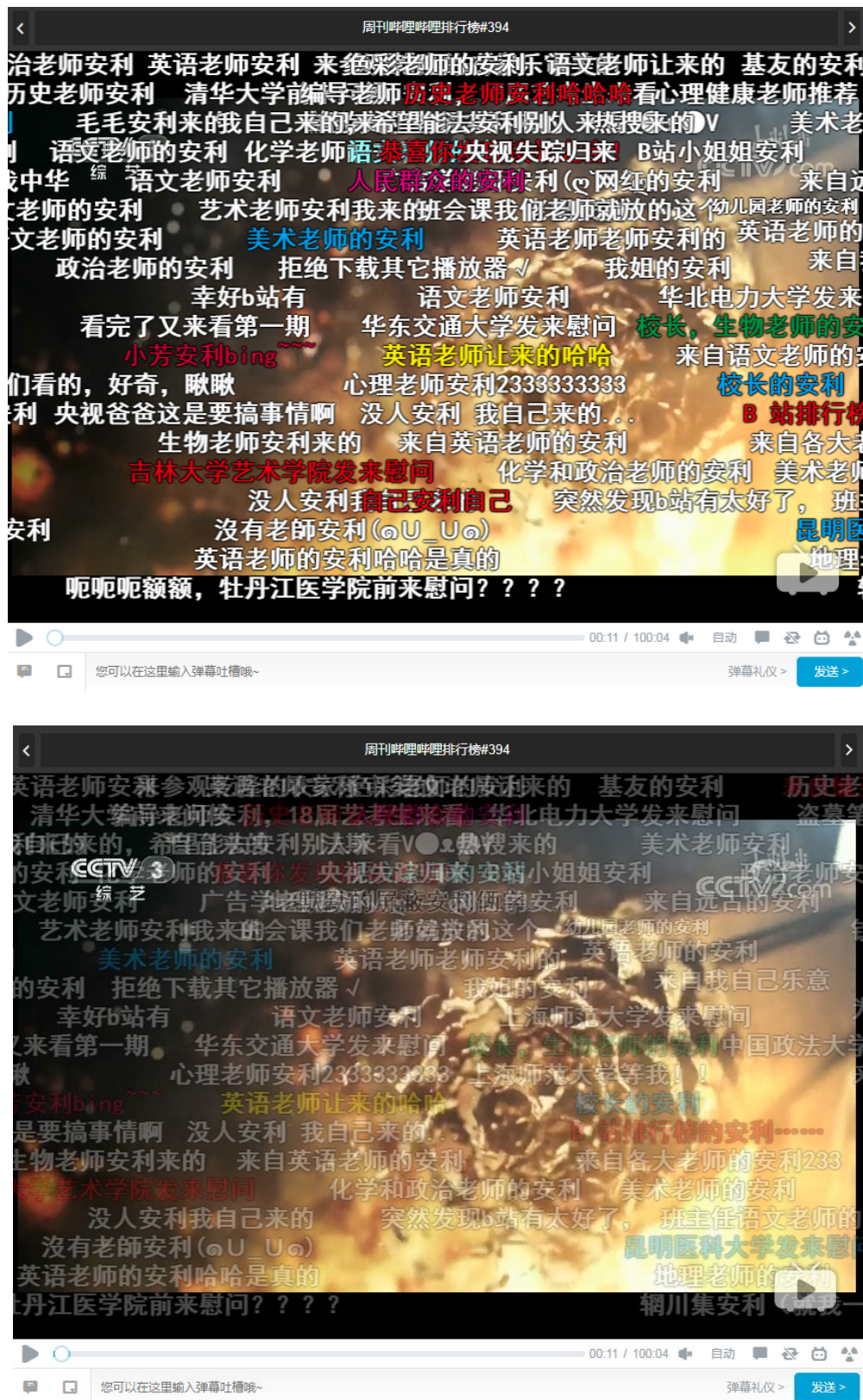


Figure 16. Comparison of a Bilibili video clip with comments at different levels of transparency

4.2.2 Direct messaging

Direct messaging happens between two users and such chat is private and invisible to other users. Such individual-to-individual conversation is also a basic element of any social platform.

As a microblogging service, Weibo's direct messaging function, named "private message" (*sixin*, 私信) plays a supplementary role to primary features such as commenting, re-posting and likes. When one receives notification of a new private message, the user has to click the notification to switch to the interface that displays the record of private messages (see Figure 17 below). The messages are categorised by the name of senders, and each folder shows one line of the message and the time when it was sent. Weibo users need to click into the folder to see the entire record of conversation. In this process, users have to leave the page of post updates to have a conversation on the private messaging interface. This feature drives many Weibo users to find other chat platforms for a better multitasking experience, according to many of my informants during interviews. The following quote from an interview I conducted describes fans' preference of online chatting.

Question: How do you talk about the fandom issues with your friend? I mean, on what platforms?

Lju: I prefer chatting on WeChat... sometimes over the phone with my friends.

Chuxia: WeChat, basically... I use the private messaging function on other platforms [such as Tieba, Bilibili] but not so much.

A similar issue also occurs on Tieba and Bilibili (see Figure 17 and 18). Just as Weibo arranges all the private messages on a separate page, Tieba and Bilibili also design a distinct webpage for users to have online private conversations. Moreover, since so many Tieba bots send spam messages, and Bilibili users receive many system notifications, many interviewees told me that they do not use or look at their private messaging services at all. Rather, they prefer other communicational tools like WeChat or QQ to carry out online conversations.

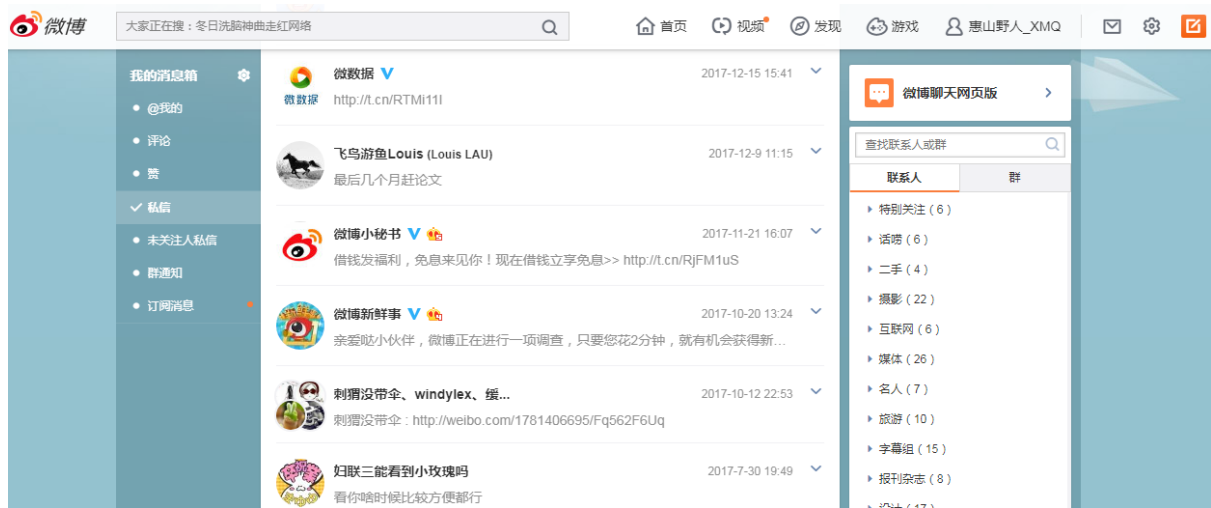


Figure 17. The interface of Weibo's private message page

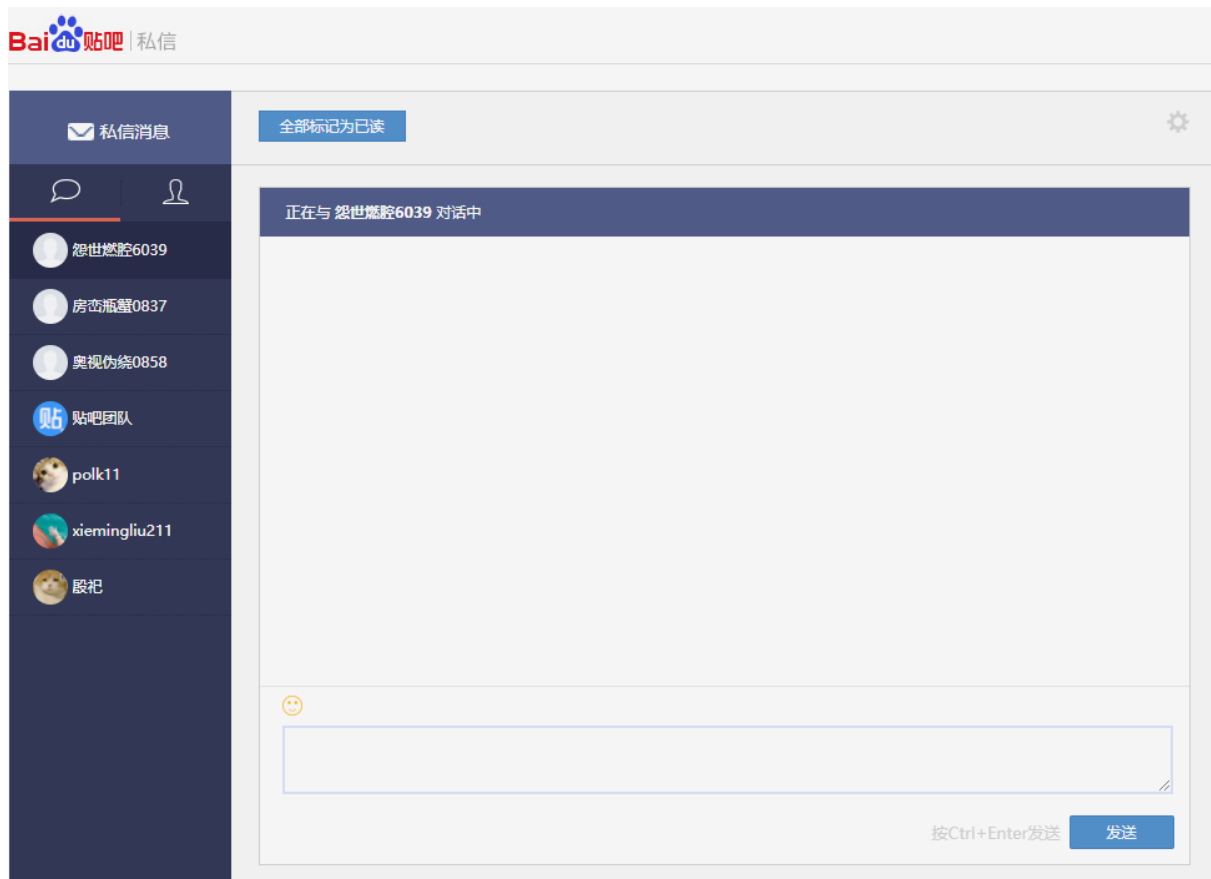


Figure 18. The interface of Baidu Tieba's private message page

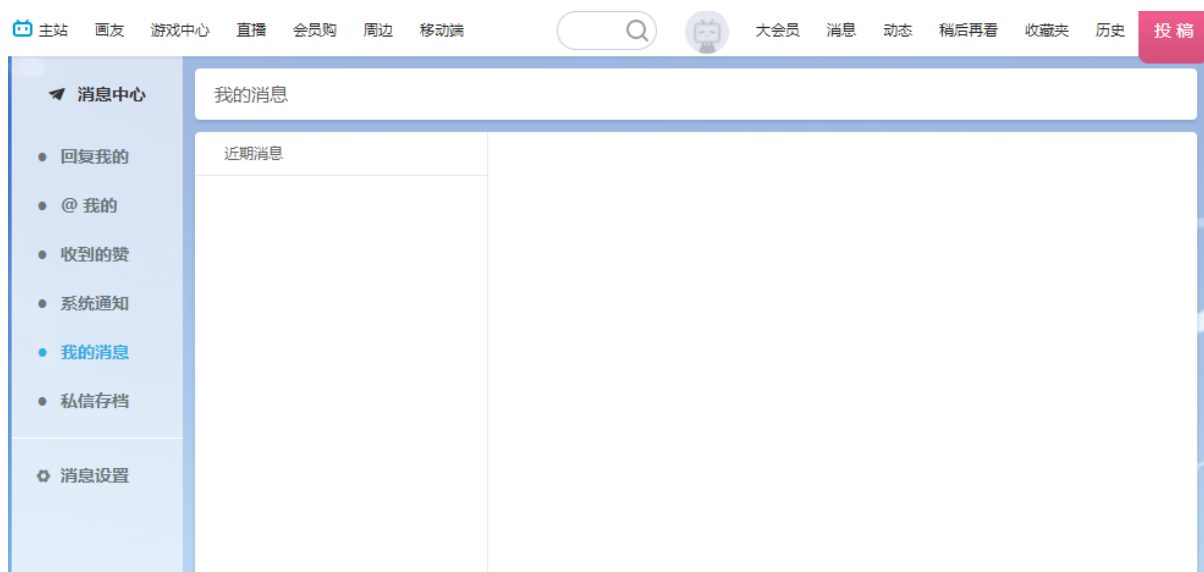


Figure 19. The interface of Bilibili's private message page

Compared to Weibo, WeChat puts direct messaging in a much more central place, just as other similar messaging apps do. As Figure 20 shows below, WeChat supports a range of message types such as text, emoji, voice message as well as URLs, and sorts conversations by the name of contacts. Since typing on a cell phone is difficult, WeChat users can choose to send up to 60-second long voice messages by pressing the voice button on the left side at the bottom and speaking into the microphone on the cell phone. If recipients prefer to read text messages, they can convert a voice message into text with WeChat's built-in voice-text convertor tool, which currently only recognises Mandarin. These features improve WeChat's affordance of chatting while multitasking.



Figure 20. The interface of WeChat's direct messaging

4.2.3 Group chatting

Online group chat is a key feature of social media. It happens in an online group and resembles face-to-face chat in our everyday life to the extent that the conversation is real-time, requires instant response, and relies on an established network of contacts. In this sense, group chat ties together connections on social platforms and thus becomes a very important feature.



Figure 21. A typical group chat pattern of Weibo

According to my observation, the openness of Weibo primarily manifests itself through these group chats. First and foremost, most Weibo users' pages and timelines are public, meaning they are visible (or partly visible, if posts are set to be seen within customised Weibo user groups) to other Weibo users. Second, on this basis, a re-posted weibo obtains a string of “re-post with comment” with several user IDs followed by “@” and distinguished by “//” (see Figure 21 above). This demonstrates how an original post is spread. Third, when re-posting a post or using “@” marks to refer to other Weibo users, user names become hyperlinks to their own timeline pages, which attracts other viewers to visit their timelines and discover potential content related to shared interests.

Such a route can indicate the similarities/differences, or at least a social relationship between, any two Weibo users.¹⁹ The chain of posts makes it is possible for Weibo users to find those who share similar tastes. Therefore, such a chain is not only a reference that I used to find interviewees, but a reference for Weibo users to extend their virtual networking more generally. When this content (i.e. Weibo posts, timelines, comments and interpersonal interactions) are archived on Weibo, it is made accessible through Weibo's search engine. In other words, Weibo's search engine offers an affordance that not only makes content more visible, but also greatly enlarges users' acquaintance networks based on interests.

While Weibo tries to connect people with similar interests, WeChat is making an effort to increase interaction between contacts in real life by bringing in more social elements than instant messaging features, as the quote from one of my interviewees below demonstrates.

Shoushou: Normally I use Weibo to find something interesting, for example, fannish texts about *Where Are We Going, Dad?* That is to say, the fannish act basically happen on Weibo... I think WeChat is more like a communicational tool. Mostly I use features such as texting, voice messaging, voice/video chatting, reading official accounts' feeds, and browse my friends' "WeChat Moments".

This quote, which represents many other informants' experiences, demonstrates that WeChat provides other opportunities for communication. Many of my interviewees consider WeChat as merely an instant messaging application that also integrates features of a social media platform. Although some informants say that fans at times share fannish texts in WeChat chat groups, very few of them share these texts on WeChat Moments, a built-in Instagram-like feature. In this sense, fannish activities occur in a very private context on WeChat, and the spread of fannish texts in this condition becomes "narrowcast" (Fiske, 1992).

Group chatting in Tieba manifests itself in online forum discussion, and conversations in Tieba forums are visible to public, but only Tieba users are able to respond to a topic. In this sense, Baidu Tieba is much more open than Weibo, as casual users can only preview very limited

¹⁹ Sometimes Weibo users delete part of the comments or other users' ID to have enough space for their own comments. In this situation, juxtaposed users may not be mutually familiar with one another, but this situation can reflect similarity or difference between them.

content on Weibo without a sign in, and some posts are only able to be seen within customised circles or even by the authors themselves.

On the other hand, since Baidu Tieba is an aggregation of various themed online forums in which each post has a separate topic, it is quite different from Weibo. Additionally, Tieba also allows its users to hide their personal information, including the people and forums they follow, their personal page and recent comments on Tieba, and users can also prevent other users from following them. Such mechanisms dramatically restrict the extension of users' social network on Tieba, and lead to three consequences: a) Baidu Tieba becomes a platform more focused on content production and sharing than a microblogging service like Weibo; b) it is more suitable for fans to create much longer texts there than on Weibo, and each separate post can be developed as a timeline; and c) Tieba users have to rely on other platforms to develop stronger connections with others, or to extend their social networks.

Bilibili represents another popular type of social networking communication within online fan communities, and such communication reflects several characteristics. First of all, most content (including video, flying real-time comments projected on video, and conventional comments displayed below the video player interface) is visible to all Internet users. This aspect is quite similar to Baidu Tieba; the key difference is that the original text on Bilibili is a video rather than the diversity of texts found on Tieba. Second, only registered users can send flying comments, which are all anonymous. This feature transforms watching a video alone into the equivalent of a virtual chat environment, as it is impossible to identify the author of comments. Third, the mechanism of membership application ensures its users have relatively similar tastes and a level of background knowledge in terms of science, history, technology and subcultural knowledge such as anime and video games. This mechanism keeps a large quantity of Internet users who have not accumulated enough knowledge or experience out of in-site user interaction.

4.2.4 Search Tools

Social media features encourage users to share information about themselves. However, this tendency leads to another question: how can users find their target content amidst the abundant information on different platforms? The solution provided by social media platforms is a search tool.

Among the four platforms, Weibo offers the greatest number of search tools in different scenarios. For example, the Weibo system pins a search bar on top of any Weibo page. It enables users to make a general search on the content as well as users in relation to the search keywords. Meanwhile, every user's Weibo page contains another search bar with which users can find content they are interested in among the timeline updates. Furthermore, if one goes to the Popular Topics page, yet another search bar allows users to find the most popular current trends on Weibo. These search bars work together and afford more precise search results for the continuously uploaded user-generated content on Weibo. More importantly, these different search tools built into Weibo highlight user-generated content and make them more visible to Weibo users than their authors may have expected. This feature greatly amplifies the influence of fannish texts, which manifest as an aggregation of bits and pieces of texts on Weibo. In other words, the feature offers the affordance of amplifying fannish texts.

Relying on Baidu's search engine technology, Tieba also offers powerful search tools for the public. Unlike Weibo, Tieba only provides one primary search bar at the top of any Tieba forum, but the rules of Baidu's "advanced search" (similar to those of Google) can be applied. Therefore, Tieba users can search not only keywords to find a themed Tieba, but also within a specific Tieba forum or across many Tieba forums, and for related news items, video clips, images and so on with the assistance of the Tieba (or, essentially, Baidu) search engine.

In contrast, Bilibili focuses on its video service and only provides a basic search tool for users to find video clips they wish to watch. The search tool can neither locate a particular flying comment projected on a video clip, nor any static comment displayed below the video player interface. In other words, comments are only viewable when audiences watch a specific video and are much less visible than those on Weibo and Tieba. Thus, interaction seems more virtual than on other platforms.

Although WeChat developed from an instant messaging app, it is now trying to build a popular search engine. Its search tool originally only supported searching for keywords within a chat

record, as well as WeChat Moments and subscription feeds when they are available.²⁰ The limited capability of WeChat's search tool highlights its core instant messaging service and guides users to follow their friends' updates and subscription feeds. For fans, the affordance of "narrowcasting" shaped by search tools helps fan community members have deeper discussions on fandom. Yet, for fans as "textual poachers", the search engines built into Weibo and Tieba are more effective at finding suitable materials with which to create fannish texts.

4.2.5 Information recommendation

To improve user interaction, these platforms provide information recommendation features. As Chang and Zhu (2011) argue, Chinese social media users consider social media as another channel of acquiring information, and they are eager to acquire information on these platforms by viewing the updates of people/publishers they are following. Therefore, the social media platforms recommend newsfeeds, potential contacts, or popular topics to users, and expect the tailored information will encourage users to "stick to" the platforms.

Among the four platforms, Weibo makes the most ambitious effort to optimise the surfing experience with information recommendations. As the screenshots in Figure 22 show, Weibo users can find a lot of recommended information on its homepage. For example, in the major search bar (Mark 1), a user can see a note stating: "People are searching [the keyword of a current popular topic]", a reminder that will be removed once the user starts typing a search keyword. Secondly, if users intend to write a Weibo post (Mark 6 in Part A of Figure 22 below), they may notice the scrolling updates of current popular topics on Weibo above the textbox (Mark 5). Users can also find another list of real-time popular topics in the right column (see Mark 16) as they browse Weibo posts updated by those who they are following. Meanwhile, the Weibo system often tracks popular movies, music and celebrities and makes a list of current hits in the right column as well (Mark 17 in Part B of Figure 22). These features allow Weibo users to follow current "hot" media products as well as popular celebrities. Thus,

²⁰ The version of 6.5.4 for iOS and Android released in January 2017 allows users to search webpages outside of WeChat feeds. This new feature is believed to change the current application of WeChat, but no scholarship yet offers a reliable assessment of its influence.

higher visibility through the information recommendation feature will generate more online interaction Weibo-wide.



Part A



Part B



Part C

Figure 22. Screenshots of a Weibo user's homepage

Beyond these popular topics, Weibo recommends potential contacts to its users. According to interviews and my own analysis, Weibo recommends new contacts in two ways. First, if several users mutually follow each other, the Weibo system will deem these users to be highly connected and part of an acquaintance circle and will recommend others in this possible circle who are not being followed yet (see mark 14 in Part A of Figure 22). Secondly, the system also affords users awareness of the extended connection. Mark 18 in Part C of Figure 22 shows the newly connected users of one's "companions" (i.e. people you follow on Weibo, as aforementioned in section 1.1.1). This feature reverberates with the argument of Chang and Zhu (2011) that friends' (or companions')²¹ active and growing connections on social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat largely motivate Chinese users to adopt the platform.

Similarly, WeChat sends recommended potential contacts derived from a user's existing social connections as well. To become a WeChat user, it is compulsory to register a WeChat account with a mobile number, and WeChat requires permission to access a user's mobile contacts. In addition, many users choose to "add new friends" from their mobile contacts when first using the app. Thus, WeChat will recommend new contacts when mobile contacts are updated, and this is the sole information recommendation service that WeChat provides. In this way, the user base of WeChat has expanded rapidly since its release.

On Baidu Tieba and Bilibili, users do not see information recommendations based either on popular topics or recommended contacts. Rather, these two platforms feature recommended "hot responses" instead (see Figure 24 and 25). On Tieba's mobile app, if a comment on a post gets over a certain number of replies or likes (e.g. the baseline is ten likes on Tieba app), this comment will be set in a particular section. On Tieba, the section is called 神回复 *shenhuifu*, which means "excellent comment". As Figure 23 and 24 show below, however, this feature is only available on Tieba's mobile app, and there is not a similar one on its PC webpage.

²¹ The original word in their research is *pengyou* (朋友) which means "friend." Here I also add the meaning "companion" to the point, considering the context of social media.



Figure 23. Screenshots of comments to a Tieba post on a PC

Figure 23 above is a screenshot of part of an original Tieba post (see Mark 1) on PC webpage and the first comment (Mark 2) to it. We can see other Tieba users replying to the first comment, but the two sections of original post and the first comment are aligned, and there is no recommended hot feedback in between.



Figure 24. Screenshots of comments to a Tieba post on its mobile app

Figure 24 above is a screenshot of the same Tieba post and the first comment (Mark 2) to the original post on the mobile app. We can see the “excellent comment” (*shenhuifu*) shown at Mark 1, and this section is arranged between the original post and the first comment (see Mark 2 in Figure 24). In Figure 24 above, the recommended comment was sent on the 16th of January 2014, a day later than the first comment. The Tieba system recognises it as “excellent” due to the fourteen replies and two likes it received.

Regarding the difference between Tieba webpage and mobile app, it is very possible that PC users can view more content on the larger screen than on a cell phone’s small screen. The differentiated design makes it easier for mobile Tieba users to find the most popular feedback to the original text among many others, which affords better immediate interaction.



Figure 25. Screenshots of comments to a Bilibili video

The feature of recommended comments on Bilibili is very similar to that on Tieba, although the layout of the sections is slightly different. Below the video clip is the section that allows a user to post a comment (see Mark 1 in Figure 25), followed by the hot comments below (see Mark 2) and all the comments (Mark 3).

The recommendation of popular comments on these platforms seems to involve a complicated ranking of interactions, as a comment which has many replies or likes can be recommended. However, a comment with more likes may not top the listed hot comments. Mark 2 in Figure 25 demonstrates that comment #29, which has received 205 likes, is still under comment #26, whose likes total is 129. Bilibili and other platforms only explain that the recommendation of hot comments is on the basis of commentary interaction, yet they have not revealed how they calculate their rankings.

Although all four platforms offer information recommendation features and have designed them to coordinate with their core services, some features, such as WeChat's recommended contacts and Bilibili's recommended comments, were not mentioned during my interviews.

Thus, I presume that my informants may possibly use these features too, but the recommendation features of WeChat or Bilibili are not as important as features like public posts, group chatting and search tool when they are engaged in fannish practices on the four platforms.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined four platforms that Chinese social media fans use most frequently: Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili. By contextualising the four platforms and introducing their user interfaces and primary features, the type of content that they emphasise and how they guide users to reach the target content became clear. By comparing the five elements of social media, public posts, direct messaging, group chatting, search tools, and information recommendation (Yoder, Stutzman, 2011), we gain insight into the different affordances provided by these platforms and how Chinese fans can accordingly employ the four platforms to develop social media fandom.

From four perspectives of platforms as Gillespie (2010) notes, including computation, architecture, figuration and politics, the platforms I have discussed are all multi-layered in structure. They enable differentiated activities and thus lay an adaptable foundation for different users to achieve further interaction. According to Gillespie (2010), computation on platforms today does not necessarily mean that platforms must allow users to write and run code, but “affords an opportunity to communicate, interact or sell” (p. 351). Specifically, in this research project, Weibo offers microblogging service for its users to upload and circulate multimedia content such as texts, pictures, video and URLs. Weibo users thus can share their feelings, opinions, or creative thinking when they comment, re-post and like. Weibo’s built-in search engine makes the content and its updated trends visible and accessible to other registered users. Likewise, WeChat and Tieba also allow their users to communicate and interact with multimedia content circulation. However, content circulation on WeChat happens within separate circles, as the interpersonal connection on WeChat is established upon an existing contact network (such as cell phone contacts). In contrast, Tieba makes the flow of multimedia content more visible to the public because it is derived from online discussion boards and closely bundled with other Baidu’s services such as its search engine. Bilibili offers another mode of online interaction. It encourages users to send flying comments

while watching video clips. Unlike Weibo, WeChat and Tieba, the flying comments are all anonymous text-based messages rather than multimedia content. However, users will feel a sense of communal experience when the flying comments are projected on the video play interface without having to switch to other platforms for interpersonal interaction (although, of course, they still can if they wish to).

From the perspectives of architecture and figurative meaning, the four platforms perform differently as well. All four platforms are designed to become distinct structures for different uses. For example, Weibo has launched various features over time, but most of them are based on the three core services: the personal timeline (where users can post updates and have interactions with other Weibo users through comments, re-posts and likes), Weibo's search engine (which makes individual users' updates visible and accessible), and information recommendation (which suggests potentially interesting content for users to discover). Weibo's core features are similar to those of Tieba, although many fans I interviewed complained that most of the recommended information on Tieba is advertising. In contrast, WeChat, as an instant messaging application, relies on an existing contact network, and offers a direct messaging service for one-on-one chatting and group chatting. WeChat Moments, an integrated social feature of WeChat, connects people who already have contacted each other and restricts the visibility and circulation of personal updates. In doing so, WeChat highlights the affordance of immediate online conversation for mobile users, which is different from Weibo's interest-driven, asynchronous interaction. While Weibo, WeChat, and Tieba rely on public posts and private messaging, Bilibili creates a virtually communal video-watching experience with its integration of flying comments and video sharing service. Video clips uploaded by Bilibili users lay a foundation for the flying comments. In other words, the interaction is more focused because all the flying comments and the static comments relate to the video clip that users are watching.

According to Gillespie (2010), the political meaning of platforms now refers to the material structure where politicians "articulate their political beliefs" (p. 350) and the beliefs being articulated themselves. Since this research project examines Chinese Web 2.0 fandom rather than the political use of Chinese social media, I do not go further in the political direction. However, as Gillespie and O'Reilly point out, these Web 2.0 platforms are "spanning all the connected devices" (O'Reilly, 2005) and highly accessible, offering "a progressive and

egalitarian arrangement, [and] promising to support those who stand upon it” (Gillespie, 2010, p. 350).

Chapter 5. Chinese online fandom and the reality show

Where Are We Going, Dad?

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Chinese reality television show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* In this case study I explore the formation, manifestation and influence of Web 2.0 fandom and investigate how fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* consume the parenting-themed reality show and develop fan culture in Chinese social media. I analyse data collected from interviews and observation to discuss three aspects of Chinese digital fan culture: fan interaction with social media platforms, fan-made texts and fan identities. Graeme Turner (2004) considers celebrity a genre of social representation, a kind of cultural commodity involving commoditised figures “traded by the promotions, publicity and media industries” (p. 9). In the following sections, I argue that social media platforms enable individual fans to establish loose and imaginary connections with celebrities, fan communities and one another; help fans build social identities in the Web 2.0 world; and guide them to contribute to participatory online fan culture. Fans in the Web 2.0 era play a major role in constructing a dynamic of power between fans and celebrities. Therefore I also look at such power dynamics as represented in fans’ consumption of each other’s creative work, and investigate how fans build cultural citizenship through discussing the narrative of the parenting-themes show and engaging in fictional rehearsal during fan discussion.

Where Are We Going, Dad?, which has aired three seasons on television, was one of the most popular television shows in the Chinese-speaking world from 2013 to 2015. In 2013 Hunan TV bought the copyright from South Korea’s Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and produced an adaptation, which soon became a massive hit, both in terms of TV ratings (CSM, 2015) and as a Weibo topic. Each episode of the Chinese version features five celebrity fathers and their children as they travel to rural places, and focuses on the developing father-child relationships. In this show, participants from celebrity families need to overcome challenges and complete a series of tasks meant to strengthen familial ties and friendship between families. Many types of fans have been producing a large quantity of creative work in relation to the show even in the three years since the show ended. In this case study, I mainly focus

on *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Season 3, which was aired in 2015, and is likely the final season that will ever be broadcast. In April 2016, The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China issued new guidelines to ban reality TV shows featuring celebrities' children, "in order to protect the children from the pitfalls of overnight fame," as the broadcast regulator claims.

As discussed in section 3.3, I read through the raw data several times and examined the codes in order to select the most salient codes. The coding cycle was repeated until the codes pointed to general trends, e.g. online fans use PCs and/or smartphones to consume content (as I will discuss in section 5.2.1). I will explain how substantial conditions (e.g. mobile lifestyle, platform features) as well as the historical and sociocultural contexts inform the way in which fans in mainland China produce *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom. More specifically, I will examine how gender plays a role in developing power structures within this fandom.

I argue that fans use different social platforms to acquire and distribute texts related to the show, while enjoying diverse interactions with celebrities and fellow fans. The seemingly decentralised user-platform interaction eliminates conventional information flows but also creates a new hierarchical pattern on the basis of social media. This new hierarchy has often worked as a mutual branding tool: on the one hand, celebrities use fan-celebrity interaction to showcase a close connection with fans; on the other hand, active fan producers consider fan-celebrity interaction as a way to develop their fan communities, their personal influence within them, and as a way to foster self-realisation. Next, I will explore gender norms and hegemonic masculinity represented in fannish texts and within fan interactions. I will conclude that the parenting-themed reality show and the celebrity-fan interaction in social media reform the construction of fans' cultural citizenship.

5.2 A Web 2.0 style fan-platform interaction

Social media has become the primary context for Chinese online fandom through providing relatively open spaces where fans are able to make and spread their works in response to the original media products. As discussed in Chapter Four, the affordances of social media guide fans to reach target content, and these platforms have designed many features for diverse interaction among all users to democratise Web 2.0 spaces. However, fans' use of these features also highlights and articulates power differences in fan communities as well as fan-

celebrity interaction. In this section I dissect the online fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* through looking at the information provided by fans during interviews and observation as well as comparing this information and other scholars' theorisation of fans' online debates (e.g. Hills, 2012).

5.2.1 Mobile lifestyle

The relatively young group of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* participants suggests the mobilised lifestyle of current Chinese youth. Most participants in my study are in their twenties, either university students or just starting their career. In interviews, they made clear the contemporary pattern of consuming television programmes via online streaming rather than television sets.

Cola: I live in my dorm at university, and we don't have a TV set there. So I just watch the show with my cell phone or laptop on Saturday... although I can't watch it with other audiences nationwide when it is broadcast, I think that is fine, because I don't need to watch the annoying, long TV advertisements.

Kevin: I was living at home when *Where Are We Going, Dad?* released its latest episodes. However, I still watched the show on my iPad in my bedroom, rather than in our living room where we have a big TV. Actually, I feel more comfortable watching the show this way.

As the show is broadcast at 10:00 pm on Friday, audience members regularly watch with their families. But since many of my participants live in dormitories or rented apartments, and typically do not have television in their rooms, they watch the show online on the official website.

Online streaming of a new episode becomes available one hour after television broadcast finishes; a few official "behind the scenes" video clips are released at the same time. Online streaming on mobile devices allows users who do not subscribe to television services to access the content of the programme. Streaming also increases the total number of individual fans, as many do not watch the broadcast with others (e.g. families, friends or roommates). Some participants acknowledged that they occasionally use a laptop to watch the show with friends or roommates; most of the time, however, they watch it alone, because they can easily find relevant content at the official website via online streaming. When these individual fans

express opinions about the show's celebrities and narratives, they tend to post their thoughts or screenshots (often edited) on Weibo. In other words, the communal watching of TV has disappeared; instead, a sense of community is found online.

PangPang: I stream the show on my laptop, and can pause the video anytime if I would like to go to another place or do other things. It's also easier to send a Weibo post when watching online. I can't use Weibo conveniently when I watch TV because I don't want to miss any of the show.

In the quote of interview, PangPang demonstrates how video streaming facilitates the development of social media fandom for *Where Are We Going, Dad?* The ability to pause affords greater opportunities for participation in fan culture (e.g. chatting with other fans on Weibo and WeChat, capturing screenshots for fannish texts) and therefore community-building. At the same time, mobile applications (of online streaming and social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat) offer the affordance of multitasking, which can help to connect individuals and get them involved in the online fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*

Content consumption through mobile devices and online services enables the *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans to be involved in social media, and through social media fans are able to extend their interpersonal relationships beyond the family, campus, and workplace. Web 2.0 platforms offer a space where fans can observe and communicate with each other. Under these conditions, as discussed in section 3.4, fans can construct and manage their own images presented in social media. I will discuss how *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans in China develop their online identities through individual-platform interaction in the next section.

5.2.2 Online tagging and the construction of fans' online identities

Content tagging has become increasingly common due to the global growth of social networking services such as Twitter, Facebook and, in China, Weibo, Baidu Tieba, and so on. Tagging is a popular feature of social media platforms, especially in online fan communities. Fans tag themselves, celebrities, producers and other practitioners, and they also employ hashtags to manage the content they post, to participate in online events and ultimately, to build online social identity.

a) Tagging to showcase connections

Fans tag users to showcase an identity or a relationship between those tagged and fans themselves. Weibo or Baidu users tag each other with “@”, although WeChat and Bilibili.com don’t provide such a function. The information provided by my interviewees as well as acquired in observation resonates with research on Twitter and Instagram (see boyd, 2008; Marwick, boyd, 2011b; Schrock, 2015), which indicates that fans tag others to interact with them, for example, trying to inform other users to have a look at texts, and wishing to elicit feedback from people they tagged. If fans receive @replies from celebrities, the @ tag functions as a mark of status and is publicised within the fan community.

[Question: How did you interact with celebrities in social media?]

Nisan: When I was clipping the video, I emphasised “please do not tag the parents [of Xiatian and Nuoyi]” to avoid increasing celebrities’ burden of dealing with public relation issues. However, some fans still tag them on Weibo, and Xia Keli (Xiatian’s father) even forwarded my work, probably because Chinese is his second language and he didn’t understand what I was trying to express through the fanvid.

Ljumao: Some celebrities, such as Liu Ye, also frequently interact with Weibo fans, and this is why a lot of fans like him.

Similar to fans’ sense of intimacy with celebrities through social media interaction (Bennett, 2014), the informants above portrayed a tag-based bond between fans and celebrities, primarily on Weibo. Weibo users are able to tag each other on this platform with “@” followed by the user ID of those with whom they wish to communicate. Users who gets tagged on Weibo are informed of the tagging by its system. Similar features soon became available on other platforms such as Tieba, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Celebrities use tagging-based interactions with their Weibo followers and regard this interaction as a strategic approach to developing a fan base. Similarly, Marwick and boyd (2011b) point out that celebrities employ Twitter as a tool to interact directly with fans and to show a seemingly authentic intimacy with their fan base, fulfilling fan expectations and keeping active celebrity-fan relationships. In Nisan’s quote above, her video clip shipping celebrity children Nuoyi (age five at the time of the show) and Xiatian (age six) got shared by Xiatian’s father, and fans of the two children celebrated on Weibo. Many fans were excited

at the idea of the fan-imagined young love becoming real, as they thought Xia Keli “approved” of his daughter’s relationship and shared this fanvid in public. Such “approval” made the fans of Xiatian and Nuoyi excited, although romantic relationships in adolescent and younger years is not encouraged by Chinese mainstream ideology (Min, 2002). This event caused enormous discussion on Weibo, and Xia Keli later deleted his repost and explained to fans that he did not support what the fanvid suggests.

Similarly, when Liu Ye replied to a fan who forwarded a post tagging Liu’s ID on Weibo, this celebrity-fans interactivity won about 10,000 forwards, 20,000 comments and 90,000 likes in its first six weeks.



Figure 26. A screenshot of Liu Ye's Weibo

Translation of comments:

@LiuYe: I follow you [my friend] on the right side.²² The soul of honour usually does everything with good luck, and here are five kisses from me 🍷 //@SangAnw: A main reason [for Nuoyi is so cute] is that he [Nuoyi] got good looks from his parents //@LiuNuoyiHouyuanhui: @LiuYe how can Nuoyi be so cute!?

[Original post]

@WangYibo: #WhereAreWeGoingDad# High resolution photos without watermarks #Nuoyi# Nuoyi chéri,²³ how can you be so good-looking!?

In the quote above, Liu Ye, although a well-known film star, breaks people's expectation of modesty in receiving a compliment. Instead he proudly showcases his happiness in hearing fans' admiration for his son Nuoyi and himself. In return, he follows one of these fans and publishes this update. The tagging feature of Weibo thus plays a vital role, affording a sense of fan community on Weibo and a connection to the celebrities that makes fans feel more involved. This string of Liu Ye's responses results in resonance within the fandom of both Liu Ye and Nuoyi, and attracts more followers to comment and join the conversation, which quickly became a popular topic on Weibo and strengthened Liu Ye's affiliation with his followers.

Both examples of celebrity practice in social media reveal a power imbalance between celebrities and fans. For most social media users, platforms like Weibo and Tieba are online spaces for leisure rather than the tools of self-branding that they are for many celebrities. Marwick and boyd (2011b) note that these users "may think of their followers as friends or family" (p. 144), while celebrities view their followers as fans. Liu Ye's Weibo practice creates an image of a "personal acquaintance" (Giles, 2002. p. 289) and his interaction with fans is welcomed as a result. The unequal power between celebrities and fans meant that Xia Keli's mistaken repost aroused fans' celebration and arguments about his daughter's interaction

²² The term "the right side" on Weibo refers to the comment on the right side. Weibo allows users to share a post and include comments from other users. Once you do so, the included comments will be displayed on the right side of your comment, or your user ID if you do not leave a comment while sharing.

²³ The Chinese here is *xueli* (雪梨, lit. a kind of pear), which is a fan-made phonetic transcription of the French word *chéri* (lit. "dear"). Liu Ye married a French woman and speaks very good French. In the show, he sometimes talks with his child in French, and "Nuoyi chéri" is a frequently used phrase, which many fans adopt to refer to Nuoyi and express their affection for him.

with other celebrity kids in the show. Xia Keli's repost also indicates unequal responsibility in social media practice between celebrities and fans. Celebrities have to carefully consider their public posts because they involve self-branding. This situation is also why Nisan suggests "not tag[ging] any celebrity [on Weibo]" in her fanvid.

On Baidu Tieba, tagging users with "@" differs from Weibo, because Tieba is intended as an interest-driven online space that primarily gathers grassroots users rather than a social context that includes all social classes such as celebrities. Meanwhile, since Tieba users are able to hide their information such as their recent updates, replies and the forums they join, social networking on Tieba is not as open as on Weibo. Accordingly, fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* only tag people within fan communities and, even so, they do not tag each other frequently. The author of the following Tieba post, a community administrator, introduces the friends she met within this fan base. The information was collected during my observation in the Tieba community "BabaQunaer Kang Nuo Ba".

LiuNianSiShuiloveXin: The next, @HeiHeiChuanhome, aka Auntie. Although she is called Auntie, she's actually a quite young girl born in 1998. Auntie is a very nice person, just like the elder members in family. But I'm not saying you are old, Auntie.



I'm a huge fan of Auntie – the only person in our circle who is not stupid.

[Comments]

HeiHeiChuanhome: How dare you reveal my age

LiuYueShiSi: OK, so she is younger than me

The author of the post and the people she tagged are members of the administrative team of this fan community. Her post introducing its leaders to other members can be viewed as a display of the community's power structure. An interesting contradiction emerges here: Tieba develops features (i.e. public visibility of Tieba posts and @ tagging) that are supposed to minimise power imbalances by enabling supposedly "egalitarian" participation, but fans use these features to highlight and (re)articulate power differences between community members.

A few Tieba-based fan groups emphasise that all posts need to follow particular formatting instructions. For example, the title of a post in the Tieba-based community 爸爸去哪儿康诺

吧 (*Baba Qunaer Kang Nuo Ba*), which focuses on discovering and developing the interactions between the celebrity children Kangkang and Nuoyi, must start with the heading “KangXinYunNuo+date+category”. The heading selects one Chinese character from each boy’s name (康 *Kang* and 诺 *Nuo*), and integrates the two characters with the words 心 *Xin* (lit. “heart”) and 允 *Yun* (lit. “to promise,” but also meaning “to give” on some occasions). The heading “KangXinYunNuo” thus can be understood as “Kangkang (promises that he) gives his heart to Nuoyi”, which suggests that the community hopes that the connection between the two children can last long into the future. Such formatting can also be seen as a type of content tag, which aims to enhance fans’ affiliation with online communities.

b) Use of hashtags to declare a stance

Hashtags are a powerful feature on Weibo. By using hashtags, Weibo users can create customised topics, and users are also able to find content attached with specific hashtags through Weibo’s search engine. In this sense, hashtags become an effective tool of search engine optimisation, as the following quotes demonstrate:

Ying: We had a Weibo hashtag movement called “#白衣仙童胡皓康#” (*Baiyi Xiantong Hu Haokang*, lit. “fairy child in white, Hu Haokang”), and you are still able to search for it now.

MK: To me, hashtags can convey a lot of information. For example, if I am quite interested in certain pairing of characters [in a TV drama or a film], I use a hashtag to highlight my post in relation to this topic... [I use such a hashtag strategy] not only on Weibo, but also on WeChat and other platforms.

In interviews, many fans told me about their use of hashtag on Weibo and other platforms. A primary strategy in using hashtags is to plot an online campaign on social media. As discussed in the previous section, fans deem content tagging as a mark of relationship to a person, a group or an event. Therefore it is natural that fan communities and celebrity agencies try to utilise fans’ understanding of tagging to promote celebrities or themselves on Weibo, and then hopefully, throughout the entire media sphere. If a campaign goes well, fans are keen to keep up with the trend.

In order to indicate to Weibo users that hashtags are different, and to allow users to click hashtags and discover more relevant content, their font colour differs from other, plain words in a Weibo post, as in the screenshot below. Only hashtags and @tags can have a distinguishing font colour in a Weibo text. A hashtag thus becomes the main approach through which users can highlight content visually, as an @tag is only applied when users wish to inform others on Weibo. When Weibo users have formed such a habit, they might employ this tagging strategy on other platforms, even on those that do not provide identical tagging features, such as WeChat Moments.

The following example of hashtags to highlight an idea is from the Weibo page of a fan informant:



Figure 27. A fan's Weibo post attaching the Daisy Duck image and Nina's photo

Translation of comments:

@576Bangqiudui-Jiejie: #KangkangNina# Daisy 🍻🍻🍻
//@KangNiShengunZhengSu: “Being gentle equals a status of peace, and means staying quiet, just like a calm duckling” – Kangkang’s ideal girl #KangNi#

[Original post]

@TudouGeMaLeGeTuierDe: 🍻🍻🍻

[Picture 1: Image of Daisy Duck from Disney] [Picture 2: photo of Nina]

In this quoted post, fans use two hashtags to declare their interest and, further, their attitude towards a the shipping of Kangkang and Nina, two of the seven celebrity children in *Where Are We Going, Dad?*. At the time, as my informants assume, the episodes were trying to overstate the interaction between the two children, in order to create topics on social media by editing scenes of interactions between the celebrities and their children in the show. In that context, many fans chose to express their attitude with Weibo hashtags. The author of the original post quotes Kangkang’s words about his favourite type of girls in an episode and connects them with Disney’s Daisy Duck, who Kangkang thinks similar to Nina (Liu Ye’s daughter) in terms of physical appearance of “whiteness” in the context of this reality show. This parody at first did not receive much attention until the fan KangNiShengunZhengSu added the hashtag “KangNi”, which binds the children’s names together. Since then, other fans who share the same stance have been able to find this text when searching the names of celebrity children on Weibo, and this fannish text became popular within several fan circles afterwards.

With the help of hashtags, fannish texts expressing a variety of viewpoints become visible on Weibo. Many texts thus adopt more aggressive strategies to achieve higher visibility and, more precisely, the potential of becoming powerful in fan communities. Most of them convey strong emotions in short words, consisting of a semi-structured sentence or two. These emotions and opinions sometimes collide and spark debate on social media platforms.

5.2.3 Power difference in social media

While online networking and content production overall are expanding due to the increasing use of social platforms, users themselves seem to engage in gradually narrower fields. My informants tend to only follow or communicate with Weibo users who share similar interests

or experience. WeChat contacts, on the other hand, are based on social connections from daily life such as families, friends, colleagues, schoolmates, teachers, and so on. According to the information I collected in interviews and observation, the situations on Tieba and Bilibili.com are similar – all users of these social networks are able to choose what to read, to select who to follow or block, to decide which text can be circulated in public and which in private. However, when my informants describe how they engage with *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom, text consumption on social media often happens in very short periods, and users pay limited attention to each text, which often presents the tip of the iceberg in a whole event.

Yashan: I have unfollowed a lot of Weibo users, and today only keep following a few dozen of users... because I don't have enough time to view all the feeds if I follow hundreds or thousands of people. That's tremendously distracting – [after all] I have work to do... Now I use WeChat a lot, as everyone is using it as a communication tool.

Ljumao: Now I mainly follow my favourite celebrities and some feeds in areas like make-up and fashion... This way I just need to check a much smaller number of Weibo updates every so often. If I want to find something out from these categories, I just use search engines on Weibo or Baidu.

Weibo users Yashan and Ljumao are not the only informants who told me that they have started to focus attention on more limited areas. To most of them, unfollowing others who are not important or interested enough becomes an effective way to manage their use of Weibo, WeChat and other social platforms.

Messages on social network platforms are transmitted rapidly and most are short. For instance, Weibo posts are commonly short texts with no more than 140 full-width characters, and the majority of user-generated video clips on Bilibili.com have the length of a pop song. The lack of context of posted information can also exaggerate users' values and personalities. Some informants talked about how they consume fannish texts on Weibo.

Leo: We all know the names of celebrity fathers in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Well, maybe not Xia Keli [because he lives in Taiwan]. So I would not do careful research on each of them... sometimes I just take a glance on their Weibo updates and WeChat subscription feed about them... but later I realise a fact that I know quite few about these celebrities. (laugh)

Lian: I check Weibo updates when I have a bit of free time, such as on a bus and during breaks at work... I don't have enough time to go through the context of a post.

Nisan: I have to scroll the screen for a while and find new topics [other than *Where Are We Going, Dad?*] on Weibo.

In the above quotes, fans participate in fandom on social media in short segments, which constrains them from understanding the full context of a post. Leo mentions that he does not pay particular attention on each celebrity because he almost knows every celebrity father's name. Such familiarity makes him not have a close look at them and only receive very short messages about them via social media. Furthermore, not all fannish texts explain word choice or the story behind them to viewers. As a result, when social media becomes increasingly interest-driven, it narrows users' views and lives. In this sense, the experience and emotions of fans (and other groups) can be amplified by social media and its fragmented pieces of information.

In a context where social media users narrow the scope of personal interests, influential transmitters or, "influencers", play a more critical role in user-led content creation (Abidin, 2016). As discussed above, the logic of open online space dictates that the more feedback a text receives, the higher its visibility. A higher visibility enables more users, scattered on social media platforms, to participate in collaborative engagement and vice versa. However, fan culture is an essential but not the only theme on social media, and even within the scope of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom, countless circles (shipping different character pairings, for example) exist simultaneously. Therefore, active social media users keep looking for suitable channels for branding on these platforms, and that leads Web 2.0 fandom to become more hierarchical.

Ying: Celebrities, including grassroot celebrities, are vital [in terms of spreading texts]. They have thousands and millions of followers or fans, so every message they post can be read, forwarded, commented or liked on a huge scale.

Nisan: After Xia Keli forwarded my video clip, my work went popular in related fan circles. I was suddenly flooded with thousands of system notifications and got a bit scared.

The scale of celebrities' followers makes each text highly visible and spreadable. Celebrities' followers are also keen to forward their posts in order to exhibit a connection to the celebrities as well as to display their own personal interests and tastes. In other words, celebrities become a kind of branding mechanism for these fans and help their own followers build an online social identity.

Compared to the very few fannish texts lucky enough to be promoted by celebrities, a much larger amount of fan-made work remains almost unseen. On platforms such as Weibo, fans tend to be scattered individuals who rarely know each other in real life, and their primary connection is their similar interest. For example, the parody of Nina (a celebrity child in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Season 3) and the figure of Daisy Duck mentioned in the previous section eventually received 45 forwards and 21 likes in total (see Figure 27 on page 131), and while this post is an example of a popular fan-made text its page views equate to roughly one percent of those of celebrities' posts. Under such circumstances, for fans who wish their creations to be widely seen and to have more interactions with other fans, joining online fan communities becomes an effective approach.

Online fan communities gather those who share similar interests, affiliations with particular celebrities and clear objectives, such as acquiring more information about celebrities or shows, exchanging feelings, opinions, and texts with other fans, and improve skills of creating fannish texts. Thus they need management to establish and enforce rules and regulations and run various events in order to keep developing. In this sense, a fan community must have a power structure that sustains its.

In the previous section 5.2.2, I quoted a long fan post that introduces the administrative team of the Tieba-based fan community "BabaQunaer Kang Nuo Ba". In addition to the description of "auntie" quoted above, we meet "Shisi" and "Xiangzi", two members of the management group. While its author LiuNianSiShuiloveXin was describing "Shisi" and "Xiangzi", she also suggestively explained the power source of each administrator.

LiuNianSiShuiloveXin: @LiuyueShisi_ Shisi is super nice, and has been contributing a lot to building up this community. Meanwhile, she has mastered a great deal of knowledge and skills, such as illustrating and video editing – she's almost almighty!

LiuNianSiShuiloveXin: @ShangTuBuJieshi aka Xiangzi, an absolute genuine fan of Kangkang. Although Xiangzi is old as well, he chases after Kangkang “without any dignity”, LOL. Hope you can see the little superstar as soon as possible. Nevertheless, Kangkang is mine!

In these quotes and her other posts, the author portrays each administrator from four aspects – expertise, personality, fannish affiliation (the primary sources of their authority), and then her own impression of them. All the administrators have produced fannish texts such as video clips, photos, fan-fictional articles, back scene stories and information about celebrities and the show, and their related skills play an important role during the process of this content production. Furthermore, all these administrators are keen to offer help – for instance, to help the community organise events, to help fans reach desired content, and/or to help those in a closer circle deal with issues other than community matters. The third and also most basic source of authority is their affiliation with celebrities (particularly Kangkang and Nuoyi in this group) as well as the fan community itself, because such an affiliation drives them to carry out fannish activities online. The three aspects that determine authority dramatically increase the visibility of the works of these members and their online IDs in the community. Their highly visible works and online conversations, together with their well-acknowledged skills and personality as well as accepted community rules and regulations, form a stronger discourse than that of other community members, which leads them to the core of power and higher status in a hierarchical structure.

Gender also affects power structures within fan communities. When I asked a fan interviewee if she could possibly introduce my project to male fans, I received a surprising answer.

Nisan: We have too few male fans! (laugh) Once we would get a male fan, we would treasure him for sure! As an old saying states, a thing is valued if it is rare (wu yi xi wei gui, 物以稀为贵)... Male members [of our fan community] can be an appeal [to female fans], because male fans have different and interesting views [compared to female fans] and that will make a fan community more active. If a male fan happens to be good-looking, we [the administrators] will very possibly assign him a position in the management team. (laugh)

Naonao: There are not many male fans in our community [and I am one of them]. The group of boys/men is always larger than that of girls/women in other places [in

China], so this feeling [of being surrounded by girls] seems good... the position [in the fan community] will not give you any literal power in [offline] everyday life, but it feels like you *gain some face* (you mianzi 有面子, lit. “be proud and/or honoured”).

Nisan, a former administrator in a *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fan community, reveals the gender imbalance in the fan community. Female fans play a much larger part than male fans, which is in line with the demographic information of my interviews and observations. This gender difference not only results in a female-oriented consumption pattern (which I will discuss in section 5.4.1), but also a power difference between community members. In a multi-level fan community, as Nisan claims, male fans may be positioned higher due to their scarcity and the supposedly different views that originate from different genders. Although Nisan explains that original contributions are of value to the community, the power of male members essentially derives from their gender.

Naonao describes female domination in fan communities from a male fan’s perspective. China is facing serious imbalance of sex ratio, largely due to the one-child policy and the traditional idea that families prefer boys to girls. Under such circumstances, Naonao claims that he enjoys the fan community where female fans outnumber male fans. Moreover, he does not think the power difference within fan communities has a negative effect on his life because such difference is not applicable in his offline life. However, it is interesting to note that he thinks his position in the fan community enables him to gain face/*mianzi*, making him feel good. This reveals that gender inequalities are reproduced even in fan communities in which men’s involvement seems relatively rare.

More significantly, Nisan indicates that her community (and many other fan communities for *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom) is a female-led social structure in which female administrators take charge of everyday management transactions, including assigning personal positions in the community. Nisan’s statements reveal the objectification of male fans; physical appearance of male fans is a rare resource in a female-led group and can be traded for dominant positions. This, I suggest, can be viewed as an inversion of a more standard “male gaze” (Mulvey, 1975) dynamic. Laura Mulvey (1975) develops the concept of the “male gaze” which argues that men enjoy the pleasure of objectifying women through the emphasis on the visual sexual appeal of female characters and their orientation towards male characters in films (pp. 8-9). In contrast to Mulvey’s “male gaze” model, the subjects and

objects of the gaze are reversed in Nisan's community, where female members take "good-looking" men as controllable objects. As discussed previously, the power of the community management team primarily derives from textual productivity, which is based on fans' knowledge, skill and enthusiasm. However, the physical appearance of male fans can be converted to communal social capital and can be traded for dominant positions in the fan community. Moreover, Nisan's word choice of "*wu yi xi wei gui* (a **thing** is valued if it is rare)" seems to reflect and reiterate the objectification of male members in her community. In this sense, male members become the object of a "female gaze".

From this case study, we can conclude that fan communities are hierarchical and the gender dynamic still seems imbalanced, although female fans play a leading role in Chinese social media fandom. In the following sections, I will go on to explore how fans produce texts to develop their culture and how gender inequality can be constituted or reproduced through creative practices.

5.3 The evolving fannish texts

Fannish texts help establish complex interpersonal relationships among fans both because these texts convey "social expectations, emotional investments, and cultural transactions" (Jenkins, 2013), and because, as Bruns (2008) proposes, such user-led content centres on the notion of "produsage". In the collaborative and participatory mode of Web 2.0 fandom, many fans also produce content. Based on a collaborative engagement with online fan communities of those who share interests, fan producers build, extend or improve existing material. Such behaviour makes fannish content a shared, always unfinished or "permanent beta" product. As a result, fannish texts can include composite pictures, short comments or even emojis, rather than fan-made videos or fan fictions in the conventional sense. These productivities make *Where Are We Going Dad?* fandom an extremely text-rich culture on Chinese social media.

5.3.1 Fan-made texts and context collapse

Marwick and boyd (2011a) argue that "[s]ocial media technologies collapse multiple audiences into single contexts, making it difficult for people to use the same techniques online that they do to handle multiplicity in face-to-face conversation" (p. 114). In my discussion

about fans' impression management in Chapter Three, I discussed how my informants communicate with the imagined audiences via different platforms on the basis of technological affordances and social context in order to construct a better online image for offline contacts. Fans are also conscious but less attentive to their imagined online contacts, which leaves their representation of meaning often unclear to viewers and thus embeds possibilities for online debates as well as arguments.

Fan-created texts integrate segments from an original media text and other related texts with the fan's watching experience. All my informants have had experience of sharing thoughts and comments about the show as well as fan productions. Quite a number of them told me that normally they neither comment on Weibo posts by official producers or unknown fans, nor have discussions with other commenters on these Weibos, but enjoy viewing the updates of the celebrity children on Weibo and Tieba, and watching the fanvids of their innocent interactions in the show. Such statements are supported by their Weibo pages, where they rarely interact with Weibo users who comment on or forward their posts. This fact is intriguing, because it is easy to find official Weibo posts having thousands of likes, comments and reposts, although my informants also mention exhaustion in interacting with other fans.

Nisan: It seems that on Weibo, a quite open platform on which interpersonal connections are not necessarily closed, people don't need to take as much responsibility as in reality. I guess that's probably why they so easily get into a bad mood.

LL: Although there are many fans of different celebrities, we can see lots of anti-fans online as well... I think conflict between these two groups may last forever.

Ying: Fans on Weibo argue very easily, most of the time for comically tiny reasons... And few of them realise that their behaviour will damage the image of the celebrities they are "fighting for".

Many informants agree that they perform differently on social media and in daily life, and do not want to be identified as fans to their offline friends, family, and colleagues. In interviews, fan Nisan discussed her understanding of the connection between social media and user behaviour, and a few other informants shared similar opinions. Such interpretations of ill-tempered user behaviour on social media reflect a connection between online activity and offline networks. As Nisan and other informants suggest, on platforms not based on offline

social connections, such as Baidu Tieba or Bilibili, users often consume and produce content which they feel is unsuitable in public, because few online contacts know their offline identity. However, once they establish connections with real-life acquaintances on platforms like WeChat, they manage themselves more carefully, because the latter become an extension of offline interaction.

Few interviewees said that they posted their feelings and opinions about the shows on WeChat Moments; some even delete old WeChat Moment posts for various reasons, such as “finding these old posts quite silly” and “keeping the space simple and clean”.

KK: I sometimes delete my posts on WeChat Moments, because... I often feel like writing about my daily life on the platform, but later I find some of my posts look really stupid.

Shoushou: Sometime I delete my old posts on WeChat Moments in order to make it tidy.

This situation arises because the connection among WeChat contacts is not based on personal interests but social relationship in day-to-day lives. Moreover, texts of personal interest cannot be conveniently reached, reproduced or circulated in WeChat Moments, due to its representation of more closed social relationships. In such contexts, most of my informants do not use WeChat (or at least WeChat Moments) as a platform to circulate fannish texts. Additionally, WeChat’s search engine only allows users to search for content that has been posted by existing contacts and subscription feeds. Therefore, a fannish text, which usually conveys personal or niche taste (in contrast to mainstream ideology promoted via mass media), becomes less spreadable on WeChat Moments and cannot be efficiently transmitted.

Under these circumstances, Bilibili seems a better option to fans. As investigated in Chapter Four, this video-sharing site features anonymous flying comments attached to video clips and also enables users to have conventional discussion like other social media such as Weibo and Tieba. For those who do not want to be identified, anonymous flying comments allow them to chat with other fans and they do not need worry about impression management; such conversation creates a communal sense of watching a video clip at the same time. For fans keen to become more involved in more online interaction can add comments, likes and “dislikes” below the videoplay interface as on other social media platforms. Common

audience members of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* can also share videos with flying comments on other popular social platforms. In sum, these features are designed for the target users of Bilibili, especially media fans.

5.3.2 Unfinished texts

Social media platforms collapse audiences into one, which makes fans select platforms to participate in and develop fan culture. Based on collaborative engagement with individuals and communities of those who share interests on Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili, active fans continuously build, extend and improve existing content. Although content does not need to be open or unfinished, the features of Web 2.0 platforms necessarily leave content shared and always unfinished product. In particular, such fan-generated content consists of unfinished artefacts “produced” in a “continuing process of revision and development” (Bruns, 2013).

On Weibo, users can forward a post with comment, which can also be seen by other Weibo users. In this sense, when fans circulate a text on Weibo, they add new information to the original post. As a result, the original work as well as commentary upon it becomes a continuously in-progress text. The screenshot below depicts one of my interview participants forwarding another fan’s Weibo.

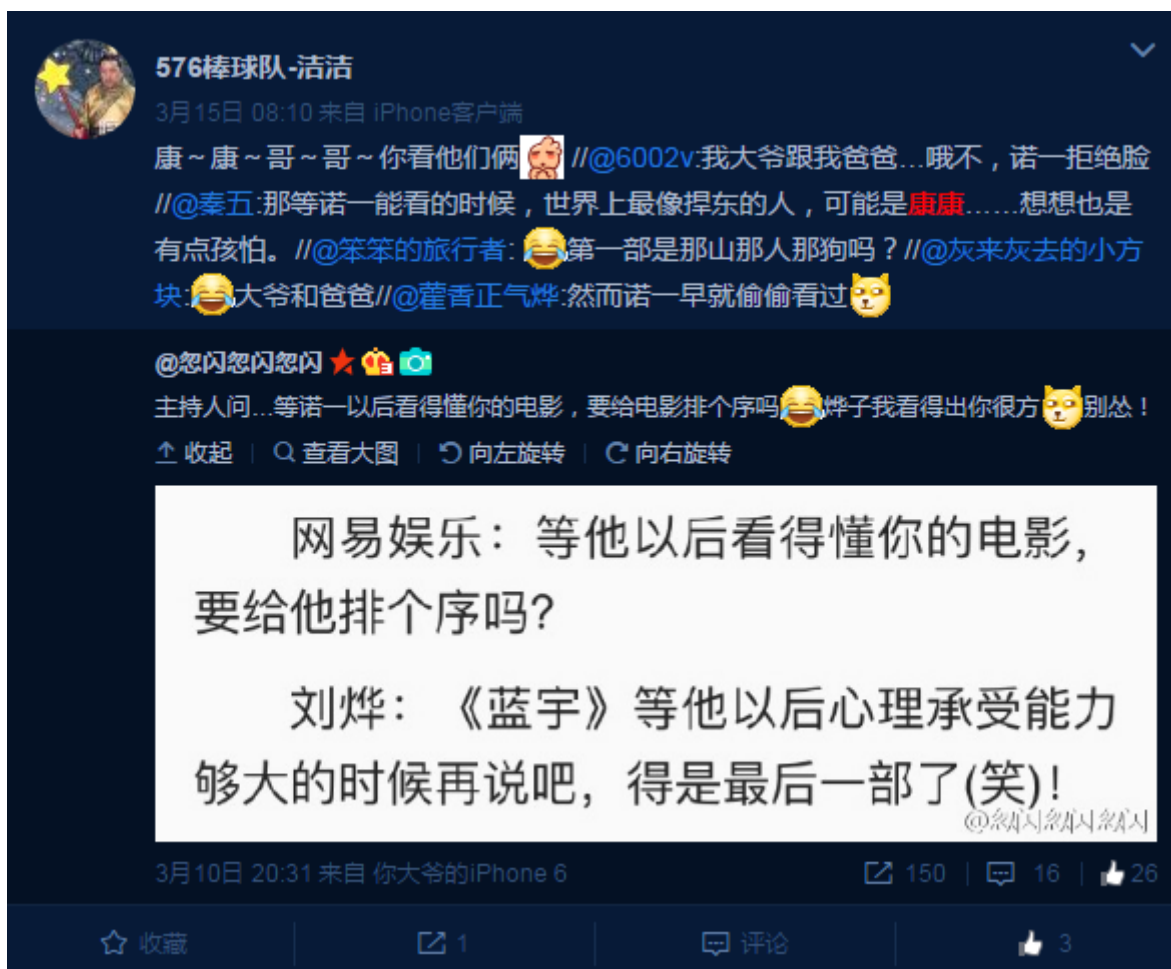


Figure 28. A screenshot of a fan's Weibo

Text translation:

@576Bangqiudui-Jiejie: [Acting Nuoyi] Brother Kangkang ~~ Look at these two men 🙄 // @6002v: [Acting Nuoyi] Uncle [Hu Jun] and my dad are... Oh no! [Refuse to believe it.]²⁴ // @Qinwu: When Nuoyi is able to watch this, the person who is most like Handong²⁵ in the world, might be Kangkang... That would be a bit spooky.²⁶

²⁴ 拒绝脸 *jujue lian*, lit. "refusing face". This informal phrase coined by Chinese anime fans portrays the facial expression of a person who refuses to accept something, and has come to be widely used in informal conversations, particularly on social platforms. There are a few similar catchphrases such as 正直脸 *zhengzhi lian* (lit. meaning "right-minded" face), 花痴脸 *huachi lian* (which refers to the status of "being intoxicated by the good-looking appearance of other people"), and 邪恶脸 *xie'e lian* (lit. "a sinister smiling face").

²⁵ 捍东 *Handong* is a character played by Hu Jun, who has a homosexual relationship with a character played by Liu Ye in the film *Lanyu* (2001).

²⁶ 孩怕 *hai pa* is an Internet catchphrase that describes "a scared status like a little kid getting frightened". The phrase is pronounced like 害怕 *haipa*, meaning "scary".

//@BenbendeLüxingzhe: 😂 so the first film would be *Postmen in the Mountains*
(1999)? //@HuilaiahuiqudeXiaoFangkuai: 😂 Uncle Hu Jun and [Nuoyi's] dad
//@HuoxiangZhengqiYe: Yet Nuoyi would have watched that secretly long ago 🐱

[The original post]@HushanHushanHushan: The presenter asks "... when Nuoyi is able to understand your films in the future, will you give him an ordered list?" 😂

Yezi (“烨子” in Chinese, a nickname of Liu Ye), I can see you getting very worried.²⁷

🐱 Don't be a coward!²⁸

[The dialogue in the picture]:

NetEase Entertainment: In the future, when Nuoyi is able to understand your films, will you give him a list with a suggested ordering?

Liu Ye: We'll see if *Lanyu* will be on the list when he's got enough psychological endurance. If yes, that will have to be the last one [on the list]! [Laughing]

The original post here can be considered as a semi-open structure. The text consists of two parts – a short quote from a Liu Ye interview, and the fan's personal interpretation of the quoted dialogue. In the selected part of the conversation, Liu Ye mentions that he stars in the gay-themed film *Lanyu* and hopes that his son Nuoyi can understand the film better when he grows up. Since Hu Jun, the actor who has a homosexual relationship with Liu Ye's character in *Lanyu*, also participates in *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, the interview arouses the interest of fans who wish to see more interaction between Liu Ye and Hu Jun in the reality show. Moreover, the quoted text's lack of introduction to the film increases fans' curiosity about the two celebrities as well as their children. Therefore, the text encourages the imagination of fans, many of whom added excited comments that connect the interaction between Nuoyi and Kangkang in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* to the story of *Lanyu*.

²⁷ 很方 *hen fang* (lit. “very quadrate”) is a catchphrase imitating the pronunciation of 很慌 *hen huang* (lit. “very worried”) in some regions' dialects.

²⁸ 别怂 *bie song* (lit. “do not be coward”) is a dialectal phrase mainly used in Northern China.

Jason Mittell (2015) proposes a centrifugal and centripetal complex model in terms of the storytelling of TV shows. He explains that some shows are structured with outward-pushing narratives. In this pattern, the number of characters can keep increasing, and the story world can expand. In contrast, other shows have narratives that keep the storytelling inward, which means that there is a scale limit in terms of both characters and scenario. As reflected in the project, the reality show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* follows the centrifugal complex pattern, as the narratives of the show and fans' engagement can continuously expand in bringing in additional material about the six celebrity families.

Meanwhile, we can see here a record of commentary history as well as routes of circulation. During this continuous forwarding, Weibo fans have added new information and meaning to the original text. Here, fans have imagined a series of scenarios of how Nuoyi would react if he were to see his father in *Lanyu*. Fan BenbendeLüxingzhe recommends another Liu Ye film when she (according to this fan's Weibo profile) shares the post. Another fan, Qinwu, even connects the fictional homosexual relationship between the characters played by Liu Ye and Hu Jun to the friendship between Nuoyi and Kangkang. It is worth noticing that the comment of Qinwu contributes about 70 forwards out of the total 150, due to the new meaning added. All this information encourages fans of the celebrities and their children to spread the text on Weibo.

This extract also exemplifies that, through the open structure of a social network, platforms like Weibo eliminate the fixed framework of a text and leave it capable of continuously developing new layers of meaning or extending its original meaning in various ways due to fan contributions. On such open social platforms, as I argued above, a fannish text is always unfinished, and fans become produsers. While they are consuming the text, new information may join in the participatory collaboration of meaning construction.

Some fans prefer to first post texts on platforms such as Bilibili and only then share this content to Weibo or WeChat. Bilibili has become a favourite video sharing platform because fans can comment on the text while streaming the video on this website. Below is a screenshot of its viewing interface:



Figure 29. A screenshot of a fanvid on Bilibili

Pictured is a video clip produced by Nisan, one of my interviewees. She extracted scenes of Xia Tian and Nuoyi from *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, and used them to make a music video set to the Japanese song *Fuwa Fuwa* (2010) by Yui Makino, which demonstrates a girl's internal monologue as she feels herself falling in love with a boy. Nisan does not provide the original lyrics and translation in the video, but modifies the Chinese translation of the lyrics, based on dialogue in the show, to tell a story of imagined romance between the two children. When some other fans read the first few lines in the verse, they indicated that "there seems to be some errors in the translated lyrics" in the flying comments before realising it to be a "new" fictional story rather than merely a music video with scenes from *Where Are We Going, Dad?* The flying comments then turned to celebrate Nisan's work and to express their feelings and offer details such as interesting contextual information.

Nisan: In fact, I didn't release my video work on Bilibili.com at first ... [After other friends' recommendation,] I started to use that website... Before that, as I sometimes extract or adjust material frame by frame, I would get sick of watching my work after I finished it. The flying comments are the only reason why I still would watch my video again, because I can get viewer feedback in this way.

In this case, the open structure of “prodused” texts is strengthened by Bilibili’s flying comments. While viewers watch videos on the site, they are also invited to add new information and thus become “produsers”, who consume and produce a media text simultaneously.

Moreover, the flying comments on Bilibili enable fans to respond to each other. Since in this system it is harder to determine which comments are sent while a fan is watching, such interactions might in fact not be real time as well. Yet the conversations within the flying comments sometimes leave the text more unfinished, because as information is added, more topics are brought into the comments.

Features such as real time comments on Web 2.0 platforms amplify the open structure of fannish texts and prompt the prevalence of these texts on social networks. Such an open structure enables fans to “produce” and share the texts and, hopefully, extend the circulation of the texts. In this process, the ongoing “produsage” requires a large quantity of related material and makes fans who master abundant cultural capital important. Meanwhile, the more potential a fannish text has, the more popular it can become. Therefore, creators who can continuously produce such potentially popular texts play an essential role in the “produsage” mode of fan culture. Both types of crucial influencers possess more power than common individual fans through their cultural capital and skills.

5.3.3 Gender norms in fannish texts

Gender issues constitute an important part of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom; fans negotiate gender normativity through fan practices. With the assistance of user-friendly Web 2.0 applications that facilitate the re-editing and distribution of memetic content (Manovich, 2005; Lessig, 2008), gender identities are normalised and reiterated. In some cases, fan practices also challenge gender norms (i.e., fandom as female-led practices, male fans subject to a “female gaze” and valued for their physical attractiveness). Through forwarding, linking, imitation or “remixing”, Chinese fans apply memetic content to create character pairings in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* The video clip produced by Nisan and the comments it receives demonstrate how fans use catchphrases to express feelings and thoughts online.

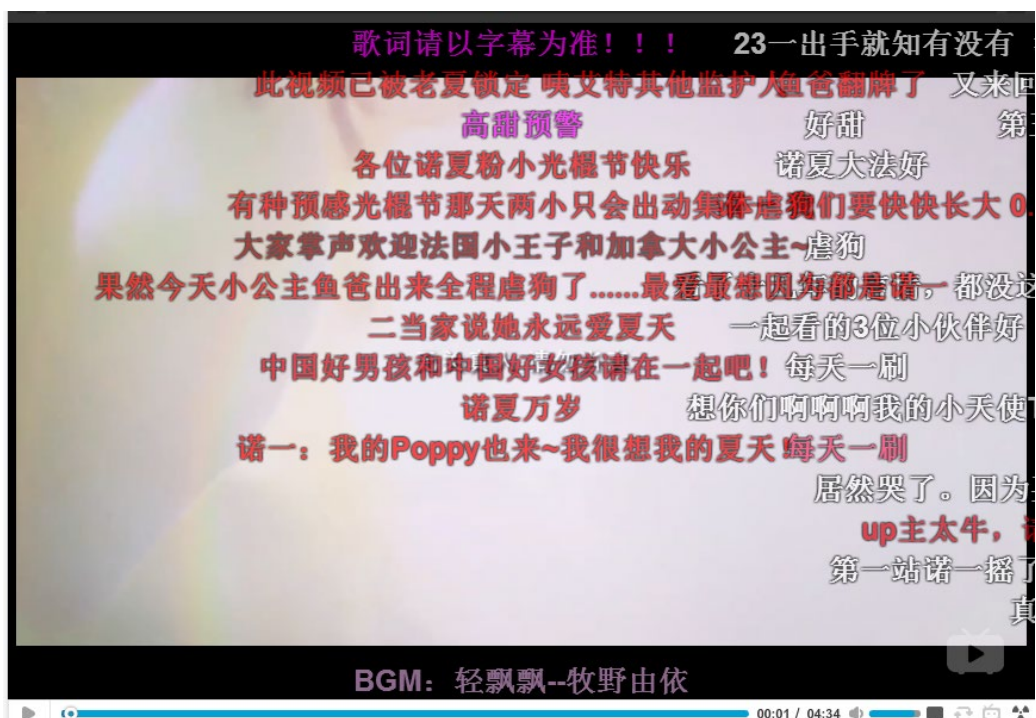




Figure 30. Screenshots of Nisan's fanvid on Bilibili

A part transcript of comments follows:

[00:00] Warning: extreme sweet content ahead! (gao tian yujing, “高甜预警”)

[00:00] Happy Little Singles' Day²⁹, fans of Nuoyi and Xia Tian! [Font colour: red]
(gewei nuo xia fen guanggun jie kuaile, “各位诺夏粉光棍节快乐”)

[00:00] Long live the Nuoyi and Xia Tian pairing! (nuo xia wansui, “诺夏万岁”)

²⁹ In China, some young people celebrate their pride in being single on November 11 (11/11), because the date consists of four number “1” that resembles four “bare sticks” (光棍 *guang gun*), which resemble individuals standing alone. This comment was posted on November 1 (1/11), which some people consider “Little Singles' Day”. (China Daily, 13/11/2014)

This special celebration is generally considered as rooted in the youth culture of university campuses, but in recent years it has been hyped by Chinese Internet companies, particularly online shopping sites such as Alibaba and JD.com. There is no convincing reference that explains why Singles' Day developed as a commercial speculation, but similar celebrations can be found in other East Asian countries, such as “Pepero Day” and “Black Day” in South Korea. “Pepero Day” also occurs on the 11th of November (11/11), because the date recalls four Pepero, a well-known Korean snack product consisting of a long, thin bread stick dipped in chocolate that is thought to look like the numeral 1. “Black Day” is an unofficial holiday on 14th April. On this day, singles gather, wearing black and eat jajangmyeon, black bean sauce noodles.

[00:00] Cruelty to dogs³⁰ (*nue gou*, “虐狗”)

[03:43] self-provided dog food (*zidai gouliang*, “自带狗粮”)

[03:44] Warning! Cruelty to dogs ahead! (*qianfang nue gou gaoneng yujing*, “前方虐狗高能预警”) (This comment repeated five times.)

[03:44] Nonsense (the comment above); this video has evidently been abusing dogs all the time. (*hushuo mingming yizhi douzai nue gou* ↑, “胡说明明一直都在虐狗↑”)

[04:06] Here Nuoyi’s capability of being a [good] boyfriend reaches maximum. (*zheli nuoyi nanyouli max*, “这里诺一男友力 max”)

[04:07] Feels like watching an idol drama. (*yizhong ouxiangju de feel*, “一种偶像剧的 feel”)

[04:31] Help! Someone’s abusing dogs! [Font colour: red] (*lai ren a, you ren zai nue gou*, “来人啊，有人在虐狗”)

[04:31] This is not just cruelty to dogs. It’s caninicide!!!! (*zhe bushi nue gou shi sha gou a!!!!*, “这不是虐狗是杀狗啊！！！！”)

[04:31] No big deal. Don’t bug me while I’m chowing down on my dog food. (*duo da shier a, bie danwu wo chi gouliang*, “多大事儿啊，别耽误我吃狗粮”)

The fanvid selects scenes portraying interactions between Nuoyi and Xia Tian as they do missions together, talking, hugging, smiling and laughing. The imagined “young love” between two children attracts many viewers to the show. Since in the Chinese language, “dog” can be a term of abuse for those of low status or less importance, “single dog” as an Internet meme has become a term through which fans display admiration of romantic relationships in a self-deprecating way. Marcella Szablewicz (2014) argues that self-mocking memes have become popular recently in Chinese online space due to public awareness of unequal income status and social class. Many Chinese netizens’ attribute the status of being single to little or no income, unattractive physical appearance, or poor conversational skill. In this quoted fannish

³⁰ Some single youth mock themselves as “single dogs”. In this example, “dog” specifically refers to the single individuals.

text, as discussed in section 2.2.2, fans pay attention to the interaction between characters and develop it with supplementary materials such as stories, images and video clips from other media products. The meme “single dog” here and its spirit of self-depreciation exaggerate the imaginary relationship between the two children, while also reflecting best wishes to them, suggesting a hope that they can “maintain such a pure and innocent connection rather than a real romance at this age”, as the video clip’s creator Nisan says.

From the perspective of form, most of these quoted comments are set to centre alignment with colours such as red and pink, and several are mixed with emoji and emoticons. Such a configuration represents and emphasises fans’ appreciation and admiration of the imagined “sweet” relationship. Therefore, the use of the meme “single dog” offers appreciation of the two children as well as self-mockery, and then becomes the main theme of real-time feedback as well as the entire production. Such memetic phrases can be easily found in other fannish texts of a similar theme.

The author Nisan creates subtitles with a fan-fictional narrative rather than the lyrics of the song when she is making the fanvid. The very first lines of the subtitles describe girls’ expectations of a boyfriend: “In fact I prefer someone modest, yet he is not that type (*qishi wo geng xihuan wenzhong dian de ke ta que bushi nazhong leixing de*, 其实我更喜欢稳重点的 可他却不是那种类型的).” This portrays a gender norm for boys/men in Chinese society: girls prefer boys who do not speak or express personal feelings much but rather do things quietly. According to this normative definition, it seems that Nuoyi may not be the first choice for girls as he speaks a lot and without regard on many occasions. But later the fanvid showcases some of Nuoyi’s good qualities such as caring for people and being concentrated on his interests in Chinese traditional novel *Journey to the West*.

This fanvid edits together all the scenes in which Nuoyi and Xia Tian hug during the chorus of the song. The third screenshot in Figure 30 illustrates some of the emotions at play. In this scene, the girl Xia Tian is crying badly as she confronts a series of difficulties while completing the children’s mission. Seeing Xia Tian crying, the boy Nuoyi, who is quite talkative in the entire show, seems very worried. He hugs the crying girl and tries to comfort Xia Tian with the limited words “it’s OK, take my shoulder (*haole baobao*, 好了 抱抱)”. This scene arouses (mostly female) fans’ sympathy for Xia Tian, because a cute boy takes what the fans see as

appropriate actions when a girl is crying. For many fans, this scene is a sweet rehearsal of heterosexual relationships. Therefore, a flying comment says Nuoyi is being a very good “boyfriend”, followed by another comment claiming that “it feels like watching an idol drama” in which audience can find idealised relationships.

Where Are We Going, Dad? fans also explore the representation of masculinity by normalising the expectation of femininity. As Figure 27 shows, some fans circulate the celebrity boy Kangkang’s words while being asked what kind of girl he likes:

“Being gentle equals a status of peace, and means staying quiet, just like a calm duckling.”

From Kangkang’s description, we can see that he grows up in a cultural environment where girls are supposed to be quiet and subordinated. Notably, Kangkang is considered to present some quality of preferred masculinity – sober, modest, and doing thing silently – and these qualities are appreciated among *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans. The preferred forms of masculinity and femininity inform each other and are circulated by fan productions, especially those involving celebrity children, which represent a powerful and unique element of Chinese Web 2.0 fandom.

5.4 The complexity of fan identity

Through interpersonal activities and creative practices, fans occupy the central position during the formation of online fandom. In social media, they show great enthusiasm and motivation in terms of content consumption, fan productivities and practices such as discussions and debates. All these activities constitute a participatory culture driven by amateurs, and these amateur fans thus have a certain “power”. In this section I examine the Web 2.0 fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* from three perspectives – gender, the appeal of celebrity, and cultural citizenship.

5.4.1 Gendered consumption of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*

Female members take a larger part in fan communities as well as my interviews, playing an important role in developing the fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, although interestingly, in my observation in the fan community “Baba Qunaer Kangnuo Ba”, male fans

seemed more open to talking in relatively close fan circles. It is worth noting that relatively more male fans, in comparison to male interviewees, were present in the two online spaces where I conducted observation, although female fans still performed more actively there. In interviews, several fans indicated that a main reason for male fans being less willing to share their ideas about this parenting-themed show is the close connection between conceptions of femininity and a desire to pair or “ship” characters, which is regarded as a major form of fan behaviour.

Shipping has gradually become a popular activity in Chinese fandom. The practice not only allows fans to construct daydreams, in which they express dissatisfaction about the official arrangement of their favourite characters and negotiate with the original texts, it also offers a strong sense of “participation” to fans, particularly with the help of social media and more user-friendly software and applications. In the Web 2.0 era, people can readily find fannish texts online about the characters and the actors/actresses who play these roles, and social media services make sharing information easier. As a result, fans can find material that they may not have been familiar with before or that provide new surroundings for their fannish work, and can then insert their favourite characters or actors/actresses into fantasy settings, and thus create new meanings. Character pairing, therefore, “allow[s them to take part in such] imaginary participation” (Rose, Wood, 2005, p. 290) In interviews, some of my informants described how gender relates to practice in the online fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*:

Ying: The theme of the show is the growth of father-child relationships during a series of missions. So I think it primarily targets female viewers, who may have greater interest in looking at male celebrities taking care of their children.

Nisan: In my opinion, this [focusing on pairing within fandom] is the main reason why male fans are not as visible as female fans. Don’t you think [imagined] character pairing is a bit girlish?

LL: Some of us [fans] ship the characters the way we used to play “house” in childhood.

The idea that women should take care of the family has been rooted in Chinese culture for long but is widely confronting challenges as a result of economic, political, and social

factors. *Where Are We Going, Dad?* suggests that men should also play an indispensable role in parenting, and some fans believe the programme tries to change the long-existing ideology that it is primarily women's job to take care of children. The fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* offers an opportunity for women to engage in a participatory culture and enjoy gazing at male celebrities doing "women's" work, albeit in an imaginary way. Furthermore, since fans can manipulate the characters during shipping activities, taking part in character pairing in fan communities or on social media platforms becomes a means of practicing their gender roles.

5.4.2 Celebrities as primary appeal

While gender differences may lead fans to varying preferences for characters in the show, one area all my fan informants shared was interest in its celebrities. Because *Where Are We Going, Dad?* features interactions between five (sometimes six) celebrity fathers and their children as they fulfil tasks together in each episode, celebrities become the primary appeal of the show.

Kevin: I have only watched Season 3. That became my favourite because I think Nuoyi is really cute, and his behaviour and words are really awesome and often heart-warming.

Ying: Honestly, I didn't pay much attention to the first two seasons. I'm a fan of Liu Ye. I like his performance in films, and he is very nice to his fans in daily life. I knew that he would participate in the third season from the beginning when the show was producing it. Then I started to watch Season 3 from its first episode and later also became a fan of Kangkang, as the boy can be quite charming when he takes care of other little kids.

Nisan: I like the show because the celebrity children in this season (Season 3) are really cute, [relatively] more mature than the kids in previous seasons and heart-warming... I particularly like Xia Tian, and admire the way [her father] Xia Keli talks to her.

In interviews, almost all informants connected their motivation for watching *Where Are We Going, Dad?* to its celebrities and their children, and more specifically their cuteness, skills and personalities. Many of my informants acknowledge that the celebrity families represent

social values (e.g. benevolence, hard work, tenacity and optimism) and lifestyle (e.g. Xia Keli's parenting), and watching how the celebrities represent values and lifestyle itself becomes part of the show's appeal.

Some participants note that enthusiasm motivates fans to organise and/or participate in online and offline activities, to seek information in relation to their favourite celebrities, and to acquire skills to produce and share their own works. Such enthusiasm can originate from appreciation or love of the celebrities on *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, their appearance, behaviour or attitudes shown on screen, or what the celebrities did previously in their careers.

Yashan: Fans engage in all kinds of fannish behaviour because they feel love (有爱, *youai*) [to the celebrities]. Nobody becomes [fanatic] like that without such love ... Of course, the show itself is quite interesting in its story-telling and editing. You can clearly feel that the producers wish fans to engage online, and you would be willing to do so... I used to have difficulties with little kids... particularly when I tried to talk to them... But things changed. One day I just clicked to watch [the streaming of] *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, and suddenly I found them so adorable! ... [So] I didn't pay much attention to the celebrity fathers. I just like their children...

Nisan: I did those things (i.e. making video clips and posting them online) totally on the basis of what I like or who I like. For one thing, it is so hard to produce a fan vid; and I don't want to get involved in arguments online, which seems quite common on Weibo.

As the interviewees state, the celebrities themselves may be important for appeal to fans, but the format and father/child subject matter appears crucial. In Yashan's case, the father/child interaction in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* has changed her attitude towards children, whom she previously found a bit difficult to get along with. To Nisan, a skilful fanvid maker, the show's parenting theme provides a more secure opportunity to make video clips for (or to support) her favourite celebrities. Both Yashan and Nisan do not focus on the celebrities' personal characteristics but performative practices of being a parent, which I will discuss in later section (5.4.4).

While fans consume the "mediated" (Evans, 2005, p. 19) celebrities' performance in the reality show, they also take part in "a process of self-constitution, of enriching the self" (Elliott,

1999, p. 139). Elliott argues that in this process, fans fulfil their hopes or desires with imagination and fantasies, in which celebrities' admirable qualities can be transferred and projected onto fans themselves, making stars a kind of role model. For instance, Nisan notes that she has learnt a lot from the show and would like to raise her child as Xia Keli does on the show. Such projective identification is a deeper attraction for fans.

As discussed earlier in this chapter (5.2.2), the imagined connection exists not only between fans and celebrities, but also among fans themselves. Celebrities help fans "construct parasocial, imagined connections" to each other, through providing "spaces for projecting and evaluating schemas that make sense of human interaction" (Miller et al., 2001, pp. 174-175). This appeal of celebrity is expected to convey more values by Chinese social media fans and the particular social conditions of mainland China, which I discuss in the following sections.

5.4.3 Masculinity: A conversation between tradition and modernity

Gender issues, especially the masculinity that the celebrity fathers and boys show in the episodes, become a major theme in the *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom. Previously, in section 5.3.3, I explored how gender norms are portrayed in fans' creative works and strengthened by the use of memetic content. Looking at fans' understandings of gender and sexuality, I will now examine the connection between fan identity and the portrayal of masculinity in the television programme as well as in fannish texts.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, contemporary Chinese online fandom has developed from the reality television show *Super Girl* in 2005. In the same year, popular female contestants who demonstrated androgynous makeup, clothing, as well as body and verbal language on television sparked a wide social debate on sexuality. (Zheng, 2016, p. 352) The winner of the 2005 competition Li Yuchun received the nickname *Chun Ge* (春哥, Brother Chun).³¹ This nickname and the later catchphrase "*Chun Ge Chun Yemenr, Tiexue Zhen Hanzi* (春哥纯爷们, 铁血真汉子, lit. Brother Chun, a real guy, a true man of iron and blood)" started an on-going discussion on masculinity, and both were widely used by Chinese netizens at the time.

³¹ The nickname *Chun Ge* (春哥, lit. Brother Chun) selects one character *chun* (春) from her full name *Li Yuchun* (李宇春) and incorporates *Ge* (哥, lit. brother), a character which is used to call a boy or a man in modern Chinese language.

A decade later, such discussions on gender presented in media products and fannish texts have become inevitable in recent Chinese Web 2.0 fandom. But the focus in these discussions has been shifted from femininity to masculinity. When I interviewed my fan informants and asked how they perceived masculine images portrayed in the show, many fans compare the celebrity fathers in this reality show to other male stars in contemporary China.

Nisan: The qualities [in terms of sexuality] that Hu Jun and Kangkang show in this programme are too different from those of the TFboys [a popular Chinese boyband consisting of three adolescent boys at the time] ...

Kevin: I think this show is much better [in terms of guiding the audience to understand masculinity]. Now we have too many male stars with “feminine” style appearance, [including] hairstyle, makeup, clothing, and even the way they talk. We really need some “tough guy” images like Hu Jun and Zou Shiming.

PangPang: I’m not saying that we don’t need [diverse aesthetics such as] J-pop or K-pop style [male] idols, although some of them look really androgynous... I think Hu Jun is so cool and funny. He always performs calm and strong. In the meantime, he is very patient and strict with his son. At times I wish my partner would be that kind of man.

The quotes imply that Chinese entertainment media has been providing alternative representations in terms of sexuality, and androgynous image like Li Yuchun or TFboys is one such type. In fact, since female fans take a large part of Web 2.0 fandom, a number of male celebrities with androgynous appearance emerge in Chinese entertainment industry, who often trigger the social debate about masculinity as Li Yuchun did a decade ago. In this condition, “tough guy” images like Hu Jun (who is considered as a tough male image because he has acted many masculine characters in television dramas and films) and Zou Shiming (an Olympic champion in male boxing games) seems that the norms of hegemonic masculinity are reasserted, eliciting appreciation from fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*.

Both the “Chun Ge” memes and the “tough guys” in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom reflect the tension between hegemonic masculinity and other sexualities. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define “hegemonic masculinity” as the “currently most honoured” behaviour pattern of being a man in a society (p. 832). In the case of “Chun Ge”, critics of Li

Yuchun rejected alternative portrayals of femininity and tried to expel this female singer from the group of girls simply due to the girl's boy-like appearance. Here, fans celebrate the idea of "men being tough guys" in the *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom because of Hu Jun's tight-lipped personality and Zou Shiming's sportsman identity. The characters that Hu Jun has performed in other media products and Zou Shiming's career in boxing, a physically confrontational sport, reiterate this "hardcore" image. In this sense, fandom plays an effective role in circulating and normalising the hegemonic masculinity.

In the *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom, fans not only project their expectations of what an ideal man or boyfriend looks like onto the celebrity fathers but also onto boys. When I asked which child in this show impressed the fan interviewees most and why, I received many answers showing their admiration for Kangkang, even from those who are not his fans. More importantly, their reasons are largely connected to masculinity, although the boy was only 7 years old when he attended filming the show.

Leo: I like Kangkang above all others... He is happy to help other children and willing to lead and protect them in different missions. And he doesn't speak much. What he often does is just getting things done, alone or with his friends... He is a nice guy!

Lian: I pretty like Kangkang, a "*badao zongcai* (霸道总裁, lit. domineering CEO)". He always performs calm and doesn't speak a lot. His facial expression seems less than others and looks cool! He has a capability to lead and manage a team. He looks very serious but cares about everyone. In the end, boys and girls all like him.

Ying: I like the interaction between Kangkang and Xia Tian... Kangkang is so protective [to a girl]. And he takes care of many heavy works in his little team while completing missions... a real man just like his father [Hu Jun]. He is so capable to become an awesome boyfriend!

In these quoted answers, fans' expectation of masculinity becomes even more specific than when talking about the celebrity fathers. Some qualities regarding masculinity seem globally shared, such as leadership/management, and care and respect for girls/women. These values, as well as the term "domineering CEO" that Lian uses, can be connected to the modern institutions such as the company, and caring for girls/women can be traced back to the

European chivalry (Liang, 2015, p.109). It is worth noting that these qualities imply men's dominance over women as either being a "domineering CEO" or "caring" means men have more power than women in the social relationship. Meanwhile, some qualities are in line with traditional values of hegemonic masculinity, such as physical strength and, particularly in Chinese society, moderate (verbal or non-verbal) expression. The fan informants Leo and Lian position moderate expression above other qualities, and this perhaps reflects that Chinese fans are starting to look back at traditional values in terms of masculinity after years of discussion of hegemonic and alternative masculinities. In this sense, although diverse perceptions of gender and sexuality have become more accepted in recent years, the traditional orientation in this field is gaining a central position. This shift regarding gender and sexuality in fannish texts emerges in recent Chinese fandoms, but I suggest this may be related to changes in the economic, socio-historical and political context of China and that will be a much larger topic than Web 2.0 fandom. This "re-traditionalisation" worth exploration in future studies of Chinese media and society.

In the above quotes, moreover, Ying attributes Kangkang's "masculine" characteristics to his father Hu Jun, giving rise to another important theme of this reality show, parenting, which I discuss in the next section.

5.4.4 Parenting theme and cultural citizenship

Although the format was purchased from South Korean producer MBC, *Where Are We Going, Dad?* is well locally adapted and produced in China. By demonstrating how celebrity fathers take care of their children (as well as themselves) in challenging but often entertaining surroundings, the show spotlights the topic of parenting, particularly a father's role in parental care, in Chinese society. How *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans recognise and interpret the theme of parenting as well ideas about family relations reflects an important aspect of cultural citizenship.

As Murdock (1999) notes, cultural citizenship emphasises on how people represent and negotiate with cultural difference through media and popular culture, "which people utilize to make sense of their lives and social positions" (de Bruin, 2011). In *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, cultural difference is represented in aspects ranging from ethnicity, language, and custom to food and accommodation. For most of my fan informants, however, the biggest

cultural difference between celebrity families and audience is how celebrities of different background communicate with their children and care for them.

Kevin: The celebrity fathers take care of their children so differently... I like how Xia Keli talks with his daughter Xiatian. He never simply tells Xiatian what she should and should not do, or what is absolutely right or wrong. Instead, he guides his daughter to think over the issues [when Xiatian meets challenges in the games, or has frictions with other kids]. And he is always patient.

Nisan: Liu Ye seems really carefree, and that's why he often performs like a big boy... You can see how helpless he was when their journey begins, and how the father-son relationship gets better and better as the show continues.

Ying: I think a few celebrity families demonstrate modern parenting ideas to the viewers... [while] the way Lin Yongjian teaches his son is quite traditional, like how typical Chinese parents act with their kids. That sometimes reminds me of my childhood.

Most of my fan interviewees express their opinions about the parenting skills of the celebrities and the father-child relationships in the show. They notice that the celebrity fathers love their children in very different ways, and often compare the celebrities' parenting. In doing so, fans come to have a better understanding of how to be a good parent and, more specifically, the role of the father. Hermes (2004) points out that media and popular culture offer usable stories to help audience members develop their individual personality. *Where Are We Going, Dad?* designs a series of challenging tasks in each episode, such as looking for accommodation, acquiring food ingredients, and helping local communities in rural or remote areas. These tasks, as well as some recreational activities, create opportunities for the celebrities and their children to cooperate with each other, to deepen parent-child relationships and to develop friendships with other celebrity families. For fans, the stories in the show not only offer material for making fannish texts but vivid instructive examples of parenting skill.

In the quote from Ying above, she recalls her childhood when she views the interaction between Lin Yongjian and his son. Several fans like Ying reflect upon their own childhood when they watch the show.

Ying: I remember how Lin Yongjian left Dajun (Lin's son) alone once, and Dajun was so scared and helpless. That was so sad... I reckon a lot of people had similar experiences in the childhood.

Leo: I was told not to do this or that quite often when I was a little kid... [However, most] celebrity fathers give their children guidance rather than orders [as what I experienced] in the show.

Naonao: My parents taught me quite differently from [how Xia Keli taught] Xia Tian, but I will take care of my child in the way [of Xia Keli] in future.

While discussing and evaluating the celebrities' parenting skills, fans naturally connect the stories in the show to their own experiences because this process helps develop individual personality and deepen self-understanding, as discussed above. But many fan interviewees also mentioned that they intend to become parents like some of the celebrities that they admire, such as Xia Keli and Hu Jun. Such statements perhaps echo what Stuart Hall calls "fictional rehearsal" in which "citizens evaluate characters' behaviour in media texts in relation to what they themselves would do in a similar situation" (de Bruin, 2011, p. 87). Moreover, for some fans *Where Are We Going, Dad?* provides an opportunity to look back at their own childhood and to think about how a particular experience at a young age can affect later personality. As Ying implies above, such recollections may be not as sweet as the show portrays, and there is no way to change the past. Therefore, some fans try to learn from celebrity role models in the hope that they will acquire better parenting skills with their own future children. Thus fans engage in a "fictional rehearsal" of parenting.

Lian: One thing in *Where Are We Going, Dad?* that I find really touching is the father-kid bedtime conversations after a long day. The celebrity fathers always praise their kids for what they do well in fulfilling the tasks or playing games, and sometimes summarise what they do wrong and guide the kids to think about the reasons and better solutions. And the kids become more open in expressing their love and opinions to dads. You can feel the development of the father-child relationship and the kids and the fathers getting more mature episode by episode.

When I asked my interviewees what aspect of the show impresses them the most, many offered answers are in relation to the growth of the father-child relationship. Lian, for example, describes how she likes the father-child communication. Such communication is

built upon an equal position between father and child, with expressions of mutual love. This is significant in the context of Chinese society, which has traditionally emphasised that parents should not praise the merits of their children, even when their children grow up and have their own families, and that children should not point out the fault of parents,³² which runs counter to the values displayed on the show. Although such Confucian family etiquette has been being modified to conform to social developments, its intrinsic spirit continues to be passed on and influence family values in Chinese society. However, some traditional values are challenged by China's modernisation, which no longer aligns easily with current family relationships. Fathers nowadays often spend much more time on work than on family, leading to a weak and sometimes even non-existent father-child relationship. As Wu Jia and Zhang Junsen argue (2017), many parents in the People's Republic of China migrate for work from rural areas to urban cities, and the parents' absence results in a significantly weaker parent-child relationship and unhappy childhood for the left-behind children in rural China. Even in urban areas, many parents (particularly fathers) have to work overtime and arrive home late, meaning their children do not have much time with their parents. Under such circumstances, the equal and friend-like bond between fathers and children on the show is moving for many members of the audience and helps increase the show's popularity in China.

5.5 Conclusion

In contemporary China, the growing use of social media platforms has changed not only the way in which fans consume popular media products but has also generated a power imbalance in online fan subculture. The Web 2.0 fandom of the reality show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* exemplifies Chinese youth's interaction with themselves as well as celebrities, the development of fans' understandings of themselves and, further, fans' interactions among themselves and with practitioners in the entertainment industry. Via diverse Internet services ranging from microblogging to socialised online forum and video sharing, fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* create, circulate and consume fannish texts that are always in a "continuing process of revision and development" (Bruns, 2013). These fan-produced texts

³² This idea comes from *The Book of Rites*, or *Liji* (礼记), a classic which belongs to the core of the traditional Confucian canon. The original phrasing is *Fu Buyan Zi Zhi De, Zi Buyan Fu Zhi Guo* (父不言子之德, 子不言父之过).

convey “social expectations, emotional investments, and cultural transactions” (Jenkins, 2013), and therefore help fans establish interpersonal connections on social media.

Notably, the consumption of the *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom reproduces some Chinese gender norms and hegemonic masculinity. Although female fans dominate the production of fannish content, many creative texts reflect and reiterate preferred masculinity (e.g. being sober, strong-minded, caring and modest) that a traditional heterosexual relationship values in Chinese society. Additionally, the fan interactions within online community also represent the gender dynamics – while male fans are objectified by female community members, they still can take a sense of advantage by blurring the boundary between online and offline experiences.

Analysis of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* has thus provided new insight into the dynamics of online fandom in China’s social media sphere by examining, first, how digital media Web 2.0 features facilitate the growth of social media fandom in China; second, how fan-made texts are structured and developed in order to add new value to the original texts; how the representation of gender emerges from, functions in, and influence fan practices; and fourth, how *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans connect the show, the celebrity culture and cultural citizenship. While the reality show is a Chinese adaptation of a South Korean programme, it does not fully adopt the mode of the original South Korean version; rather, it tries to attract fans to engage in online discussions about the celebrities and children who participate in the episodes and arouse people’s acknowledgment of Chinese identity as well as modern parenting methods. The show and fan practices surrounding it help audiences to negotiate gender roles with mainstream ideology and to achieve alternative understandings of parent-children relation and, eventually, to connect themselves with family and contemporary society.

Chapter 6. Chinese online fandom and BBC crime drama

Sherlock

6.1 Introduction

BBC's crime drama *Sherlock* has attracted fans from all over the world, including China. In this chapter I investigate how Chinese *Sherlock* fandom is manifested on local social media platforms, and explore the connection between fans' participatory practices and how they view themselves. Through analysing data collected from interviews and online observations, this case study considers three aspects of Chinese social media fandom: fan-platform interaction, fan-made texts and fan identity in the context of Web 2.0 fandom. The discussion of these three aspects reveals that *Sherlock*, as an imported Western media product, prompts Chinese fans to engage with fannish texts to better understand the stories; and accordingly, fans acquire, improve and show off their skills in making fannish texts, not only to consume the episodes, but also to demonstrate new fans how to participate in fandom. Moreover, Chinese social media facilitate the production and spread of fan-participated translation, which not only helps bridge the language and cultural gap between *Sherlock* texts (the BBC TV episodes and original novel) and Chinese fandom but also connects different types of *Sherlock* fans online.

BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-) is a modernised adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective stories. It is set in the present, but some elements, such as names, personal characteristics and evidential details, from the original Sherlock Holmes stories are retained. The entire series includes four seasons, one mini-episode (available on Chinese video streaming sites as well as on-demand TV channels) and one special episode released in Chinese cinemas. Using online sources, Chinese fans of British drama first translated and introduced *Sherlock* when its first season aired in the UK in 2010. In December 2011, the DVDs of *Sherlock* Season 1 were officially released in China, over one year after its original airing in the UK ("Shentan Xialuke", 2011). The second season was imported in the form of DVDs in July 2012, about a half year after its airing in the UK ("Xinshiji Fuermosi", 2012). As a result of the overwhelming

popularity of the two seasons, *Sherlock* was mentioned as an example of transcultural communication by former British Prime Minister David Cameron and Chinese President Xi Jinping during mutual diplomatic visits. The later episodes became available on Chinese video streaming sites and in Chinese cinemas almost simultaneously as in the UK. Thanks to easier access to the copyrighted video content, the entire series grew into a noteworthy phenomenon in China.³³

In the meantime, fan-subbed episodes have been produced and circulated online since the first episode aired in the UK in 2010. These fansub groups immediately translated and subtitled these first series episodes into Chinese by as soon as they were broadcast in the UK. A fansub group (*zimuzu*, 字幕组) is a particular type of fan community. According to Dingkun Wang and Xiaochun Zhang (2017), as well as my interviews and observation, fansub groups are generally composed of fans of a foreign TV programme or film who have mastered either sufficient language skills to translate foreign texts into Chinese or other video production skills such as editing and programming. Such active fans of *Sherlock* have brought this TV drama to Chinese audiences before its official importation and laid a foundation for its later popularity there.

A difference between the Chinese and western audiences for *Sherlock* deserves comment. Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock* stories are established on the Western culture, with which most Chinese audiences are not familiar. Meanwhile, although the *Sherlock* stories were introduced into China decades ago and the names of Sherlock Holmes and Dr John Watson have long been widely known among the Chinese, many audience members of the BBC series have either not read the original stories or remember few details from the stories. In other words, the culture difference between China and the West results in the different socio-cultural context of Chinese and Western *Sherlock* fandom.

³³ Watching the copyrighted *Sherlock* series online is free on Youku and Tencent Video (Chinese video streaming sites that bought the franchise from the BBC) unless members of the audience wish to catch up to the latest episodes' air schedule in UK. Therefore, a great majority of the shows *Sherlock* audience do not need to wait for official DVDs or go underground to look for illegal video copies.

Similar to my previous case study of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, my research on *Sherlock* consisted of three phases: searching for fan texts on Weibo, interviews, and observation. I first searched fannish texts on Weibo to find appropriate content for analysis and potential participants for the case study. After obtaining consent from participants whom I found through this Weibo search and their referrals, I carried out thirteen effective interviews. During my initial search and interviews, I also found one online fan community and obtained permission to do observation within it in order to collect more data. When my interviews and observation were finished, I analysed the data collected from these different phases and categorised participants' discourse. My findings from these interviews and the observation provide detailed insight into the complexity of fan culture in China.

In the following sections, I explain how *Sherlock* fandom on Weibo and WeChat emerges, the ways in which fans connect with each other through social media, and the patterns of fan-platform interaction. In doing so, I also investigate how Chinese *Sherlock* fans establish fan culture and what role social media plays in maintaining a continuous transcultural fandom of *Sherlock* over several years. Unlike *Where Are We Going Dad?*, which is a locally produced reality show, *Sherlock* is an imported media product, and fans enhance their understandings of *Sherlock* through consuming translated episodes, original novels, and western fans' creative work. Fans discover, circulate and produce texts relating to *Sherlock* on Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili. Accordingly, I analyse the fandom on these platforms from three perspectives: the social media that fans use, fannish texts, and fan identities.

6.2 Linkage between multiple platforms: Fan-platform interaction

Over the past several years, socio-technological developments such as the rise of social media have influenced fan practices (Hills, 2013). The first season of *Sherlock* was introduced in 2010, when Sina Weibo led the growth of Chinese social media and experienced an enormous increase in its user base. In the meantime, peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing services such as BitTorrent and eMule and subtitle sharing sites (e.g. shooter.cn, which was forced to close by Chinese government in 2014 due to its spreading of unauthorised Chinese subtitles for foreign

movies and TV shows) also became popular, and millions of fans found content they were interested in on these platforms. Through these technologies, fans have been engaging in participatory practices regarding *Sherlock* and have spread different types of related texts online. Social media and online downloading have allowed audiences to reach translated episodes, facilitated fans to further discuss and engage with fannish production, and thus provided a basis for fannish practices about *Sherlock* and popularisation of its episodes.

Since most fans use Weibo and Tieba to find news and texts related to *Sherlock* and watch fanvids on Bilibili, the interaction of Chinese *Sherlock* fans with these platforms is largely similar to that of fandom for *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, particularly in its use of multiple platforms for different purposes. But some patterns of media use differ with *Sherlock*. In the next section, I investigate how *Sherlock* fans interact with social media platforms, particularly Weibo, WeChat and Baidu Tieba, based on interviews and observation in Juanfuba, a Tieba-based fan community.

6.2.1 Multi-platform practices based on affordance

Although social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, globally, or Weibo in China connect a lot of fan-produced contents, fans still choose a variety of platforms for different fannish practices. For instance, they log in to Bilibili to watch fan-made videos and their featured comments and use Baidu Tieba to discuss specific topics with other fans. In this way, they enjoy different types of fannish texts with people who have similar tastes, while the fans can also be categorised by these differentiated spaces.

[Question: What platforms do you use for *Sherlock* fandom? How do you use them?]

Chuxia: At first, I followed a fanfic sharing site... which is quite influential among slash fans. I follow producers of fannish texts on Weibo to see what they have updated recently, because these authors usually are in your circles... I also watch fanvids on Bilibili, which has many fan-made music video... but I don't post anything in relation to fandom on WeChat.

Lian: I primarily use Weibo [to engage in *Sherlock* fandom]. Until now I have used Weibo more than WeChat [to do so]... I got to know some fans and joined some communities originally through Weibo, and then reached them on WeChat if they have WeChat accounts. But I don't talk much in WeChat groups.

Wei: I go to Weibo and Tieba to see updated fan productions when I follow up on new episodes. I send out my own opinions about *Sherlock* on Weibo... On Tieba I just look at what other fans are talking about... Sometimes I look for fanvids on Bilibili. Interacting with the flying comments while watching videos is really fun.

[Question: How about Tieba?]

Chuxia: No, I haven't created a new topic on a Tieba forum related to *Sherlock*.

The interviewees all outline their practices on Weibo, including discovering fannish texts and their creators, and posting opinions about episodes. Their experience of Tieba seems similar, yet none of them mention posting on Tieba in these quotes and Chuxia gives a negative answer to my question of whether she has started a discussion on Tieba. In Chapter 4, I discussed the features and affordances of Weibo and Tieba and noted that Weibo features a 140-character limit while Tieba does not. Weibo, as a microblogging service, is designed for mobile users, while Tieba derives from earlier conventional online fora. Therefore, Weibo has offered the affordance of immediacy from the beginning, but Tieba does not. In other words, fans can discover interesting content and update posts on Weibo much more rapidly than in a Tieba forum, although both offer powerful search tools.

My interviewees also mention their experience of using WeChat and make comparisons with Weibo in talking about social media, because WeChat and Weibo are the most popular platforms in China and most commonly used by fans. But contrary to their passion for Weibo, very few of my informants update fannish texts on WeChat (specifically WeChat Moments) due to concerns about privacy and their broader social image.

Naonao: I don't post much fandom-related content on WeChat Moments... I think showing off my fan identity is not such a good thing.

Since WeChat contacts rely on existing offline social networks, interviewees worry about social tags that might be generated in posting fannish texts in front of their families, supervisors and companions. In this sense, fans become very cautious when they post on WeChat Moments, as I discuss previously in section 3.4.3.

6.2.2 Online resources, offline practices

In contrast to *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans, fans of *Sherlock* tend to talk about the series and its characters with friends in everyday life rather than with people on Weibo or Tieba. During the process of Weibo searches, I found a number of people debating about celebrities or celebrities' work. While I was expecting my interview participants to talk a great deal about their online conversations with other *Sherlock* fans on Weibo, the result of interviews was surprising: few discuss *Sherlock* with other Weibo users.

Lian: I used to talk with my friends (who produce some fannish work) through QQ (a Chinese instant messaging service) or on the phone ... I see some Weibo posts about *Sherlock* occasionally, but few discuss the show in depth. My followers don't mention that in online conversations now. *Sherlock* may not be a popular topic until the new episodes are released.

Wei: I don't talk much on Weibo, but I often search for related information. I don't post anything in relation to *Sherlock* on WeChat Moments either. I mostly talk about *Sherlock* slash and fan fiction with my friends on the phone.

Although these fans mention using Weibo to find news and fan-made texts, Weibo plays the role of a search engine that specialises in user-generated content for them rather than a platform for them to communicate with other fans. Many Chinese *Sherlock* fans share, discover, and participate in discussion about the drama on social media, and their Web 2.0 engagement contributes resources for expanding fandom. According to Mittell's (2015) definition of centripetal complex model, television shows have inward storytelling narratives if there is a scale limit in terms of both characters and scenario. BBC's *Sherlock* seems more centripetal, in this sense, because fans primarily trace its storytelling back to Sir Conan Doyle's

original novels and, of course, some fans crossover Sherlock fandom with other well-known products such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* stories. In other words, the locally produced *Where Are We Going, Dad?* allows fans' expansion on the basis of the projection of cultural familiarity, whereas *Sherlock* episodes do not allow this same expansion.

On the other hand, my informants' offline practices with their friends in relation to the slash texts suggests that fans frequently have conversation about deeper or more sensitive topics with people they know very well, who might be classmates or trusted online friends within the same fan communities. Those with whom my fan informants discuss the slash texts often share similar background knowledge and tastes.

Wei: These [Boy Love stories] are nothing surprising... Usually I [as a fan] like [the celebrities and their work] quietly...and only talk [about slash or Boy Love texts] with close friends [whom I know in person].

As such quotes suggest, fan informants emphasise the importance of offline conversation, particularly when the topic of such conversation is about slash texts of *Sherlock*. Given the demographic characteristics of my participants, I propose that this result can be related to the slash genre as well as other aspects of fan identities, such as age and education. Most participants in my interviews are in their twenties and are completing or have completed undergraduate education; some are now in postgraduate programmes. They appear quite relaxed and confident in video interviews and at times answer questions with abstract concepts or terms. Some of my fan informants who have accumulated several years of working experience are particularly open-minded in talking about fan behaviour and online debates. This high level of educational background suggests that Chinese fans of *Sherlock* often have broader internet access (e.g. a VPN to reach web resources blocked by the Great Firewall) and good knowledge of English, but also suggests a distinction among classes or at least tastes in general social media fan culture.

Admittedly, offline interactions with other fans, who are mostly friends in everyday life, is important; however, these interactions are not the entire story. Fan-produced texts on social

media record a massive amount of fan-platform interactive data, which reflect perceptions and tastes about who or what fans are interested in. I discuss these texts in the next section.

6.3 Fannish texts and globalisation

As Jenkins points out, textual poaching is a common fan practice, especially in a Web 2.0 context where media and information become immersive. Fans therefore can pick up readily available texts or information to create new meanings with novel use of such material. Social media platforms, meanwhile, facilitate the circulation and reproduction of fannish texts. Through drawing upon notions of textual poaching and collective intelligence, I investigate the role textual poaching plays in the production and consumption of fannish texts in a postmodern context. Drawing on Jenkins's research about *Star Trek* slash fiction (2006a) and Allington's study on *The Lord of the Rings* bromance fan fiction (2007), I also explore why male-male romance has become a major aspect of Chinese *Sherlock* fandom, by additionally following the approaches via which Mizoguchi (2003), Nagaike (2003), Saito (2011) investigate Japanese *doujinshi* culture.

6.3.1 Multiple strands of Chinese fandom

Chinese fandom of the *Sherlock* TV series demonstrates a complex structure of textual poaching, which brings together a variety of texts, diverse personal tastes of fans, and multiple cultural origins for fan practices. Various media texts as well as new phrases and terms have become visible on internet as Chinese fans have developed fan culture. When consuming texts, Chinese fans use concepts and loanwords derived from different cultures to describe their fannish practices and further establish their identity. In mentioning numerous terms in relation to fandom, my informants demonstrate the multiple origins of fannish ideas.

Lian: When the official producers didn't give the audience a very clear representation [of the tight connection between Sherlock and John] in the beginning [of the series], "Tongren" fans were very keen to look for tiny clues from all kinds of texts [including original episodes and other media texts in which Benedict Cumberbatch

plays a role]. Then they could create fannish work based on their own interpretations and compilations [of fannish material]. But when the episodes' representation of the Holmes-Watson relationship became pretty straightforward, there was, well, little room for such creation... we (fans) often discuss the original stories, bring up ideas from other sources, and go to other texts to find materials.

Chuxia: There are so many types of fan fiction, ranging from interpreting or rewriting the plot, alternative universe stories, and developing BL (boy's love) stories, to crossovers.

Before discussing fan poaching of material to produce fannish texts, it is worth noting that Chinese fans often use the word *tongren* to refer to fan fictional productions including articles, pictures, video clips, music and video games. The term represents the Mandarin reading of Japanese *doujin* (同人) and was introduced from Japan by Chinese anime fans. The phrase literally means "same person", that is a like-minded individual, and refers to a group of enthusiasts who share similar habits, interests and goals in doing something together. The term is now particularly applied to fan-fiction creations based on Japanese anime, manga, video games and light novels. Chinese fans borrowed this term to specify fandom that focuses on the production of fan fictional texts, particularly those that portray male-male character pairings in media products, and those who are fond of such texts. In the quotes above, Lian uses *tongren* to refer to *Sherlock* fan-fictions, while Chuxia adopts the more western phrase "alternative universe" to describe a genre of fan production.

Liang Tianming (1994) points out that in China, fans used to be called *mi* 迷 (such as *yingmi* 影迷, lit. film fans of an actor, actress or director), a term that can be traced back to the 1920s when the Chinese film industry started to develop. According to Liang, Chinese fans in this phase simply expressed their appreciation, admiration and worship of famous actors or actresses (Liang, 1994, p. 7). From the late 1980s, however, the word *zhuixingzu* (追星族, lit. "star-chaser") began to be visible in news stories and academic researches due to the rapid growth of entertainment industry in Hong Kong and Taiwan (ibid.). The new word reflects how Chinese fans at the time started to have more conversations with their idols in the

context of China's reform and opening-up policy as well as the transition to a market economy. Liang (1994) argues that a fetishism exists among *zhuixingzu* that had not been seen before. A further new word, *fensi* (粉丝), emerged in 2004 when Hunan TV's reality singing show *Super Girl* (*Chaoji Nüsheng*, 超级女声) became a phenomenon in China (Tao, 2009). This show selected girl contestants from five regions in China for a singing competition, and it allowed audiences to vote for their favourite singers to compete in the next round of singing battle. This competition rule significantly empowered audiences and fans to support their preferred idols for the first time in China, and groups of fans were able to participate more directly in their consumption of celebrities.

The context of particular platforms that fans use helps the like-minded to learn about fan culture in different regions around the world. Participants in both of my case studies mention that they often view content on Bilibili.

Lju: I usually go to Bilibili to watch fan-made music video about *Sherlock*. Many fans share their work on that site.

Chuxia: I went to a few websites to check out if there is anything interesting related to *Sherlock*, such as fan fiction sites, Tieba, Bilibili, etc.

As discussed in Chapter Four, these flying comments create a more participatory space in which users can see others' feedback and freely add new layers of information themselves. Since the flying comments are visible to a communal audience, such practices should be considered as "textual productivity" (Fiske, 1992; Sandvoss, 2011; Hills, 2013). This feature has become the most attractive factor of the video sharing site. Although Bilibili has expanded its services to include material ranging from officially imported anime, music videos, TV episodes, documentaries to various fan-made video clips, it primarily offered fan-subbed Japanese anime when it was established in 2010 and therefore rapidly attracted young viewers interested in anime and Japanese popular culture more generally. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that Bilibili users have adopted Japanese fan culture to describe fan practices in China, and Japanese terms and ideas have gradually become popular, which will be exemplified in the following discussions.

In this area as well *Sherlock* fandom differs from fandom for *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, which, as a Chinese adaptation of a South Korean reality show, keeps the concept and production mode of the original but reflects Chinese culture. *Sherlock*, however, is set against the background of London and British culture, and the episodes are produced in English. The cultural and linguistic gap between Chinese audiences and the original texts forces fans to find more interpretations from other fans and consume more supporting information than the participants in the previous case study to understand both the original production and further fannish creations better. In this sense, many fannish texts about *Sherlock* interweave characters, stories and jokes from multiple sources such as drama, film, talk show, interviews and the content that the celebrities post on social media. In my interviews for the previous case study, fans' discussion about the reality show take a larger part than their engagement with fan fictions while answering my questions. In contrast, *Sherlock* fans are quite happy to talk about their experience of creating or consuming fan fictional texts, which take on greater significance than their understandings of the original episodes.



别夏_

+ 关注

14-8-11 01:07 来自 iPad客户端

在B站刷完第三季，快要变成腐女了好么😂卷福你要不要辣么萌啊喂！



Figure 31. A fan posts screenshots of *Sherlock* episodes on Bilibili with flying comments

Text translation:

Biexia_ : Just finished [watching] the third series, and am almost becoming a *funü* (腐女, lit. “female slash fan”), OK? 🤔 Juanfu (a nickname of Holmes given by the Chinese *Sherlock* fans), stop being so cute (*meng* 萌)!

In this excerpt of a Weibo post, the *Sherlock* fan uses terms derived from Japanese fan culture such as *funü* and *meng*. *Funü* (腐女) originates in the Japanese *fujoshi* (腐女子), which literally means “rotten girl” and is a self-mocking term made by Japanese female manga/anime fans who enjoy the romantic (sometimes even erotic) relationship between male characters. The word *meng* (萌) to describe cuteness comes from the Japanese *moe* (萌え). Similar terms in fan culture can be seen in online fandom, such as the aforementioned *tongren* (同人), *danmei* (the Mandarin reading of 耽美, pronounced *tanbi* in Japanese, which means fascinated by beautiful and romantic things and refers to Boy’s Love stories) and *zhai* (宅), a term borrowed from the Japanese *otaku* (お宅) to categorise enthusiastic fans of anime, manga, and video games. Chinese fans introduce these ideas by keeping and using the same hanzi/kanji characters to develop their own subculture. These anime/manga-related ideas have now become applied in China not only to Japanese media texts but in all kinds of media fandom.

In the above example, the fan shares three screenshots from *Sherlock* Season 3. The first screenshot is from the episode “The Sign of Three” which tells a story throughout the wedding of John and Mary. Sherlock is invited to be John’s best man and to deliver a speech for the ceremony. The screenshot captures the moment in which only Sherlock and John have shown up in this scene, along with fan flying comments in the Bilibili video play interface. This is an intriguing scene, as Sherlock wears the same suit as John and therefore allow fans to envision these two male characters are getting married if only looking at this picture instead of the full episode. Furthermore, the second screenshot, in which Sherlock and John are sitting together in a garden bench, and the third, which portrays Sherlock saving John, support the fan’s implication that Sherlock and John are marrying. The repetitive words *ruguo zhe dou busuan ai* (如果这都不算爱, lit. “if this were not love”) and *jiehunzhao* (结婚照, lit. “wedding photos”) in the flying comments on these screenshots also cheer for the bromance between the two characters. This excerpt of a fannish Weibo post thus displays a string of “proof” from both

original episodes and fan interpretations to imply that feelings that go beyond friendship or brotherhood between Sherlock and John.

As more Western media products and their surrounding fandoms have entered China, many local fans have adopted Western ideas and terms. Some of these ideas have been developed for decades, such as in the fandoms of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *Doctor Who*, and these fandoms differ from those in East Asia due to a different socio-cultural background. Meanwhile, the rapid growth of English speakers in China means that local fans can more easily find first-hand material from media products such as *Harry Potter* and BBC's *Sherlock* in global online fan communities and social media. Fans have started to produce crossover texts that combine characters from multiple media franchises (as in the example below).



今天和爷合照并搂搂抱抱了吗



15-3-12 05:41 来自 三星

#福华##卷福##sherlock##HP# 实在太萌😂！有个妹子评论说AU 就是她的生命。握手！AU的也许是毒枭警官梗？还有前世今生梗？生子梗😂 还有温馨的老年au 和hp学院啊！！画风爱惨！妹子我必须关注你🐱🐱😂



Figure 32. A fan on Weibo posts drawings created by other fans

Text translation:

JintianHeYeHezhaoBingLouloubaobaolema³⁴: #FuHua (“Holmes and Watson”)# #Juanfu (“Curly Holmes”)# #Sherlock# #HP (“Harry Potter”)# So cute (*meng*) indeed

😂! A girl makes a comment that AU (“alternative universe”) is her life. Handshake!

The AU stories can be based on the plot of “drug dealer and the police officer”? And

³⁴ The user ID “今天和爷合照并搂搂抱抱了吗 (*Jintian he ye hezhao bing louloubaobao le ma*) is a question meaning “have you had a photo and a hug with your dear?” The phrase teasingly suggests the intimate relationship between Sherlock and John.



“the past life and the present”? And “having a kid”? 🤔 And the very warm AU of the elder [characters] and the [Hogwarts] houses in the *Harry Potter* series!! I love the painting style! I have to follow you, girl 🐱🐱

The author of this Weibo post integrates phrases from different fandom origins and knowledge to declare her tastes and her fascination with fannish texts of the *Sherlock* alternative universe that mingle with the world of *Harry Potter*. The text of the post mixes hashtags, fannish slang, plots, Japanese-origin terms like *meng*, English abbreviations like “AU”, and emoji to showcase not only her understanding of *Sherlock* and *Harry Potter* stories but also the cultural capital she has accumulated. The string of hashtags allows other fans to find her post about the joy of discovering someone with similar tastes who potentially has noteworthy materials. The attached pictures are also interesting, collected as they are from multiple cultures that range from Japanese manga to western cartoons, comics and illustrations. Such hybrid textures can be observed across social media in fannish texts which convey many layers of meaning to showcase authorial skills and values.

6.3.2 Fannish texts as reflection of value

In interviews, many fans mention their fannish texts as entertainment, as an approach to understand the officially produced texts that are the object of fandom, and as a kind of self-reflection. As discussed in the previous section, such texts reflect their author’s taste, style and life experience. Through these texts, other fans see not only the creators’ interpretation of original episodes, but also glimpse their preferences and sometimes identities.

My observation also revealed interesting use of the British flag in *Sherlock* fandom. Since Sir Arthur Conan Doyle primarily set the *Sherlock Holmes* stories in London and the BBC’s TV series are produced in the UK, several fans use pictures of *Sherlock Holmes* (or actor Benedict Cumberbatch) in which the Union Jack flag takes a big part to demonstrate their affinity for the country, and their love for the series and/or the celebrity.



Figure 33. A fan on Tieba shares the home screen on his cell phone

The above image from a Tieba post encourages members of this community to showcase their desktop or home screen pictures. The fan who shared this screenshot set a big Union Jack with a sketch of Sherlock as the iPhone lock screen. Attaching the sentence “Believe In Sherlock”, the picture uses a dark, fresco-like tone to create a vintage texture, which evokes the crime theme and also expresses “coolness”. The picture has received many comments and likes, and the fan later shared the wallpaper with other members of this Tieba forum.

Likewise, a photo posted in the same forum shows Benedict Cumberbatch holding a UK Armed Forces Day flag in a public campaign. The top half of the flag that he holds evokes the Union Jack, while the lower half reads “ARMED FORCES DAY” and the “SHOW YOUR SUPPORT” in a similar colour scheme.



Figure 34. A Tieba post with a photo of Cumberbatch holding a British flag

Scholars such as Michael Billig reveal the tight connection between “flagging” in everyday life and nationalism (Billig, 1995). Billig points out that both the “waved” and “unwaved” flags play a major role in constructing national identity: while waving a flag plays a symbolic and signalling role, and calls conscious attention to the flag, an unwaved flag is habitual, routine, and often subconsciously present; “the remembering is mindless”, functioning while other activities are engaged consciously (Billig, 1995, p. 41). Although some “unwaved” flags have long been ignored, they still function as reminders of nationhood and imagined belongings. Both waved and unwaved national flags can be seen a declaration of cultural identity or political stance. To a non-British fan who lives far from the UK, the Union Jack here assists in demonstrating the fan’s background and personal interests. The above lock screen can be considered a powerful symbol declaring the fan’s affinity to British culture, as the flag is always “waving” when the screen is turned on and becomes a part of the fan’s everyday life. According to Sandvoss’ (2005) notion of fandom heterogeneity, some *Sherlock* fans have better access to and/or understanding of other cultures, such as participants Lian and Chuxia, who speak very good English and have studied abroad. Therefore in these fannish texts circulated in Chinese social media, the flags become a symbol that fans draw upon to tag themselves and declare their affinity for a foreign cultural sphere, and such actions can actually be more powerful than waving a flag, as Billig notes.

While pictures containing the British flag are quite visible online, in contrast, it is difficult to find similar fannish pictures that contain flags of China's near neighbours. Not once, for example, in the previous case study of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* did I come across a Chinese or South Korean flag during my Weibo searches even when fans explicitly compared the Chinese adaptation and the Korean original shows. This, I propose, reflects other aspects of Billig's theory, which argues that citizens are familiar with "flagging" within the social environment and they often operate "flagging" unconsciously. As he points out, flagging can be greatly affected by geopolitics. Due to the global prevalence of media texts in English, "waving" or "intentionally unwaving" a British flag in a fannish text may be a much more secure act than using a South Korean flag. After all, there has been much friction between China and the surrounding nations. And online debates between Chinese and South Korean netizens, two nations known for nationalist digital activism, have been particularly noteworthy. (Nanto, Chanlett-Avery, 2006; Swaine, 2017)

While a number of fannish texts outline fans' cultural affinities, slash or "BL" fictional work is another highly visible theme of Chinese *Sherlock* fandom that suggests other interests in media consumption. In my Weibo searches for fannish texts and observation, I frequently came across fannish texts commenting upon relationships between the major characters in the *Sherlock* series, a topic that some fans also discussed in interviews:

Lian: Looking at fan fiction written by my friends or those I've read, I think the "bromance" portrayed in most stories is an idealised male-female relationship. I guess there may not be so much entanglement in a real male-male relationship... [which] may not be that sensitive, probably?

Susu: [For many fans,] this kind of affective interaction [between Holmes and Watson] cannot exist in real life, therefore fans can only produce fiction through their imagination, well, creating some self-gratification... Most articles of character pairing seek a feeling or affection of "loving one forever", which should be irrelevant to whether the persons in that relationship are male or female.

These fans understand well that shipping in Sherlock fandom reflects fans' imagination of idealised relationships. Their shipping does not necessarily declare eager support for same-sex relationships in everyday life. Rather, many fannish texts like the below can be recognised as drawing upon more heteronormative desires about male-female relationships.



Figure 35. A fan drawing that crossovers *Sherlock* and *Harry Potter*

The Figure 35 above attached to a fannish Weibo post that I cited as an example in section 6.3.1 is a crossover practice that combines *Sherlock* characters and *Harry Potter* world settings (e.g. the black wizard robes, the magic wand on the ground, and Hogwarts-like Gothic campus building in the background). It portrays an alternative universe for Sherlock and John on a college campus while John, positioned to evoke a schoolgirl, kisses Sherlock. The composition

reflects a stereotype of the male-dominant heterosexual relationship: the more dominant character appears taller and his face is positioned slightly above to imply dominance. As Kumiko Saito (2011) notes, such narrative tactics can be considered as a reflection of conservative mainstream gender systems. Analysing *doujinshi* fan fiction, she proposes that most male-male relationships in fan-made BL stories include an active, or even aggressive, character and a relatively passive one, as female fan producers try to portray their understanding of an ideal romance relationship. This active-passive pairing, and thus can be seen as a simulation of traditional male-female romance, which reflects an idealistic relationship for some fans, who are most typically female. In this sense, therefore, no matter how the slash culture of media texts such as *Sherlock* differs from daily life, it is inadequate to assume that BL fan culture is meant as a genuine challenge to dominant heterosexual gender discourse.

6.3.3 BL fan fiction as manipulation

In analysing the terms that participants use to describe their engagement with fannish texts, it becomes evident that Chinese BL fandom draws significantly upon Japanese *doujinshi* culture, since many participants have experience with Japanese anime or manga. The two countries shared cultural similarities and linguistic cross-fertilization has had an impact upon slash fan culture as well. Thus, Japanese scholars' discussion of male-male romance in BL fictions has proved helpful to my research.

The below fannish text from Weibo consists of a hashtag, comment and pictures, demonstrating the fan's stance toward a pairing of Holmes and Moriarty.



捧咚杀世界

15-3-26 来自 微博 weibo.com

#福莫# 妈的这台词百搭。



75

10

53

Figure 36. A fan uploads fannish work

Text translation:

PengdongShaShijie: #FuMo (“Holmes and Moriarty”)# Damn, the line fits anywhere.

[Chinese subtitles:]

Moriarty: 全伦敦都知道 (Quan Lundun Dou Zhidao, “All London knows”)

你是我莫里亚蒂的男人! (Ni Shi Wo Moliyadi De Nanren, “You are the man who belongs to me, Moriarty!” or simply, “You are my man!”)

[The provided fan-made English subtitles:]

Moriarty: quan London dou know

I’m your man!

The pictures are a screenshot of a scene in which Holmes confronts Moriarty on the roof in the final episode of Season 2, but in the fan text subtitles as well as a blush effect on Sherlock’s

cheeks have been added. The editing attracts other fans to comment, forward and circulate this post. The fan-made English subtitles intentionally mingle incorrect translation with pinyin (i.e. the official Romanisation system for Mandarin Chinese in mainland China) for comic effect. The Chinese subtitles portray Moriarty angrily shouting that Sherlock belongs to him. However, the English subtitles swap the subject and object, and the scene becomes Moriarty claiming he belongs to Sherlock, with anger. This comic creation attracts 75 forwards, 10 comments and 53 likes on Weibo. Many Weibo users comment that the English subtitles are hilarious and that they really enjoy the unexpectedly “wonderful” translation. Meanwhile, some are provoked by Sherlock’s shyness in the third picture. It is difficult to tell whether these fans also noticed the use of English, as they evidently prefer to discuss the characters.

Slash is a popular theme in Chinese Sherlock fandom, yet some fans emphasise the boundary between fictional and real male-male relationship.

Lian: My friends and I reckon Sherlock and Moriarty fight each other because they attract each other. The two characters in the episodes are both smart and share similar personalities. For example, they both don’t like “meaningless” social norms in everyday life... I [am not a lesbian and] am not in a homosexual relationship, but I believe that real homosexual relationships should be different from how they are depicted in fan practices.

Fans like PengdongShaShijie and Lian who are fond of slash shipping may agree that a majority of such fannish texts depict active-passive relationships; however, the male characters in the above story occupy equal positions. As Saito (2011) points out with regards to Japanese *yaoi* fandom, gender impacts fans’ relationship to the mass media, connecting female BL authors’ identities as women and writers of fan fiction. Saito examines gender in BL fiction and argues that the bond between two (or more) male characters composes the central theme in these stories. Such bonds are primarily built on an equal relationship (e.g. close ability in battle or competition). Under this premise, the original relationship between two males “transforms into parodies that emphasize interactive psychological tactics to overcome and surpass each other” (Saito, 2011, p. 180) and matures into mutual affinity.

Some fans notice that the episodes have many clues that imply a potential romantic relationship between Sherlock and John, and those clues may guide people to create fannish texts.

Chuxia: Now the director [or producers] have understood that [the connection between male characters in a show can attract and entertain the audiences], so they consciously guide the audiences to such imaginings... But I think it's better for the official producers not to produce such [shipping] content intentionally to meet audience interests, otherwise it will be quite repulsive, like the recent *Sherlock* series.

In my interviews, many fans notice the dynamics between producers' intentions and their own observations in both the *Sherlock* episodes and the producer-fan interaction in social media. Daniel Allington (2007) argues that slash fiction reflects a complicated reception process of different discourses in his analysis of *Lord of the Rings* fan fiction. He argues that for many readers or viewers such textual consumption does not only need a long-term engagement with the text itself but also social interactions and subjective experiences, the latter in particular can help fans better understand and create a slash text. Chuxia also told me that she is experienced in finding foreign (primarily American, British and South Korean) episodes and often goes to slash fiction sites. She claims that many fans are fond of slash fiction that depicts relationships developing naturally, but that the recent *Sherlock* series sets up many unnecessary scenes to strengthen the looming bromance between Sherlock and John. To an extent, official texts now seem to rush to attract more fans, and some fans regard these official creators as "pandering" to the fan base. The episodes change the original narrative style of Conan Doyle's stories and the previous seasons and make modifications that are too obvious to fans, which weakens their "long-term engagement with the text" (Allington, 2007, p. 59). This is also the reason why some fans like Chuxia use the word "repulsive" to describe how they dislike producers pandering.

Researchers also point out that female fans of male/male fantasies enjoy the process of manipulation in empowering male characters to have such special relationships (Jenkins, 1992; Mizoguchi, 2003; Nagaike, 2003). Many female fans tend to consider participate in BL

fandom as an available, feasible and effective approach to reject the sexual oppression of males, to resist the subordinate status of females, and eventually to acquire equal discursive power in socio-cultural activities. Such an idea in fact does not contradict Saito's (2011) argument that many male-male fictions resemble an idealised male-female romance, because fan and official culture are always in a state of negotiation. In the case of *Sherlock*, BL fan fiction and official media collaboratively corrode the border between BL culture and mainstream discourse. These popular cultural productions increasingly adopt "slash-like relationships" in heterosexual romance (i.e., potentially romantic friendships based on matching abilities and competition), largely due to the visibility of slash/BL fannish work on social media platforms.

However, as researchers and fans widely agree, the characters in these stories do not accurately reflect the lives of gay men. Rather, they are mostly idealised female projections of desired romance. Notably, the sexual and domestic roles of these figures "are often constructed as masculine and feminine, and these roles are usually irreversible within the same story — although different writers may choose different pairings" (Saito, 2011, p. 184). In this case the norms and roles of heterosexual relationships still exist in the BL world.

6.4 Fans' skills, power, and fan identity

In the previous sections I have discussed what Chinese *Sherlock* fans consume and how they do so. In a way, their participation distinguishes this group of fans from other circles. In this section, I investigate three specific aspects of *Sherlock* fandom – skill in making fannish texts, "fansubs", fan interpretations – to understand how Chinese fans develop their fan identities.

6.4.1 Skill as a measurement of being a fan

As mentioned in the chapter introduction, the sociocultural context of Chinese *Sherlock* fandom differs from the West, and this context affects how Chinese audiences consume the BBC's episodes. The way in which Chinese fans engage with *Sherlock* texts probably echoes the research by Barker, Egan, Jones and Mathijs (2008), who analyse the pattern of audience

response to *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy on the basis of a worldwide audience survey and point to an obvious connection between the presence of Tolkien's books and audience response. In countries where the books have long been available, the film audience sees the Hollywood trilogy as a "spiritual journey". They enjoy the development of the LOTR story and following the characters on a journey to save Middle Earth. Audiences in countries where Tolkien's books are relatively new, however, pay more attention to how the film trilogy was produced and marketed. My research on Chinese *Sherlock* fandom suggests that although the *Sherlock* books were first translated into Chinese over a century ago, the presence of *Sherlock* stories is very limited. Therefore, the episodes encourage fresh and unfiltered engagement more than an observation of how well they capture the flavour of a beloved original text.

Under such circumstances, Chinese *Sherlock* fans need more cultural capital in relation to *Sherlock* for better understanding, and thus rely on fan activities and online productivities that bring about additional details to the episodes. In this way, fans' recognition of being a *Sherlock* fan is affected by online fan productivity.

Lian: I used to talk with my friends [who produce some fannish work] through QQ (a Chinese instant messaging service) or phone calls... now I see occasional Weibo posts talking about *Sherlock*, but few discuss the show in depth. My followers don't mention that in online conversation now. *Sherlock* may not be a popular topic until new episodes are released.

Chuxia: I'm not concentrating on this series now because I have been engaging in other fandom recently... After all each season of *Sherlock* only has three episodes, doesn't it? [For me,] it's very difficult to stick to one series when you often have to wait for one year and then you can watch only three episodes.

Lian indicates the connection between her fannish behaviour and other fans' productivities. The implication is clear: with the decrease of fan productivities, enthusiasm fades. Some fans stop thinking of themselves as fans of *Sherlock* or as "real fans", as some participants claim in the first case study on *Where Are Going, Dad?*, although the attention of some will probably return when new episodes of *Sherlock* are available in future.

Such reduction in enthusiasm is also visible in individual fans' everyday life and discussions on social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat. It is intriguing to note that fans' passion in online communities seems to be stable. Despite that some previously active fans like Lian and Chuxia shift their interests to other areas, the overall fannish interest of *Sherlock* maintains a relatively constant level due to continuous textual productivity in relation to the drama and/or its cast. Such fannish texts circulate within the community as "gifts" for exchanging and increasing its value (Terranova, 2000), which helps bond fellow fans.

Here a hierarchical structure of *Sherlock* fandom emerges: a text creator may be in a leading position in a fan community, as textual productivity provides information and guidance to new and potential fans. Since producing such a text needs the creator to master such competencies as English language, translation, image/video editing, and so on, skill becomes a measurement of being a fan. These skills come from education, work experience and continuous practices of fan productivity. In my interviews, informants, when asked how they regard elements of Chinese *Sherlock* fandom such as fan-made BL stories and online debates, give a sense of differing understandings of these issues:

Wei: I think either slash or homosexual relationships develop in the context of a diverse culture and a prosperous economy... In fact, male-male relationships were seen as quite normal in some earlier periods of China's history. In these periods China was at peace and the economy was good.

Lian: The fans [of *Sherlock* who debate with others online] might be similar to those who adore Korean celebrities... they like debating online with all kinds of people.

Wei's quote suggests certain characteristics of Chinese fans: young, but mature and well-educated. Lian's claim, however, might seem slightly more aggressive. She links online arguments (as mentioned in 3.4) between fans to the characteristics of a specific group of fans, particularly fans of Korean celebrities. Some scholars (Yang, 2012; Ahn, 2014) point out that fans of Korean media texts in China tend to be young, with most aged from eighteen to their twenties. According to my interviews and observation, however, a much larger number of teenage fans have not been taken account into these studies. How the Chinese teenage

fans develop their culture to distinguish from that of mature fans worth further investigation in future.

6.4.2 Fansub groups as labour

According to participants and my observation, Chinese fans have from early on engaged in the fan production of the *Sherlock* series and its spread. This fandom originally started within small circles (e.g. English learners, foreign television/film fans), and became a phenomenon soon through word of mouth and various fan translations. With the support of Web 2.0 services, online translation communities played a crucial role in the transcultural fandom of *Sherlock* in China.

Chinese fansub groups emerged around 2000 and boomed in the early 2000s and were initiated by fans of foreign media products, particularly Japanese anime (Yang, Xu, 2017). One reason for this rapid growth is likely the growing number of household PCs in China (see the China Internet Network Information Centre reports from 2000 to 2005), and teenager and university student dominance of internet usage at the time. Under such circumstances, some ideas about Japanese fandom were introduced into China and adopted by media fans in China, as noted. By now, many fansub groups participate in translating the *Sherlock* episodes and related texts. According to my informants, fan translators claim to subtitle foreign language texts into Chinese for “exchanging experiences and skills of translating” or “for better enjoyment” (Jenkins, Ford, Green, 2013) and upload their works online.

Question: How did you found the fansub team?

Liusu: We initiate the group due to common interests among the founders. We all love BBC programmes, and we all major in English. So we decided to establish a circle to facilitate peer-learning, exchanging experiences and skills of translating... for better enjoyment.

Liusu is a *Sherlock* fan who also serves as an administrator of a fansub group. Here she explains the motivations for founding the translation community. “Better enjoyment” here consists of two layers of meanings: firstly, these fans enjoy translation, as most major in or

are interested in a foreign language (for instance, English, Japanese, or Korean). Secondly, since different fansub teams often simultaneously work on same popular television shows, they translate for audiences to have better viewing experience with a few competitive features such as better accuracy of translation, explanatory notes on socio-cultural background, bilingual subtitles, and subtitles with visual effect. In this sense, fan subtitling establishes a reciprocal relationship between translators and other fans and audience members.

When I asked participants what they think of this activity during interviews, they praised fansub groups without any hesitation, although these communities are not founded specifically for the public good.

Lian: Fansub groups are great people! ...they contribute much of value... and these contributions are basically positive. They work voluntarily, making all-out effort to translate the [original English] subtitles [of *Sherlock*] into Chinese for people [who can't follow what the characters talk about] ... Without fan-subbers as an information source, there wouldn't be either so many different group of fans or online debates... Through fansub groups' works, many people know the show and enjoy watching it.

Chuxia: I started to watch the drama for the very beginning, because my classmates [for English courses] recommended it to me... and I think I only watch the episodes translated by fansub groups... They bridge China and the world!

Andrejevic (2008) points out that participants in online fan communities play a value-enhancing role for television producers, and here fan translators also contribute value for people other than the producers of *Sherlock*. Many participants enjoy the drama and construct a fandom thanks to fansub groups' products, which convey new values to Chinese audiences. In discussing online translations, Kelly Hu (2016) and Weiyu Zhang (2016) argue that Chinese online translation communities derive from personal interest but gradually develop to make productions for the public good, especially when the "translated content bears on social, political, or educational meanings" (Zhang, 2016, p. 68). For some of my interviewees, these fan-subbed episodes (some of which provide Chinese and English

bilingual subtitles) become very good material for learning English; for many others, they are a window through which the audience can have a glance at another culture. Therefore, the functions of translated episodes often vary for different audiences, and the value created by fan translators are multiple. Fan-made translations invite a larger audience incapable of fully understanding the original dialogue to engage in the episodes and related content such as interviews with the cast and creators. It is noteworthy that many translation communities finish a translation of a new episode very rapidly, often within 24 hours after its release. These immediate online translations not only bridge language barriers and facilitate the appreciation and circulation of the series, but also allow Chinese audiences to keep up with worldwide trends, forging or enhancing a sense of global connectivity. Therefore, fan translations help establish a solid basis for further online activities.

Some fansub community members accepted my interview requests for this project. When I asked what motivated them to translate and make subtitles for *Sherlock* episodes, they showed their love for the show and pride in better understandings of the texts as well as their language skills.

Liusu: We like what we do (i.e. translating and fansubbing practices) and we usually do provide really good translations in terms of accuracy and vivid language. Because of this, we have a good number of followers.

Due to their passion for *Sherlock* stories or the cast, fan translators are willing to devote more energy to the drama than professional translators, which in turn leads to a higher accuracy in terms of translation. Not infrequently, fan translations are much better than official ones as the latter are usually carried out by commercial companies whose translators do not necessarily have deep knowledge of the content and its background (Ouyang, 2009; Wang, 2017). Nonetheless, since there is competition for reputation between fan communities, translated subtitles for popular episodes must be produced within a very short period in order to attract viewers. Such time limits do not allow each translator to spend much time on polishing the work, even though the project may be collaborated upon by a few people. As a result, translation accuracy easily becomes a major issue debated online.

As mentioned, fan-subbed episodes also offer good material for language learning and understanding a different culture. Lian, for example, shares her experience using translated subtitles of *Sherlock* to learn English:

Lian: I like British culture, and I like the storytelling skills, rhythm and photography represented in British TV drama. *Sherlock* is one of my favourites. I watched the episodes again and again when I was preparing for my IELTS exam, as there are so many long lines in the drama that could help me improve my reading skills... and most characters have a British accent, so I can improve my listening and speaking by imitating their conversations.

Like Lian, some English learners use clips of American or British entertainment content for listening and speaking practice. Influenced by them, many fans of foreign video content are inclined to watch Chinese-English bilingual subtitled episodes, as they persuade themselves and others that they can learn English in this way. Therefore, the need for translated entertainment content is huge in China, and fan translations are credited with providing such material. This need in turn encourages the growth of fansub groups.

Another contribution of online fan translation group is that they make acquiring content of interest more efficient. Most fansub groups have their own websites or social media accounts (for example, on Weibo) where others can find and download their translated subtitles or subtitled episodes for free. These platforms, as a product of “free labour” (Terranova, 2000; Zhang, Fung, 2013), greatly reduce the cost of content consumption and therefore enlarge audiences, since others do not need to spend much to purchase or rent videos to enjoy foreign content. In doing so, some fans enjoy a bit of an “outlaw” identity against the authorities and the Great Firewall, as they have to use a VPN to access services like Facebook, Tumblr and Netflix unavailable in the People’s Republic of China. They do so for entertainment content rather than with the intention of challenging or overturning the Chinese government. Doing so, however, jeopardises the business interests of programme producers if the fan-subbed video is provided in official outlets, and creates criticism of online

fansub communities. Some fansub communities have been shut down by the Chinese government (Chen, 2014).

As Terranova (2000) argues, building online fan communities can be categorised as a type of labour which is voluntarily given and normally are unwaged and enjoyed. She suggests that fan labour maintains an unpaid status since their work is “willingly conceded in exchange for the pleasures of communication and exchange” (p. 48). This notion follows the theory of “gift economy” (Jenkins, Ford, Green, 2013) and is reflected in some of my interviews with fan translators. Many fansub groups build their own website and also have been invited by media companies to collaborate upon translation projects for popular video content. According to my participants, however, these translation communities usually resist cooperation with corporates, because translators believe they already have gained the pleasure of communication and exchange as a reward for their works and do not pursue the activity for compensation. Such “anti-commercial” attitudes reflect Hills’ two-sided fan identity model, which indicates that fan practices have an “anti-commercial ideology” side and a “commodity-completist” side, and both sides are in continuous competition (Hills, 2002).

The fan labour of fansub groups in China sometimes generates wrong expectations. First, audiences can enjoy the latest fan-translated *Sherlock* episodes for free immediately after release. Due to the huge popularity of the series, many communities compete to offer different translations. Although fan translations are provided for free, competition for reputation or, more accurately, cultural capital among fansub groups can resemble commercial battles in the business world. For example, fansub groups often compete for the first release of translated subtitles for a popular show such as *Sherlock*, in order to promote the team’s reputation and personal/collective achievement. Translators of different groups sometimes criticise bad translations or inappropriate business use of fansub practices made by other groups, which can trigger arguments between fansub groups (see Wang, Zhang, 2017; Zheng, 2016). Under such circumstances, some audiences take fan translations for granted, and sometimes demand more volunteering work from online fan communities.

Secondly, practitioner in the media industry also try to use fan labour as part of business. Although fan subtitling can be criticised by producers as piracy, some industry practitioners tolerate it and utilise it as a marketing tool. For instance, Chinese online video sharing sites (even the biggest ones such as Youku) were booming and competing intensely when the first series of *Sherlock* was aired, and these service providers allowed users to upload entire fan-subbed episodes to their websites so that other users could view this content for free. This illegally shared content was available to view until the websites received complaints about piracy.³⁵ Here three parties are involved (uploader, video sharing site, and fansubber). It is difficult to tell whether the uploader of fansubbed *Sherlock* episodes intends to pursue material benefit or self-fulfilment from such behaviour, but video sharing sites that tacitly permit uploading are surely oriented by profit. Mel Stantill (2019) proposes that media industries consider fans as audience commodity and data commodity. Fans are valued as audience commodity because, for cinemas, broadcasters as well as video sharing sites, fans can bring a quantity of views that can be relevant to the advertising income. In the digital age, fans are also valued as data commodity because the data of their individual-platform interaction can be collected and traded with analytic institutions for monetised profit. In this case, fans and audiences of *Sherlock* become huge asset of the video sharing sites. Fansubbers, who produce translated subtitles or episodes, face an interesting dilemma. On the one hand, being uploaded to video sharing sites, the episodes they love will be known by more people, and their fansubbed work can get more views than merely circulating within fan circles. This, to fansubbers, is a kind of affirmation in terms of skill, knowledge, enthusiasm, and loyalty regarding to *Sherlock*, which further enhances their self-realisation. On the other hand, however, it is a bit complex to see their interest-driven volunteering work being utilised by video sharing sites for monetisation because many fansubbers have an “anti-commercial ideology”. Therefore, due to lack of clearly defined boundaries between these different responsible parties in file sharing, fansubbers in China are left in an awkward position – other fans and audience members ask them for voluntary translated quality works, while

³⁵ With amended the intellectual property laws in China, such illegal use of fansubbed episodes can no longer be seen today.

practitioners in media industries make money from these works shared by those fans, and fansubbers themselves may face legal risks in terms of intellectual property.

6.4.3 Alternative interpretation

Jenkins' "textual poaching" theory (1992) notes that media consumption in fandom reflects a particular mode of fannish behaviours. Fans as textual poachers create their own texts by picking only seemingly useful or pleasurable aspects, and this process involves a set of critical and interpretive practices. Nonetheless, it is common to see fans interpret texts excessively and, in the view of other fans, give them meaning that was not implied in the original text or only potentially implied.

Lian: I joined an online fan community but I quit soon, as the fan arguing was so intense... Online arguing is inevitable within fandom... Due to overinterpreting or overprotection... fans here argue about everything... from arguing between the fans of different dramas to arguments between *Sherlock* fans of different characters.

Chuxia: Fans' interpretation [to other fans' creative work] ... is often too much.

This participant's experience exemplifies that fans' interpretations of media texts can vary and often mingle with differing values such as taste, aesthetics and interests as a kind of supplement, perfecting, or redefinition. Jenkins (1992; 2006b) proposes that no object of fandom is complete or perfect or whole in and of itself. As he points out, an official media text always has aspects that do not meet fans' demands or tastes, and fans complete and perfect the object or "the statement of characters", as Jenkins (2006b) terms it, in fannish practices. For instance, fans produce alternative stories about the characters in the episodes, when official subsequent developments go against fans' expectation which fans regard as a criterion of their experience of viewing an original text. With this motivation or maxim, fans are keen to celebrate what is right about an object, criticise what may be wrong, and propose solutions and new directions for the development of that object.

In his investigation of the grassroots appropriation of *Star Wars*, Jenkins (2006a) argues that *Star Wars* fans "reject the idea of a definitive version produced, authorized, and regulated by

some media conglomerate” and seek to establish a participatory culture in which all fans and audiences can create and circulate whatever text pieces reflect their own tastes and ideas (p. 256). As discussed above, *Sherlock* fans weave new texts with related or possible threads about the episodes and/or actors, not only to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and their understanding of the drama itself but also to show new fans what *Sherlock* fandom looks like. Fans’ participatory practices in social media broaden potential interest in this drama for the mass audience by “tailoring it to cultural niches underrepresented within and underserved by official texts” (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 557). Here we can connect examples from Section 6.3.2 such as “BL fan fiction” and “Sherlock x Harry Potter crossover” with Jenkins’ notion of “cultural niches”. These fan-produced texts of course serve niche fan groups well, by providing interpretations of the original or fan-fictional stories in a “language” familiar within respective cultural niches. Eventually, the episodes are distributed in all these niches, which might not be covered when the drama was first available.

When fans project meaning, value and emotion onto *Sherlock* episodes, their love and passion for their self-made texts can be excessive. This enthusiasm does not become a problem if such fannish texts are shared within a small group of fan companions. But when these texts are publicly visible or recommended by social media features on platform like Weibo, they often raise arguments when fans disagree with each other about their understandings of actors or characters or the subsequent developments of stories (either original or fan-fictional). Argument is also a root cause of why some critics describe fans as an irrational, hysterical crowd and, surely, why many interviewees claim not to be real fans. Such criticism forces many of my fan informants to seek ways to represent their fan identity and to protect themselves from becoming involved in unnecessary arguments with other fans, which recalls my discussion of privacy and impression management in Chapter Three.

6.5 Conclusion

An analysis of the Chinese *Sherlock* fandom from the perspective of fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identity suggests that this fan culture involves a rich complex of fan behaviours, creative productions, fans’ self-recognition and interpersonal connections. Social

media platforms offer features and affordances (e.g. search engine, connectivity with other platform users, and multitasking) that allow users to reach the texts and a large number of fans scattered online, and help fans create and spread their participatory practices. Many Chinese Sherlock fans share, discover, and participate in discussions about this drama on social media, and their Web 2.0 engagement contributes to resources for expanding the fandom. Drawing upon Jason Mittell's (2015) centrifugal and centripetal complex model of TV show storytelling, I have shown how, for Chinese audiences, *Sherlock* is structured with inward-pushing narratives, which means there is a scaling limit in terms of both characters and the scenario, because fans primarily trace its storytelling back to Sir Conan Doyle's original novels and, of course, some fans crossover Sherlock fandom with other well-known products such as Marvel's *Avengers* series and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* stories (see Figure in section 6.3.2). On the other hand, other fans prefer offline practices in relation to deeper cultural engagement such as the slash texts, which suggests that fans usually have conversations about deeper (or, more precisely in this case, sensitive) topics with people they know well who often share similar background knowledge and tastes.

In my discussion of fannish texts, I have investigated the multiple origins of Chinese digital fandom, and explored how different ideas come together to form a localised culture. Moreover, fannish texts not only showcase the diverse sources of Chinese *Sherlock* fandom in a globalised context, but they also reflect fans' taste, skills, and personal value. For instance, a few *Sherlock* fans express their affinity for British culture by adopting a UK flag to produce fannish texts. To a fan who lives in a country far from the UK without UK citizenship, waving a Union Jack flag assists to demonstrate the fan's background and personal interests. Meanwhile, fans of male/male fantasies enjoy the process of manipulation in enabling the male characters to have special relationships (Jenkins, 1992; Mizoguchi, 2003; Nagaïke, 2003). Some female fans deem participating in BL fandom as a possible approach to depict their imagination of an ideal relationship and to acquire equal discursive power in socio-cultural activities. But such imagination represented in fan-produced texts often resembles a traditional heterosexual relationship, in which hegemonic gender norms (e.g. men are active and domineering in a relationship while women perform subjectively) take the central

position. In this sense, the fannish texts of *Sherlock* develop a fantasy for Chinese fans, which consists of western language, figures, imaginary western societies and Chinese ideologies.

In the third section of the analysis, I further investigate a dilemma of fan identity, which manifests as enthusiasm of participatory engagement in Web 2.0 fandom but simultaneously concerns over privacy and fan identity. To look at how Chinese *Sherlock* fans develop their fan identity, my discussion of fans' skills grounds further exploration of Chinese fansubbing culture, which is considered as unpaid labour by both *Sherlock* audiences and the industry. On the one hand, fans and fansubbers are commodified by the media industry, as they are valued as a primary source of the advertising income as well as various individual-platform data collections that can be traded with analytic institutions for monetised profit. However, due to the vague clarification of responsible parties in media consumption, fans and fansubbers may have legal risks regarding intellectual property for re-creating and sharing copyrighted content. On the other hand, different level of mastering skills or cultural capital leads to fans' varying interpretations of the *Sherlock* episodes and fannish texts, and thus causes many online discussions and debates, which become a reason for some fans to begin expressing concern over their fan identities and keep a loose connection with other online fans.

Sherlock fandom on Chinese social media platforms typifies how Chinese fans consume an imported media product in a globalising context. For better understandings of transcultural content, fans utilise multiple platforms according to the different affordances that those platforms offer, and apply their knowledge and skills in creative practices, especially of producing slash/BL texts (which also display a re-traditionalisation of gender). In this process, fans' enthusiasm and devotion in relation to *Sherlock* episodes become entangled with the business interests of content producers and media platforms, which results in fans' confusion and concern regarding fan identity. The consumption of *Sherlock* fandom demonstrates that Chinese social media not only facilitate the production and spread of fan-made texts, but also shape the form of contemporary Chinese fandom.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have investigated several aspects of social media fandom in a rapidly developing China, including the historical development of fandom, general characteristics of Chinese fans, most popular media platforms, fan-platform interaction, fannish texts, and fan identity. I argued that Web 2.0 fandom with Chinese characteristics must be understood in relation to China's social, cultural, economic, and technological conditions. Through analysing the affordances offered by Weibo, WeChat, Tieba, and Bilibili, I have argued that the varying ways that the four platforms develop user connectivity has resulted in differing patterns of interpersonal interaction, differing fan engagement with texts, differing fan understandings of their identity, and ultimately, then, very different fandom characteristics.

The fan activities that I describe and analyse in the above chapters demonstrate the usual appearance of Chinese social media fandom in the context of globalisation. Because current Chinese fan culture emerged only about ten years before Web 2.0 fandom, Chinese fans have introduced a series of international concepts and ideas of fandom to develop their own discourse, which now informs a unique culture in Chinese society. Meanwhile, commercial interests and fan practices together shape a different landscape for social media and popular media culture than elsewhere the world. In the following sections I revisit the findings of the platform analysis and case studies in order to compare the two fandoms from the aspects of fan-platform interaction, fannish texts and fan identities.

7.1 A new mode of Chinese fans' media consumption

By introducing the context of Weibo, WeChat, Tieba, and Bilibili, we can clearly see that the four platforms highlight different type of content and guide their users to reach the target content due to the difference in terms of figuration and affordance between these platforms. The comparison of five elements of social media, public posts, direct messaging, group chatting, search tools, and information recommendation (Yoder and Stutzman, 2011) provides us an insight into the different affordances offered by these platforms.

The four platforms develop the Web 2.0 connectivity by every possible means, ranging from public post, private messaging, group chatting, to Bilibili's flying comments. Gillespie (2010) proposes that platforms today "affords an opportunity to communicate, interact or sell." (p. 351) Specifically, the microblogging service of Weibo allows its users to upload and circulate multimedia content such as texts, pictures, video and URLs. When Weibo users comment, re-post and like another weibo post, an online interaction is being generated, and the users in this interaction are in a way connected. Likewise, WeChat and Tieba also afford their users to communicate and interact with multimedia content circulation. But the interpersonal connection on WeChat is established upon an existing contact network (such as cell phone contact or a face-to-face conversation). Whereas Tieba keeps many characteristics of online discussion board, particularly in terms of interface design. Tieba also closely bundle with other Baidu's service such as Baidu's search engine to increase its connectivity among existing and potential users. Different from all the platforms mentioned above, Bilibili encourages users to have anonymous group chatting with flying comments while watching video clips. This participatory engagement creates a sense of communal video watching experience and a kind of a virtual presence when the flying comments are projected on the video play interface. This affordance gives users a totally different experience of watching video.

The differences of search tools on Weibo, WeChat, Tieba, and Bilibili illustrate the different application scenarios, and reflect how different the four media sphere can be. Although all the four platforms feature search functions, the fans I interviewed often use search tools of Weibo and Tieba to discover fandom related content. Both the Weibo system and Tieba pin a search bar on top of any page, enabling users to make a general search on the content and person in relation to the search keywords. Meanwhile, users can find search bars everywhere the sight goes on a Weibo page – on personal timeline, on Popular topic page, or on the message inbox page. Weibo's ubiquitous search functions assist users to find target content in every possible scenario and enable users to reach accurate results. More importantly, the multiple search tools highlight user-generated content and make them more visible for Weibo users than their authors may have expected. This feature amplifies the influence of fannish texts, which manifest as an aggregation of bits and pieces of texts scattering on Weibo. The

search tool of Tieba also increase the accessibility of UGC, essentially because the search tool is provided by world's largest Chinese search engine Baidu. As analysed before, Tieba consists of thousands of different themed forums. And Tieba's search engine allows users to reach relevant content across different Tieba forums as well as the sites other than Tieba itself. Therefore it becomes another popular choice for fans to search for content related to fandom. Compared to Weibo and Tieba, the search tools on WeChat and Bilibili are more conventional. WeChat allows users to search chat histories and public posts in the Moments section, while the search function on Bilibili is merely designed to find video clips within the website. Among the four platforms, Weibo has much more search bars than the other three in order to guide users to the results, because Weibo users upload a massive amount of short texts (comparing to texts on other platforms) which make the information flow on Weibo discursive and fragmented. Tieba gathers users sharing a common interest in each themed forum and allows users to create longer texts, therefore it requires its search tool can find contents more than within a specific forum for extended reading or writing. Search tool becomes essential for a WeChat user if he/she has a large number of contacts and chatting topics much vary from each other. However, for Bilibili users, the watching experience can be continuous. In this sense, a search tool like that of Weibo or Tieba may probably become a surplus, and will not bring much user experience better than now.

Explored these different platforms, we can understand that connectivity plays an increasingly important role in the development of Chinese online media. Some features are originally designed for SNS services such as Weibo, but now people apply these features in an extensive scope. For example, Weibo users adopt its @ tagging to inform another Weibo user or demonstrate intimacy with the ones being tagged. And # tagging, on the other hand, are often regarded as a connection to a stance, which may be a social event, or a personal activity. Today, the use of tagging is well accepted by Chinese netizens, and such mechanism is applied not only on SNS platforms but also those which do not support tagging. As mentioned in previous chapters, some fans use tagging in flying comments to express the feeling that they want to showcase a connection with someone or something while watching Bilibili video, yet this function is not available in flying comments.

Since these platforms afford many helpful features for users to enjoy the Web 2.0 connectivity and to reach target content, Chinese fans can accordingly employ the different features (or platforms) to develop social media fandom. My two case studies, for instance, are both revolving around the fan culture of television programmes (one reality show and one television drama), but many of my fan informants watch the two shows on PCs, smartphones or tablets. A number of *Sherlock* fans prefer to download the drama and watch with fan-translated subtitles, and therefore it is more convenient for them to do so on computers. Meanwhile, although a few informants admit that there is no other choice for them as they live in university dormitories where television sets are not provided, more fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *Sherlock* are inclined to consume the shows on PCs or mobile devices because the web services allow them to pause or/and multitask while watching, which make producing fannish texts easier than conventional television.

Many fans involve with the Web 2.0 fandom on a series of platforms rather than a singular one, as different platforms encourages different fandom characteristics. For many fans, Weibo becomes a search engine of looking for user-generated contents. The connectivity of Weibo, in the meantime, allows fans to have quick, contemporary conversation with others, and such conversation are visible for other Weibo users as long as it is not through private message. In this sense, Weibo affords fans to expand their network between individual fans. In the *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom, not only fans are interested in UGC, celebrity fathers who participate in this show also demonstrate a great enthusiasm to fannish texts. On Weibo, celebrities often update their feelings and thoughts about current life, and sometimes share the recent materials about their children. The fan-celebrity interaction is usually considered a demonstration of intimacy as fans anticipate, but for celebrities, it becomes an approach of branding that plays an important role in monetisation. The fan-platform interaction in *Sherlock* fandom, however, tend to be celebrated between fans, because the actors and producers of this drama open their Weibo accounts quite late, and there is a cultural and language gap between British actors/producers and Chinese audiences.

In the contrast, WeChat is more applied as a communicational tool by fans that intend to deepen the connection to other fans as well as the intimacy with friends, while Tieba becomes

a base for fans who have similar interests to share longer contents such as fan fictional articles. Because Tieba evolves from bulletin board service, many fans prefer longer conversation on it rather than Weibo. Bilibili gathers a number of skilled fanvid makers. These fan producers showcase their expertise of video editing and, perhaps more importantly, their grasp of insider knowledge in specific fandom.

The interaction between Chinese fans and social media platforms reflects both the gift economy (Jenkins et al, 2009; Scott, 2009) and commercial logic, while most fans do not notice or really care about how these two concepts are different. In the Web 2.0 spaces, as I discussed in previous chapters, fans' practices on social media can be understood as a part of the media production, because the texts can be always unfinished and fan production may contribute new meanings to the original texts. Fan activities in social media promote the spread and consumption of official contents. In Chapter Six, I noted how *Sherlock* enters into Chinese market. In the early days when *Sherlock* was not officially available in China, fans of British drama and fansubbers collaborate to introduce the episodes on social networks including Weibo. Without fan-translated subtitles for this drama, it may not be as popular as it is now in China. In return, fan activities also rely on the social media platforms to sustain. The fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* has been active for three years, largely because fans can find updated materials about the celebrity fathers and their children on Weibo. On this basis, they can continuously produce and circulate fannish texts about the celebrity families as well as their performance in the reality show. To sum up, Chinese fans and Chinese social media platforms facilitate the development of each other.

With the increasing participation of Web 2.0 fandom, some fans become not content with simply online activities. My fan interviewees mention that some discuss the shows with their other fans over phone, and some go to the filming sites or airports to meet the celebrities in group. These online fans start to call for self-organised offline activities, and many of my interviewees deem such offline activities as a way to measure how much a "real" fan can devote to fandom. As Zheng (2016) notes, Chinese offline fan conventions and materialised fan products come later than online fandom, and base on online fandom (p. 359). Although the issue of offline fan activities emerges in my interviews with online fans, I have not

discussed it much in the previous chapters as my research project focuses on online activities. But this worth further exploration in future.

7.2 Fannish text: A practice of skills, knowledge, and more

In the previous chapters, I draw on the theory of “unfinished texts” to explore how fans enrich fandom through ongoing textual productivity. I also argue that the “textual collapse” exists in Chinese social media and makes fans concern over their self-presentation on different social platforms. The concept of “impression management” then explains why the Web 2.0 fandom seems everyone participated but my informants keep slightly distant to such fever during the interviews. I also notice the different presentation of BL fan fiction in both fandom.

As Marwick and boyd (2011a) argue, social media gather multiple audiences into single contexts, and it sometimes becomes difficult for fans to discuss fannish topics while lacking enough context or full awareness of what others say, making it very easy to have online debate among fans. Most fan informants I interviewed tend to circulate fannish texts on Weibo, Tieba, or private chatting via WeChat, because my WeChat contacts belongs to professional networks rather than personal friends sharing similar interests. Even on Weibo, while fans updating and sharing texts in social media, they themselves have own followers and audiences whose identities cannot be confirmed. Under such condition, we can conclude that fans communicate with the imagined audiences on different platforms based on technological affordances and social context.

The fans I interviewed regard the fannish texts as an extra entertainment out of official text, another channel to understand the main text, and a kind of self-reflection. As discussed in the previous chapters, a text reflects its author’s taste, skills and preference. Through these texts, fans not only can see others’ interpretation of original texts, but also acquire knowledge of being a fan. In contrast to pre-Web 2.0 era, fans now can easily contact each other online. In this condition, a conversation, a comment or even simply an emoji response could be visible (if that is not in a private scenario) with the facilitation of search tools. These public texts bring about extra meanings to the original text, making the text continuously unfinished. During

this process, fans are always getting new information while viewing, and always making contribution to the meaning construction (which, in this sense, lasts quite long if the process keeps ongoing) while sharing the texts. Therefore, the information exchange in the process becomes a kind of fun for many fans, powering them to continue the circulation.

The information exchange here follows Mittell's (2015) centrifugal and centripetal complex model in terms of the storytelling of TV shows. According to Mittell, some television shows are structured with outward-pushing narratives, in which the number of characters can keep increasing and the story world can be expanding. On the contrary, some shows have narratives which keep the storytelling inward. In this narrative the scale of characters and the scenario may be restricted at a limited level. Due to the cultural familiarity, the narratives of the locally produced reality show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and fans' engagement can be continuously expanded by bringing about all the materials in relation to the six celebrity families. Whereas BBC's *Sherlock* seems more centripetal for Chinese fans because they can primarily trace its storytelling back to Sir Conan Doyle's original novels in the first place. In other words, since Chinese audiences are more familiar with the celebrity families in *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, the narrative might allow fans to expand the stories of the celebrity families. Due to the lack of cultural familiarity toward *Sherlock*, most fans of this drama need more directly related information to help them better understand the drama as well as British culture. Yet with the increase of such understanding, the stories about *Sherlock* will also expand to some extent, and this is why we can see the crossover fictions between *Sherlock* episodes and *Harry Potter* stories.

Through the discussion of the two cases, I find that Chinese fans also adopt Web 2.0 fandom as an approach that they can use to develop skills and participate in social events. The *Sherlock* fandom well exemplifies this argument. As mentioned in Chapter Six, a large number of Chinese *Sherlock* fans firstly watch the episodes through online downloading along with fan-translated subtitles while the drama was not available in China. At that time, the volunteering fansubbers work together on the Chinese translation of English subtitles and become the initial *Sherlock* fans in China. These fans discover the episodes, translate the subtitles, introduce the drama in fan communities, and collect related information for new

fans to understand the drama. They enjoy these practices due to several reasons, including to practice translating skills, to improve English, to get in touch with “authentic” British culture, and to catch up the latest episode with international audiences. Such initial online participation was coincidentally happening at the same time while Chinese social media emerging. Since both fan culture and Web 2.0 services value connectivity and sharing, Chinese fandom and social media mutually facilitate the development of each other. Through the high visibility of fannish texts on Web 2.0 platforms, many people start to consume these fan-produced texts and some participate in the Web 2.0 fandom. In this sense, fannish texts not only bridge the different cultures, but also play an essential role during the growth of Chinese fandom and social media culture.

Fannish texts display fans’ skills, knowledge, and their view of point towards the world. These skills and knowledge sometimes can be more than something around specific fandom, for example, English language or skill of video editing as mentioned above. Fans value these skills as much as the knowledge of a certain fandom, both of which become the major source of individual influence in fan communities. In the *Sherlock* fandom, although the *Sherlock* books have been translated into Chinese for long, the detective stories are still not as popular as in Western societies because the stories are established in a Western cultural framework, which is very different than Chinese. Therefore, the episodes allow for a fresh and unfiltered engagement rather than as observing how well (or not) they capture the flavour of a beloved original written text. This means fans need more extra materials for understanding the episodes, which offers opportunities for fans who have better language proficiency and knowledge of *Sherlock* and British culture to empower themselves through information exchange during sharing fannish texts.

When I explore the two different fandoms, it is noticeable that BL themed fannish texts take an important part in the fan cultures. In the fandom of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, many fans connects the interaction between Hu Jun and Liu Ye to a gay-themed film that they co-starred in several years ago. Moreover, fans also practice creating shipping between their sons, Kangkang and Nuoyi. Compare to *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, in the *Sherlock* fandom, BL fanfics and shipping between male characters of the drama are much more in quantity and

some portray more erotic scenes. For example, there are more passionate lines (from the episodes) and intimate physical contacts (e.g. hug, kiss) in fannish texts about *Sherlock* than the fan practices about *Where Are We Going, Dad?* A primary reason is that with the globalised media flow, Chinese users gradually see how Japanese *Otaku* culture and Western fandom manipulate materials to create male-male fictions. Meanwhile, fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* only find clues about the friendship (sometimes brotherhood) in the locally produced reality show, and same-sex relationship is still considered as a taboo in China. Consequently, fans slightly overstate the friendship (or brotherhood) to mimic a slash text. In doing so, Chinese fans can practice this type of fan productivity, and show what fandom looks like to new fans. Another possible reason is about Chinese fans' self-censorship. As discussed in previous chapters, many fan communities have their regulations about which activities are acceptable and which are not. The community 爸爸去哪儿康诺吧 *Baba Qunaer Kang Nuo Ba* in which I carried out observation, for instance, prohibits producing and sharing fannish texts depict inappropriate intimate physical contact between children. But there are no similar regulations to prohibit intimate contact between Sherlock and other characters in fan community 卷福吧 *Juanfu Ba*. I suggest the regulation that prohibit producing inappropriate content in communities like 爸爸去哪儿康诺吧 *Baba Qunaer Kang Nuo Ba* play a role in reducing the number of erotic texts in relation to *Where Are We Going, Dad?*

7.3 Fan identity in the context of globalisation

Since *Where Are We Going, Dad?* is a localised adaptation from South Korean programme and *Sherlock* derives from Western culture, fans need different knowledge and skills to consume the different shows. The different processes of production determine that the consumption of two shows requires different level of knowledge and skills. As discussed above, *Where Are We Going, Dad?* adapts from South Korean reality show to a more localised programme that highlights the social norm and family value of Chinese culture as well as the parenting ideas of celebrity families. And most celebrities in this show are well-known for Chinese fans. Therefore, it can be categorised as a centrifugal narrative, which needs fans to add extra information to strengthen the highlights they find (in this case, the interactions between

fathers and children, and between celebrity families). In contrast, *Sherlock* as a British produced television drama, is originally created to meet British audience demand and expectation. It is a media product of British culture, which is significantly different from Chinese culture. Moreover, this drama was not available in China while airing in the UK. And a large number of Chinese audiences are not much familiar with the *Sherlock* stories. Therefore it can be considered as a centripetal narrative in China, and needs fans to translate, to explain the cultural difference, and to help other audiences better understand the stories. Only on this basis, more fans can participate in the production of fannish texts as what they practice upon local media content. In other words, the difference between the locally produced content and transnationally travelling media makes audience and fans consume these media texts differently.

The two type of contents requires fans to master different level of knowledge and skills, or according to Hills (2002), different level of cultural capital. The development of Chinese *Sherlock* fandom calls on not only fans who know how to produce fannish texts, but also those who can speak English, those who can translate, and those who understand British culture well. This leads to a fact that some *Sherlock* fans accept better education (i.e. study in better university, have experience of studying abroad), making that the *Sherlock* fandom a bit elitist. Different education background and devotion to fan communities result in the different social connections (e.g. different level of social acknowledgement) among fans, or as Hills (2002) proposes, different social capital. The difference in terms of cultural capital and social capital gradually inform a hierarchy within the Web 2.0 fandom, although the Web 2.0 technologies initially allow media users to share what they have got in an equal status.

The transnational spread of *Sherlock* begins from fan participation. The drama was firstly discovered and introduced by the fansubbers who have deep interests in English language and culture. These fans, as Koichi Iwabuchi (2002) suggests, search foreign contents that may be commercially unavailable in the People's Republic of China and enjoy experiencing the cultural difference. Jenkins (2006a) also describes this type of fans as cosmopolitans who escape the parochialism of their own culture.

When some fans I interviewed participate in engagement with transnational media, they develop a sense of self-recognition and identity in China's society as well as in a context of globalisation. How these fans recognise and interpret their favourite themes (such as celebrity families travelling in China and Australia, and Chinese elements represents in *Sherlock*) reflects an important aspect of cultural citizenship. Both two fandoms look at how people represent and negotiate with cultural difference, and fans examine their own lives and social positions through the episodes (de Bruin, 2011). On social platforms, *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans discuss the difference in terms of parenting skills as well as everyday conversation between Chinese families and international background families, while *Sherlock* fans highlights their affinity to the British culture with "waving" Union Jack flags on their phone. In both cases, television shows as original texts, as Hartley (1995) notes, involve people who have different backgrounds in a shared sense of community based on the participation within fannish engagement in social media. Social media therefore become a shared cultural space, facilitating people to find their similarities that help them come together, and discover differences that distinct them as a group from others.

In sum, the analysis of Chinese social media platforms, fannish texts, and fan identity demonstrates that connectivity plays a vital role in Chinese Web 2.0 fandom. The discussions above illustrate such connectivity from two aspects: on one hand, the connectivity of social media ensures that texts, no matter whether professionally produced or user-generated, can become highly visible and accessible by offering dynamic public virtual spaces and powerful search functions. On the other, Web 2.0 technologies make users more connected and encourage them to become more involved in participatory online culture. In this sense, Web 2.0 connectivity fosters both the circulation of texts and interpersonal communication.

The spread of content across social media platforms keeps a text continuously developing and forever unfinished. Such a structure attracts fans to make contributions by creating new meanings and value. These new meanings may come from additional material that fans bring to bear, or from new perspectives that they take on the existing content. In other words, to "fulfil" an unfinished text, fans need to possess more texts and more online/offline social experience.

I have suggested in previous chapters that the current form of Chinese fandom develops in a globalising context, as Chinese fans have been introducing ideas, knowledge and practices of international fan cultures to the People's Republic of China. During such transcultural communication, gender emerges as a major theme in the identity construction of Chinese fans. As discussed in both case studies, gender plays a pivotal role in fannish texts as well as in official media products. In both *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *Sherlock* fandom, fans produce a variety of shipping and slash/BL content. In this way, they project their imagination of ideal sexuality onto the characters of the two shows. Masculinity, in particular, becomes a primary topic in these texts. A significant finding from both case studies is that gender-themed fannish texts widely reinforce traditional gender norms (e.g. men should be active, strong-minded and dominant while women remain somewhat vulnerable) and hegemonic masculinities (e.g. being serious, physically strong, protective). Such themes even appear in BL stories that depict male-male relationships. This reflects the idea that Chinese fan practices of slash content do not go along with social activities that support equal rights for same-sex relationships. Rather, Chinese fans take this approach to practice heterosexual gender roles, which becomes a dominant theme in Chinese fandom.

Gender also plays a role in the development of fan communities. My interviews with *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans reveal that female-led fan communities objectify male members. Male members in these communities are considered as communal social capital because of gender scarcity and the novelty of their involvement in female-dominated practices. Meanwhile, some male members are still able to generate a sense of advantage in such objectification by bringing in their experiences from offline life. Therefore, gender dynamics in fan communities do not much to influence the patriarchal structure of Chinese society.

These kinds of gender dynamics, however, are not as clear in *Sherlock* fan communities. An explanation could be that fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* are more culturally familiar with the celebrities and places in the show, and therefore they are keen to see gender diversity in their communities. In contrast, gender representation is less evident in *Sherlock* fan communities, which need to engage in more work to overcome barriers in transcultural consumption. As fans become more familiar with the *Sherlock* stories as well as the

actors/actresses in the episodes, gender dynamics in these communities may very possibly emerge in the future.

The evolution of a fannish text calls for fans' collective talent including the skills and knowledge of fandom that are regarded as measures of being a fan, as discussed in Chapter 6. Consequently, the more actively fans participate, the more hierarchical fandom can become. In such an active, hierarchical fandom, arguments are almost inevitable, because the growth of fandom requires continuously evolving texts and, essentially, fans who have additional materials and different perspectives as mentioned above. From this point of view, argument perhaps is not a bad thing, because it is the exchange of different ideas that brings about diverse opinions, alternative perspectives, and the spreadability of texts, which encourage fans to take part in fandom technologically and culturally. The participatory fandom in Chinese social media increases opportunities for fans to realise individual fulfilment in a collective setting, to develop interpersonal connections, to understand differences in individuals and cultures, and to form a sense of cultural citizenship – not only in a rapidly developing China, but also in a context of globalisation.

7.4 Directions for future research

The two case studies reveal the rich meanings of Web 2.0 fandom in the People's Republic of China and set up a roadmap for further research. Due to the growth of social media, Chinese fans and fan culture are no longer marginalised as they were in the pre-Web 2.0 era. On social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Tieba and Bilibili, some of the Web 2.0 principles such as "produsage" (Bruns, 2008) and China's intellectual traditions such as collective writing adapt to each other and make fannish texts continuously unfinished, visible and spreadable. Through Web 2.0 participatory engagement, Chinese fans establish connections between themselves and with the contemporary world. In this sense, social media platforms empower Chinese fans to negotiate with mainstream ideology and Chinese tradition.

The aim of this project has been to enrich English-language scholarship on Chinese Web 2.0 fandom. To understand a (non-Western) fandom, it is important to consider the historical,

political, socio-cultural and technological contexts of that fandom. By acknowledging this, the study has challenged the stereotype that the internet has a transnational nature that can universally fit any market, although the western transnational companies dominate the internet globally.

Both case studies suggest that gender has become a central issue in Chinese Web 2.0 fandom. Firstly, gender is a fundamental identity in fan communities. Looking at the communities of both fandoms, female fans play a larger part than male fans, and this leads to power difference within fan communities. In *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fandom, male fans become a result of “female gaze” due to their scarcity in fan communities. A gendered gaze does not seem so clear in Chinese *Sherlock* fan communities, however, female members dominate the production and consumption of slash texts. Both fandoms note the portrayal of masculinity in the shows and fannish texts. Fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* emphasise the “tough guy” images by celebrities in the show, which represent and reiterate hegemonic sexuality as well as traditional gender norms in Chinese society. The *Sherlock* fans show a relatively diverse understanding of gender in their manipulation of male characters in the drama, but many fan-made slash texts still reflect heterosexual norms rather than contemporary understandings of non-heterosexual relationships. Therefore, both fandoms regard gender as a means of fans practicing gender roles and also as an approach to connect with tradition and globalised modernity. The latter, particularly, is worthy of exploration in future studies.

In terms of mapping Chinese fandom in a globalised context, this project has also found that fansubbing plays an important role in transnational media consumption. In my two case studies, fansubbers not only introduce foreign media products to Chinese audiences through their fan-made translation, their works also contribute to the development of Chinese fandom. The language that Chinese fans use to describe “how to be a (real) fan” is based on imported ideas derived from different cultures and different periods. During participatory engagements, however, fansubbers are sometimes considered as providing “voluntary labour”, and sometimes have to deal with problematic expectations from audience members and industry practitioners. Under such circumstances, it will be important in future research to look at the dynamics or even tension between fandom as “labour” and the “exploiters”.

Due to the lack of participatory observation in offline fan activities, the thesis has limited its focus to “online” participation. As I noted in sections 6.2.2 and 7.1, some fans mentioned offline fandom, and participate in offline fan activities. Some fans view offline behaviours a much more secure way to get involved, in a context that Chinese social media platforms aim to increase every possible visibility of users and user-generated content, as I discussed in Chapter 4. Researchers (e.g. Zheng, 2016) also have been aware that offline fandom develops rapidly after online fandom becomes a major part of online cultural consumption, yet offline fandom and its connection to online fandom have not been studied in much detail yet. This limitation also suggests that there is a distinction between online and offline culture that some digital media scholars explicitly reject. Therefore, this will be another important area worth investigating.

In section 5.4.4 I have suggested that fans of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* generate a sense of cultural citizenship through online discussion of celebrity fathers’ parenting skills. Many fans recalled their childhood and how their own parents deal with similar situations as depicted in the reality show. Some fans implied that they could have become better persons if their parents treated them with modern methods, and noted that they would learn “better” parenting skills from the reality show (but in fact, some experiences displayed in this show might be problematic) and other sources. In such a process, *Where Are We Going, Dad?* fans find another dimension that they can use to position themselves between history and the future. In section 6.3, I explored how Chinese fans introduce many different ideas and knowledge of being a fan from other cultures to develop their own discourse. Cosmopolitanism might emerge during such cultural exchange, but as the media context of Web 2.0 fandom in mainland China is quite enclosed within the country (see section 4.1.5), it could be confusing for Chinese fans to form an understanding of cultural citizenship in a contemporary global context. Therefore, this is another area worth investigating.

To sum up, Web 2.0 participatory engagement of fans in the People’s Republic of China reflects the complexity of Chinese social media fandom and also of China, which itself is a multicultural society. Instead of focusing on a singular aspect of fan culture as many Western studies do, this research project provides a panoramic view for international scholarship to

look at Chinese fandom, analyses the intertwined connections between media platforms, fannish texts as well as fan identity, and lays a foundation for future exploration of Chinese fans and Chinese contemporary society.

Bibliography

- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. J. (1998). *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Abidin, C. (2016). “‘Aren’t these just young, rich women doing vain things online?’: Influencer selfies as subversive frivolity”. *Social Media+ Society*, 2(2), 1-17.
- Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council. (2018, April). *Xuewei shouyu he rencai peiyang xueke mulu (Discipline catalogue of degree granting and talent cultivation)*. Retrieved from the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China website: http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A22/xwb_left/moe_833/201804/t20180419_333655.htm
- Ahn, J. (2014). “The new Korean Wave in China: Chinese users’ use of Korean popular culture via the Internet”. *International Journal of Contents*, 10(3), 47-54.
- Alhabash, S., Y. H. Chiang, & K. Huang. (2014). “MAM & U&G in Taiwan: Differences in the uses and gratifications of Facebook as a function of motivational reactivity”. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 35, 423-430.
- Allington, D. (2007). “‘How come most people don’t see it?’: Slashing *the Lord of the Rings*”. *Social Semiotics*, 17(1), 43-62.
- Andrejevic, M. (2008). “Watching television without pity: The productivity of online fans”. *Television & New Media*, 9(1), 24-46.
- Andrejevic, M. (2009). “Exploiting YouTube: Contradictions of user-generated labour”. in P. Snickers and P. Vonderau (eds.) *The YouTube Reader*, 406-423. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
- Appadurai, A. (1990). “Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy”. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7(2-3), 295-310.
- Baidu. (2017). “Tieba”. Retrieved from Baidu Baike website: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%B4%B4%E5%90%A7/122101?fromtitle=%E7%99%BE%E5%BA%A6%E8%B4%B4%E5%90%A7&fromid=95221>

- Bao, Z. (2013). "Meijie fensi wenhua yu nüxing zhuyi (Media fandom and feminism)". *Nankai Journal (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, 6, 120-129.
- Barker, M., K. Egan, S. Jones, & E. Mathijs. (2008). "Researching *The Lord of the Rings*: Audiences and contexts". In Barker, M., & Mathijs, E. (eds.) *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's World Audiences*, 1-20. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bauwens, M. (2005). "The political economy of peer production". *CTheory*, 12-1.
- Bennett, L. (2014). "'If we stick together we can do anything': Lady Gaga fandom, philanthropy and activism through social media". *Celebrity Studies*, 5(1-2), 138-152.
- Berry, R. S. (1999). "Collecting data by in-depth interviewing". Retrieved from the *University of Leeds* website: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001172.htm>
- Bilibili Fanju. (2017, 23rd December). "Guanyu 2018 nian 1 yue xinfan de shuoming (Declaration of new programmes in January 2018)". Retrieved from Bilibili website: <https://www.bilibili.com/read/cv118972>
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Bolter, J. D., & R. A. Grusin. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Booth, P. (2015). *Playing Fans: Negotiating Fandom and Media in the Digital Age*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press
- boyd, D. (2008). "Facebook's privacy trainwreck: Exposure, invasion, and social convergence". *Convergence*, 14(1), 13-20.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). "Using thematic analysis in psychology". *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bruns, A. (2008). "The future is user-led: The path towards widespread produsage". *The Fibreculture Journal*, (11). Retrieved from The Fiberculture Journal website:

<http://eleven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-066-the-future-is-user-led-the-path-towards-widespread-produsage/>

- Bruns, A. (2013). "From prosumption to produsage". in R. Towse and C. Handke (eds.) *Handbook on the Digital Creative Economy*, 67-78. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Bu, D, & Q. Mu. (2007). "Shishu dazhong liuxing wenhua dui qingshaonian de yingxiang (Mass popular culture's influence towards the youth)". *Journal of Guangdong Youth Leaders - College*, 21(1), 30-33.
- Busse, K., & Gray, J. (2011). "Fan cultures and fan communities". in V. Nightingale (ed.) *The Handbook of Media Audiences*, 425-443. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cao, Zuoya. (2003). *Out of the Crucible*. Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Carbaugh, D. (2007). "From Cognitive dichotomies to cultural discourses: Hofstede, Fougère and Moulettes in conversation". *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 2(1), 20-25.
- Chang, Y., & Zhu, D. (2012). "The role of perceived social capital and flow experience in building users' continuance intention to social networking sites in China". *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(3), 995-1001.
- Chen, A. (2014, 6th December). "China cracks down on unofficial fan groups who subtitle hit American TV shows". *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from South China Morning Post website: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1656544/china-cracks-down-unofficial-fan-groups-who-subtitle-hit-american-tv>
- Chen, H. (2008). "'90hou' qingshaonian 'huoxing wenzi' xianxiang diaocha fenxi (An investigation of the use of 'Martian language' of 'after 90' generation)". *Qingnian Gongzuo Luntan (Youth Education Forum)*, 1, 32-35.
- Chielens, K., & Heylighen, F. (2005, April). "Operationalization of meme selection criteria: Methodologies to empirically test memetic predictions". In Proceedings of *the Joint Symposium on Socially Inspired Computing (AISB'05)*, 14-20.
- China Box Office Online. (2016). "Sherlock: The Abominable Bride". Retrieving from China Box Office Online website: <http://www.cbooo.cn/m/642281>

- China Daily. (2014, November). "11·11 Ni zhidao 'Guanggun jie' zenme laide me? (About 11th November – do you know where the 'Singles' Day' comes from?)". Retrieved from *China Daily* website: http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/news/2014-11/13/content_18907297.htm
- China Youth & Children Research Center. (2005). *Report of Chinese Adolescent Policy*. Beijing: China Youth Publishing Group.
- Chongqing Morning Post. (2017, March). "Shanzi 'fanqiang' shang jingwai wangzhan, zeling tingzhi lianwang bing jinggao (Illegal 'circumventing the GFW' and access to foreign websites, the internet service will be cut off and get warned)". Retrieved from Youth.cn website: http://news.youth.cn/jsxw/201703/t20170328_9368757.htm
- Christensen, M., A. Jansson, & C. Christensen. (2011). *Online Territories: Globalization, Mediated Practice and Social Space*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Clark, Paul. (2008). *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Condry, I. (2013). *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829-859.
- Coppa, F. (2014). "Fuck yeah, fandom is beautiful". *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, 2(1), 73-82.
- Crawford, G. (2012). *Video Gamers*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- CSM Media Research. (2015). *CSM50 TV rating*. Retrieved from tvtv.hk website: <http://www.tvtv.hk/archives/2351.html>
- Cui, D. (2016). "Beyond 'connected presence': Multimedia mobile instant messaging in close relationship management". *Mobile Media & Communication*, 4(1), 19-36
- Dawkins, R. (1982). "Replicators and vehicles". Retrieved from Richard Dawkins website: <http://www.richarddawkins.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Replicators-and-Vehicles.pdf>

- Dawkins, R. (2006). *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- de Bruin, Joost. (2011). "Shortland Street audiences and cultural citizenship". *Continuum*, 25(1), 85-97.
- de Kloet, J., & S. Landsberger. (2012). "Fandom, politics, and the *Super Girl* contest in a globalized China". in K. Zwaan and J. de Bruin (eds.) *Adapting Idols: Authenticity, Identity and Performance in a Global Television Format*, 135-150. Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- de Kosnik, A. (2012). "Fandom as free labor". In T. Scholz (ed.) *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*. New York: Routledge.
- Deller, R. (2011). "Twittering on: Audience research and participation using Twitter". *Participations*, 8(1), 216-245.
- Dillon, W. R. Madden, T. J. and Firtle, N. H. (1994). *Marketing Research in a Marketing Environment*, 3rd edition. Irwin.
- Dong, C. (2008). "Jiedu '90hou' wangmin 'huoxingwen' xianxiang (An interpretation of the 'after 90' generation netizens' using 'Martian language')". *Qingnian Tansuo (Youth Exploration)*, 1, 76-78.
- Downey, T. (2010, 7th March). "China's Cyberposse". Retrieved from The New York Times website: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07Human-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- Dwyer, C. (2007, January). "Digital relationships in the 'myspace' generation: Results from a qualitative study". In *the 40th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2007*, 1-19. IEEE.
- Elliott, A. (1999). *The Mourning of John Lennon*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Epstein, S., & S. Jung. (2011). "Korean youth netizenship and its discontents". *Media International Australia*, 141(1), 78-86.
- Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing Naturalistic Enquiry: A Guide to Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Evans, Jessica. (2005). "Celebrity, media and history". in J. Evans and D. Hesmondhalgh (eds.) *Understanding Media: Inside Celebrity*, 12-55. London: Open University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and Power*. London and New York: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Harlow: Longman.
- Fang, X. (2009). "Shehuixue shijiao xia de qingnian liuxing wenhua xianxiang (Phenomenon of youth popular culture from the perspective of sociology)". *Journal of Tangshan Teachers College*, 31(1), 99-101.
- Feng, X., & A. Johansson. (2017). *Top executives on social media and information in the capital market: Evidence from China* (No. 2017-47). Stockholm China Economic Research Institute, Stockholm School of Economics.
- Feng, X. T., D. L. Poston Jr, & X. Wang. (2014). "China's one-child policy and the changing family". *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 45(1), 17-29.
- Fiske, J. (1989). *Understanding Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. (1992). "The cultural economy of fandom". in Lisa A. Lewis (ed.) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, 30-49. London: Routledge.
- Fox, S., & P. E. Spector. (2000). "Relations of emotional intelligence, practical intelligence, general intelligence, and trait affectivity with interview outcomes: it's not all just 'G'". *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 21(2), 203-220.
- Fu, J. (2016). "Xin meiti shidai de danmu wenhua fenxi (A study on danmu culture in the era of new media)". *Journal of Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications (Social Science)*, 18(2), 9-16.
- Fung, A. (2013). "Deliberating fandom and the new wave of Chinese pop: A case study of Chris Li". *Popular Music*, 32(1), 79-89.
- Gao, Q., F. Abel, G. J. Houben, and Y. Yu. (2012). "A comparative study of users' microblogging behavior on Sina Weibo and Twitter". Proceeding in 20th *International Conference on User Modeling, Adaptation, and Personalization*.

- Gao, X. (2006). *Liuxing Wenhua Shehuixue. (Sociology of Popular Culture)*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Gauntlett, D. (2011). *Making is Connecting*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Giles, D. C. (2002). "Parasocial interaction: A review of the literature and a model for future research". *Media Psychology*, 4(3), 279-305.
- Gleiss, M. S. (2015). "Speaking up for the suffering (br) other: Weibo activism, discursive struggles, and minimal politics in China". *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(4), 513-529.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gillespie, T. (2010). "The politics of 'platforms'". *New Media & Society*, 12(3), 347-364.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin.
- Gray, J., C. Sandvoss, & C. L. Harrington. eds. (2007). *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York: NYU Press.
- Green, J., & H. Jenkins. (2009). "The moral economy of Web 2.0: audience research and convergence culture". In J. Holt and A. Perren (eds.) *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, 213-225. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Guan, Y. (2009). "Lun liuxing wenhua zai gaoxiao de biao xian ji dui daxuesheng de yingxiang (Popular culture in college campus and its influence towards college students)". *Caizhi (Intelligence)*, 11, 52-54.
- Guo, Y., G. Gao, T. Wang, H., Wu, & S. Y. Chow. (2012). "Wangluo yuqing yijian lingxiu yanjiu: Hudie tushi, zhenbie ji yingxiangli pingjia (A study of internet opinion leaders: The 'Butterfly Pattern', examining method, and evaluation of influence)". *Tushu Qingbao Gongzuo (Library and Information Service)*, 63(14), 62-73.
- Guo, F., & H. Su. (2012). "Lun dangdai qingnian liuxing wenhua fazhan qushi jiqi yindao de zhuti fanglue (The development trend and coping strategy of contemporary youth popular culture)". *Sixiang Zhengzhi Jiaoyu Yanjiu (Ideological and Political Education Research)*, 28(4), 32-35.
- Hartley, J. (1999). *Uses of television*. London: Routledge.

- Hartley, J. (2012). *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- He, Z. (2014). "Liuxingyu liuxing de moyinlun jiedu (An interpretation of catchphrase from the perspective of Memetics)". *Shandong Waiyu Jiaoxue (Shandong Foreign Language Teaching)*, 35(2), 7-13.
- Held, D., McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D. and Perraton, J. (1999). *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hermes, J. (2005). "Burnt orange: Television, football, and the representation of ethnicity". *Television & New Media*, 6(1), 49-69.
- Hesketh, T., L. Li, & W. Zhu. (2005). "The effect of China's one-child family policy after 25 years". *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 353(11), 1171-1176.
- Hermes, J. (2004). "A concise history of media and cultural studies in three scripts: advocacy, autobiography, and the chronicle". In *The SAGE Handbook of Media Studies*, ed. J. D. Downing, D. McQuail & P. Schlesinger, 251-270. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Hills, M. (2002). *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Hills, M. (2013). "Fiske's 'textual productivity' and digital fandom: Web 2.0 democratization versus fan distinction". *Participations*, 10(1), 130-153.
- Hills, M. (2015). "Veronica Mars, fandom, and the 'Affective Economics' of crowdfunding poachers". *New Media & Society*, 17(2), 183-197.
- Hills, M. (2017). "Transnational cult and/as neoliberalism: The liminal economies of anime fansubbers". *Transnational Cinemas*, 8(1), 80-94.
- Hogan, K., & R. Stubbs. (2003). *Can't Get Through: Eight Barriers to Communication*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing.
- Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and the Interview Method*. Sage.
- Hu, K. (2016). "Between informal and formal cultural economy: Chinese subtitle groups and flexible accumulation in the age of online viewing". In K. Iwabuchi, E. Tsai, & C. Berry (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of East Asian Popular Culture*, 59-68. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Hu, Q. (2009). "Jiexi liuxing wenhua dui daxuesheng shehuihua de xinli yingxiang (Popular culture's psychological impact to college students in terms of socialisation)". *Xuexiao Dangjian Yu Sixiang Jiaoyu (Party Building and Ideological Education on Campus)*, 5, 69-71.
- Huang, Z., B. Yuan, & X. Hu. (2013). "Understanding the top grass roots in Sina-Weibo". in J. Yang, F. Fang, C. Sun, & ISciDE (eds.) *Intelligent Science and Intelligent Data Engineering*, 17-24. Heidelberg: Springer.
- Hutchby, I. (2001). "Technologies, texts and affordances". *Sociology*, 35(2), 441-456.
- Ito, M., D. Okabe, & I. Tsuji. eds. (2012). *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ito, M., H. Horst, M. Bittanti, D. boyd, B. Herr-Stephenson, P. G. Lange, C.J. Pascoe, & L. Robinson. (2008). "Living and learning with new media: Summary of findings from the Digital Youth Project". Retrieved from John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation: <http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/files/report/digitalyouth-WhitePaper.pdf>
- Iwabuchi, K. (2002). *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Janks, H. (1997). "Critical discourse analysis as a research tool". *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 18(3), 329-342.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). "Quentin Tarantino's *Star Wars*?: Digital cinema, media convergence and participatory culture". in Durham, M., Kellner, D. (eds.) *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, 549-576. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Jenkins, H. (2012). "'Cultural acupuncture': Fan activism and the Harry Potter Alliance". *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10. Retrieved from Transformative Works website: <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/305/259>.

- Jenkins, H., X Li., A. D. Krauskopf, & J. B. Grean. (2009). "If it doesn't spread, it's dead (part one): media viruses and memes". Retrieved from Confessions of an ACA-Fan – The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins website:
http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p.html
- Jenkins, H., S. Ford, & J. Green. (2013). *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: NYU Press.
- Jensen, J. (1992). "Fandom as pathology: The consequences of characterization". in L. A. Lewis. (ed.) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, 9-29. London: Routledge.
- Jia, L. (2010). "Liuxing wenhua shi tisheng guojia wenhua ruanshili de zhanlue liliang (Pop culture as a strategic means for enhancing national soft cultural power)". *Journal of Northwest University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, 40(5), 82-87.
- Jiang, H. (2017). *Shujuhua: Youneierwai de zhineng (Datamation: An inside-out intelligence)*. Beijing: Communication University of China Press.
- Knapp, M. L., J. A. Hall, & T. G. Horgan. (2013). *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Knobel, M., & C. Lankshear. (2007). *A New Literacies Sampler*. New York: Peter Lang.
- LeCompte, M. D., & J. J. Schensul. (1999). *Analyzing and Interpreting Ethnographic Data*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.
- Leibold, J. (2011). "Blogging alone: China, the internet, and the democratic illusion?". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 70(4), 1023-1041.
- Lévy, P. (1997). *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*. (R. Bononno, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Perseus books. (Original work published 1994)
- Li, L., and T. T. C. Lin. (2016). "Examining Weibo posting anxiety among well-educated youth in China: A qualitative approach". *Information Development*, 32(4), 1240-1252
- Liang, T. (1994). "Mingxing, zhuixing zu, shangpin baiwujiao: Dangdai qingnian zhuixing re xianxiang toushi (Pop stars, star-chasers, and commodity fetishism: Investigating the contemporary fanaticism of chasing after pop stars)". *Dianying Pingjie (Movie Review)*, 2, 6-8.

- Liang, Yi. (2015). "Lun 'badao zongcai' qingjie muti cong wenxue dao dianshiju lingyu de liudong: You dianshiju 'Heyisheng Xiaomo' lunqi (The motif of 'domineering CEO' shifting from literature to television drama: A discussion of the television drama 'My Sunshine')". *Dongnan Chuanbo (Southeast Communication)*, 130(6), 108-111.
- Lin, R., A. Levordashka, & S. Utz. (2016). "Ambient intimacy on Twitter". *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 10(1), article 6.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5817/CP2016-1-6>
- Liu, X. (2015). *The Linguistic Analysis of Chinese Emoticon*. (Master's thesis). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst.
- Longhurst, B. (2007). *Cultural Change and Ordinary Life*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.
- Lovink, G. (2011). *Networks without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Lu, C. (2017). "'Fanquan' yu 'quanfan': Daxuesheng fensi qunti de hudong jizhi yanjiu ('Fan circles' and 'being fans': A research on the interaction between undergraduate student fans)". *Qingshaonian yanjiu yu shijian (Youth studies and practices)*, 4, 85-91.
- Manovich, L. (2005). "Remixing and remixability". Retrieved from http://www.manovich.net/DOCS/Remix_modular.doc
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1989). *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Marwick, A., & D. boyd. (2011). "I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience". *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114-133.
- Marwick, A., & D. boyd. (2011). "To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter". *Convergence*, 17(2), 139-158.
- McCombs, M. E., & D. L. Shaw. (1972). "The agenda-setting function of mass media". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.
- McClellan, A. (2014). "Redefining genderswap fan fiction: A *Sherlock* case study". *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 17.

- Meikle, G. (2016). *Social Media: Communication, Sharing and Visibility*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Miller, T., N. Govil, J. McMurria, & R. Maxwell. (2001) *Global Hollywood*. London: BFI.
- Milner, R. M. (2012). *The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media*. (Doctoral dissertation). Lawrence: University of Kansas.
- Min, L. (2002). "Dui 'zaolian' de zairenshi ji jiaoyu duice (Re-think 'young love' and its education strategy)". *Zhongguo Xingkexue (Chinese Sexology)*, 1(1), 8-11.
- Mittell, J. (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: NYU Press.
- Mizoguchi, A. (2003). "Male-male romance by and for women in Japan: A history and the subgenres of Yaoi fictions". *US-Japan Women's Journal*, 25, 49-75.
- Mo, Q., & K. Yang, (2014). "Wangluo shuijun shibie yanjiu (Overview of web spammer detection)". *Journal of Software*, 25(7), 1505-1526.
- Mtime. (2011, 15th December). "Shentan Xialuke denglu zhongguo shou ji faxing zhongwenban DVD (Sherlock comes to China, and its first season now has Chinese version of DVD)". Retrieved from Mtime website: <http://news.mtime.com/2011/12/15/1477941.html>
- Mtime. (2012, 12th July). "Xinshiji Fuermosi huigui Shentan Xialuke dierji DVD faxing (Sherlock Holmes in the new century comes back, DVD of Season Two available)". Retrieved from Mtime website: <http://news.mtime.com/2012/07/12/1492555.html>
- Mulvey, Laura. (1975). "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema." In L. Braudy & M. Cohen (eds.). *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 833-844.
- Murdock, G. (1999). "Rights and representations: Public discourse and cultural citizenship". In J. Grisprud. (ed.) *Television and Common Knowledge*, 7-17. London: Routledge.
- Nagaike, K. (2003). "Perverse sexualities, pervasive desires: Representations of female fantasies and 'Yaoi Manga' as pornography directed at women". *US-Japan Women's Journal*, 25, 76-103.

- Nanto, D. K., & E. Chanlett-Avery. (2006, January). *The rise of China and its effect on Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea: US policy choices*. Library of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1984). *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion — Our Social Skin*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1991). "The theory of public opinion: The concept of the Spiral of Silence". In J. A. Anderson. (Ed.) *Communication Yearbook 14*, 256-287. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Ouyang, L. (2009). *Research on the Current Fansubbing in China*. (Master's thesis). Changsha: Hunan University.
- O'Reilly, T. (2007). "What is Web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software". *International Journal of Digital Economics*, 65, 17-37.
- Pratt, M. L. (1991). "Arts of the contact zone". *Profession*, 33-40.
- Qiu, J. (2016). "Social media on the picket line". *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(4), 619-633.
- Raacke, J., & J. Bonds-Raacke. (2008). "MySpace and Facebook: Applying the uses and gratifications theory to exploring friend-networking sites". *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 11(2), 169-174.
- Raymond, E. (1999). "The cathedral and the bazaar". *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, 12(3), 23-49.
- Ropp, P. S., & Barrett, T. H. (Eds.). (1990). *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Roscoe, J. (2004). "Multi-platform event television: Reconceptualizing our relationship with television". *The Communication Review*, 7(4), 363-369.
- Rose, N. (1998). "Controversies in meme theory". *Journal of Memetics-Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission*, 2(1), 43-56.
- Rose, R. L., & S. L. Wood. (2005). "Paradox and the consumption of authenticity through reality television". *Journal of consumer research*, 32(2), 284-296.

- Ross, A. (2009). *Nice Work if You can Get it: Life and Labour in Precarious Times*. New York: NYU Press.
- Ross, C., E. S. Orr, M. Sisic, J. M. Arseneault, M. G. Simmering, & R. R. Orr. (2009). "Personality and motivations associated with Facebook use". *Computers in Human Behavior*, 25(2), 578–586.
- Saito, K. (2011). "Desire in subtext: Gender, fandom, and women's male-male homoerotic parodies in contemporary Japan". *Mechademia*, 6(1), 171-191.
- Salkowitz, R. (2012). *Comic-con and the Business of Pop Culture: What the World's Wildest Trade Show can Tell us About the Future of Entertainment*. New York: McGraw Hill Professional.
- Sandvoss, C. (2011). "Fans online: Affective media consumption and production in the age of convergence". In M. Christensen, A. Jansson, C. Christensen (eds.) *Online Territories: Globalization, Mediated Practice and Social Space*, 49-74. New York: Peter Lang.
- Sandvoss, C. (2013). "Toward an understanding of political enthusiasm as media fandom: Blogging, fan productivity and affect in American politics". *Participations*, 10(1), 252-296.
- Schäfer, M. T. (2011). *Bastard Culture!: How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Scollo, M. (2011). "Cultural approaches to discourse analysis: A theoretical and methodological conversation with special focus on Donal Carbaugh's Cultural Discourse Theory". *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 6(1), 1-32.
- Scott, S. (2008). "Authorized resistance: Is fan production frakked?". In T. Potter & C. W. Marshall (eds.) *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, 210-223. New York: Continuum.
- Shifman, L. (2013). "Memes in a digital world: Reconciling with a conceptual troublemaker". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 18(3), 362-377.
- Shifman, L. (2013). *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Shih, C. C., T. M. Lin, & P. Luarn. (2014). "Fan-centric social media: The Xiaomi phenomenon in China". *Business Horizons*, 57(3), 349-358.

- Schrock, A. R. (2015). "Communicative affordances of mobile media: Portability, availability, locatability, and multimediality". *International Journal of Communication*, 9(1), 1229-1246.
- Storey, J. (2011). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Sullivan, J. (2014). "China's Weibo: Is faster different?". *New Media & Society*, 16(1), 24-37.
- Sun Weihua. (2015). "Gonggong biaoda de bianyi: Wangluo zhengzhi yaoyan xianxiang yanjiu (The variation of public speaking: A study of online political rumours)". *Dangdai Chuanbo (Contemporary Communication)*, 6, 49-52.
- Sundet, V. S., & E. Ytreberg. (2009). "Working notions of active audiences further research on the active participant in convergent media industries". *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 15(4), 383-390.
- Svensson, M. (2014). "Voice, power and connectivity in China's microblogosphere: Digital divides on SinaWeibo". *China Information*, 28(2), 168-188.
- Swaine, M. D. (2017). "Chinese views on South Korea's deployment of THAAD". *China Leadership Monitor*, 52(4), 1-15.
- Szablewicz, M. (2014). "The 'losers' of China's Internet: Memes as 'structures of feeling' for disillusioned young netizens". *China Information*, 28(2), 259-275.
- Tao, D. (2009). *Fensi Wenhua Duben. (Fan Cultures: A Reader)*, Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Terranova, T. (2000). "Free labor: Producing culture for the digital economy". *Social Text*. 18(2), 33-58.
- Tosenberger, C., & M. P. Steal (2014). "Children's literature and the unpublishability of fanfiction". *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 39, 4-27.
- Tulloch, J., & Jenkins, H. (1995). *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*. Routledge.
- Turner, G. (2004). *Understanding Celebrity*. London: Sage.

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14: Teaching and Learning – Achieving Quality for All*, UNESCO, Paris, 2014.
- van Dijck, J. (2013). *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vogt, W. P. (1999). *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences*. London: Sage.
- Wang, D., H. Park, G. Xie, S. Moon, & M. A. Kaafar. (2013, April). "A genealogy of information spreading on microblogs: A Galton-Watson-based explicative model". In *INFOCOM, 2013 Proceedings IEEE*, 2391-2399.
- Wang, D., & X. Zhang. (2017). "Fansubbing in China". *Target - International Journal of Translation Studies*, 29(2), 301-318.
- Wang, J. (2015). *Jiyu Danmu Shipin Wangzhan De Danmu Wenhua Yanjiu (A study of the "danmu" culture on "danmu" video sharing sites)*. (Master's thesis). Jinan: Shandong Normal University.
- Wang, L. (2011). "Shejiao xinmeiti weibo de chuanboxue fenxi (An analysis of Weibo as a new social media from a perspective of communication studies)". *Journal of Zhengzhou University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, 44(4), 142-144.
- Wang, Shiyong. (2014). "Wangluo liuxingyu: Guanshe yiti ji yiti jiangou (Internet catchwords: Involved topics and setting of the topics)". *Qiusuo (Quest)*, 8, 4-10.
- Wang, Siqi. (2007). "Zhongguo dangdai liuxing yinyue wenhua gongneng yanjiu (A study of the cultural function of contemporary Chinese pop music)". *Zhongguo Yinyuexue (Musicology in China)*, 2, 37-43.
- Wang, Siqi. (2008). "Zhongguo dangdai liuxing yinyue yu shehui wenhua huanjing hudong guanxi yanjiu (The interaction between contemporary Chinese pop music and sociocultural environment in China)". *Yinyue Yanjiu (Music studies)*, 1, 81-86.

- Wang, N., and Y. Sun. (2016). "Social influence or personal preference? Examining the determinants of usage intention across social media with different sociability". *Information Development*, 32(5), 1442-1456.
- Wang, X. (2005). "Dangxia zhongguo liuxing wenhua fenxi (An analysis of contemporary Chinese popular culture)". *Journal of Huaiyin Teachers College (Social Science)*, 26(6), 820-822.
- Wang, Yao. (2000). "Maodun chongchong de 'guodu zhuangtai': Guanyu xin shiqi wenxue 'yuantou' kaocha zhiyi (The 'transition' with contradictions: An exploration on the 'origins' of literature in the new era)". *Dangdai Zuoja Pinglun (Contemporary Writer Review)*, (5), 22-32.
- Wang, Yao. (2013). "Lun zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi de 'guodu zhuangtai': Yi 1975-1983 nian wei zhongxin (A study of the 'transition' in the contemporary Chinese literature: Focusing on the period from 1975 to 1983)". *Wenxue Pinglun (Literary Review)*, (4), 5-16.
- Wang, Yin. (2011). "Woguo liuxing wenhua yanjiu shuping (A research review of China's popular culture)". *Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy and Social Science)*, 34(5), 137-144.
- Wang, Z. (2006). "Jindai Fuermosi tanan xiaoshuo daibiaoxing yizuo de fenxi yu pingjia (Analysis and evaluation on modern [Chinese] translation of *Sherlock Holmes* detective stories)". *Journal of Shanxi Datong University (Science)*, 22(3), 99-102.
- Weibo Data Center. (2015). *Weibo User Development Report*. Retrieved from Weibo Data Center website: <http://data.weibo.com/report/reportDetail?id=297>
- Weibo Data Center. (2017). *Weibo User Development Report*. Retrieved from Weibo Data Center website: <http://data.weibo.com/report/reportDetail?id=404>
- WeChat. (2017). *WeChat Data Report*. Retrieved from WeChat website: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ulk-m0k3qdY6tOaXQihelQ>
- Wen, T. (2013). *Baci weiji: Zhongguo de zhenshi jingyan (Eight crises: Lessons from China)*. Beijing: Oriental Publishing.

- Wen, Z. (2008). "Zhongguo qingshaonian de 'hari hahan' xianxiang jiqi fansi (Why do so many Chinese youth and children favour Japan or Korea so much?)". *Qingnian Tansuo (Youth Exploration)*, 3, 7-10.
- White, M. (2006). *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wu, J., and J. Zhang. (2017). "The effect of parental absence on child development in rural China". *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 12, 117–134.
- Wu, K., S. Yang, & K. Zhu. (2015). "False rumors detection on Sina Weibo by propagation structures". Proceeding in *IEEE International Conference on Data Engineering, ICDE*.
- Xiang, G., and X. Xu. (2005). "'Furong jiejie' xianxiang zheshe chu shenme (What does the phenomenon of 'Furong jiejie' reflect?)". *Chuanmei Guancha (Media Observer)*, 12, 16-18.
- Xu, H. (2008). "Liuxing wenhua dui gaoxiao xuesheng jiazhiguan de yingxiang ji duice (The influence of popular culture towards college students' values)". *Shidai Wenxue (Times Literature)*, 8, 92.
- Yang, H. (2015). "Shehui zhichi dui cujin funü jiuye de wenxian zongshu (How social support encourage women's employment: A literature review)". *Modern Anthropology*, 3(3). Retrieved from Hans Publisher website: https://image.hanspub.org/Html/3-3030023_15735.htm
- Yang, J. (2012). "The Korean wave (Hallyu) in East Asia: A comparison of Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese audiences who watch Korean TV dramas". *Development and Society*, 41(1), 103-147.
- Yang, G. (2012). "A Chinese Internet? History, practice, and globalization". *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 5(1), 49-54.
- Yang, L., & H. Bao. (2012). "Queerly intimate: Friends, fans and affective communication in a Super Girl fan fiction community". *Cultural Studies*, 26(6), 842-871.
- Yang, L., & Y. Xu. (2016). "'The love that dare not speak its name': The fate of Chinese danmei communities in the 2014 anti-porn campaign". in McLelland, M. (ed.). *The End of Cool*

Japan: Ethical, Legal, and Cultural Challenges to Japanese Popular Culture. New York: Routledge.

Yangtse Evening Post (2016, 9th January). "Shentan Xialuoke fanyi 'yingshang' bei tucao reng dang buzhu dianying piaofang po yi ('Serious' mistranslation in Sherlock has been criticised but not affected the movie earning over 100 million CNY)". Retrieved from Yangtse Evening Post website: http://epaper.yzwb.net/html_t/2016-01/09/content_271314.htm?div=-1

Yoder, C., & F. Stutzman. (2011). "Identifying social capital in the Facebook interface". Proceeding in *The SIGCHI Conference on human factors in computing systems*, 585-588.

Yu, L., S. Asur., & B. A. Huberman. (2011). "What trends in Chinese social media". Proceeding in *the 5th ACM workshop on Social Network Mining and Analysis*.

Yu, S. Qiong. (2012). *Jet Li: Chinese Masculinity and Transnational Film Stardom: Chinese Masculinity and Transnational Film Stardom*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Zhang, Chunyu. (2016). Loving Boys Twice as Much: Chinese Women's Paradoxical Fandom of "Boys' Love" Fiction. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39(3), 249-267.

Zhang, J., and B. Gao. (2010). "Wangluo liuxingyu de mimi: Moyin (The secret of Internet catchphrase: Meme)". *Journal of Sichuan College of Education*, 2, 55-59.

Zhang, J. (2009). "Zhun shehui jiaowang zhong qingshaonian mingxing chongbai de yanjiu (A study on the youth's celebrity worship in 'quasi-social' interaction)". *Dangdai Chuanbo (Contemporary Communication)*, 1, 27-29.

Zhang, L., & A. YH. Fung. (2013). "Working as playing? Consumer labor, guild and the secondary industry of online gaming in China". *New Media & Society*, 16(1), 38-54.

Zhang, Shengyun. (2014). "Zhongguo xiqu de ximi yu piaoyou (Fans and aficionados of Chinese traditional opera)". *Xiju Wenxue (Theatre Literature)*, 368(1), 115-121.

Zhang, Weiyu. (2016). *The Internet and New Social Formation in China: Fandom Publics in the Making*. New York: Routledge.

Zhang, Wendi. (2014). "*Zhaixi*" Wangluo Yuyan De Chuanbo Yanjiu (A Study of the Spread of "Otaku" Language Online). (Master's thesis). Shanghai: Shanghai Normal University.

- Zheng, Xiaohong. (2008). "'Hanliu' chengyin ji dui woguo qingshaonian de yingxiang (The reason of 'Korean wave' and its impact to Chinese youth and children)". *Zhongguo Qingnian Yanjiu (China Youth Studies)*, 2, 97-99.
- Zheng, Xiqing. (2016). *Borderless Fandom and Contemporary Popular Cultural Scene in Chinese Cyberspace*. (Doctoral dissertation). Seattle: University of Washington.
- Zheng, Xuemei. (2010). "Dazhong chuanmei wenhua zhi wangluo wenhua xianxiang jixi: Wangluo danmei wenxue liuxing xianxiang zhong de shehui xintai (An online phenomenon in mass media culture: The social mentality in the context of popular online fan literature)". *Wenxuejie: Lilun ban (Literature: Theory Edition)*, 7, 203-204.