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# Intertextuality, cybersubculture, and the creation of an alternative public space: ‘Danmu’ and film viewing on the Bilibili.com website, a case study

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**Keywords:** Bilibili, cybersubculture, Danmu, intertextuality, public space

## Introduction

As a prominent feature of the burgeoning video-share websites such as Bilibili.com in China, an online video commentary format called ‘Danmu’ – which literally means ‘bullet screen’ but can also be interpreted as a ‘barrage’ – has become highly popular. Through having viewers’ text commentary scroll across the screen and being particularly popularised in China by Bilibili.com, it embraces not only ‘ACG’ (anime, comic, and game) video viewing but also film viewing by the users using the same websites. By enabling viewers to add their comments directly onto the screen, Danmu creates an atmosphere of a ‘pseudo-synchronicity’.[1] Although the format originates from Japanese ACG subculture, while being integrated into non-ACG video viewings on Chinese websites, film viewings featuring Danmu have become uniquely popular among young online film audiences in China. Meanwhile, the film viewings on Bilibili.com, in particular, highlight the ACG website’s dual role as an anonymous web-based communication platform, opening up to subcultural texts and audience use of Danmu as non-mainstream reception of texts.

The aim of this case study is to explicate the relationships between the following: (1) Danmu as an intertextual practice; (2) Bilibili as a youth subculture platform; and (3) the creation of an alternative public space. I will argue that a public screening space is created by the audience engagement through interactive entry points into a story world; also, the formation of the space can be conceptualised as a 'subculturalisation' of film texts. By this token, the mechanism departs from both mainstream video-share websites and underground screening venues.

While much recent research has focused considerable attention on ACG fan consumption on Danmu video sharing platforms like Bilibili, there has been little attention to practices other than the ACG-related activities on the websites. In addition, most scholarly writing on interactive film-viewing experiences online has focused primarily on theorising the practices in general. However, more contextualising issues such as specific cybersubcultures and social formations, especially within a non-Western context, have been granted a rather small share of academic interest.[2] Considering the convergence of the films intertextualised by Danmu and the subcultural context of film reception on Bilibili, I suggest that the film viewings on the non-mainstream platform, through a relocation of Danmu as an intertextual device, create an alternative public space where 'modern' and 'postmodern' experiences coexist. Through a combination of private and public film screening-viewing-transformation systems, the use of Danmu on Bilibili gives way to the viewer to develop a 'paracinematic' reading strategy, thereby becoming a catalyst for the emergence of distinct fan communities; it is then appropriated by 'mainstream' audiences as a way of constructing a 'public space' where they share and discuss films, so as to make the website function as an alternative to offline screening and discussion spaces, in response to the limits placed by political and commercial powers on offline screening for foreign, non-commercial, and arthouse productions. Meanwhile, in the space formed by a spontaneous collective of anonymous individual users, creating Danmu while viewing films acts as a strategy to re-distribute another form of cultural capital across social classes and different regions of offline China. As a result of the long-standing coexistence of the low level of copyright protection and the high level of government control over offline theatrical releases, film viewings on the website can be considered to be a mixture of an 'underground' cinema experience and viewers' transmedia participation by integrating Danmu into the film texture. Furthermore, this article will explore the impact of the ACG subcultural atmosphere on film viewings on Bilibili. I

will analyse the interactions, overlaps, contradictions, and conflicts in cyberspace between the subculture and the audience preferences for different types of film on the same platform. This article will argue that appropriating the Danmu format while watching films by making use of Bilibili as a sub-cultural platform in cyberspace is not a 'postmodernisation' in a linear process but rather heterogeneous events in a rhizomatic process, where the modern and postmodern receptions of films join hands.[3]

## Danmu as a commentary/intertextualisation format

In his influential essay '*Casablanca*: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage', Umberto Eco gives a description of the intertextual engagement making films 'cult objects': '[i]n order to transform a work into a cult object one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of the original relationship with the whole.'<sup>[4]</sup> By means of drawing both textual and extra-textual references into the video versions and further into audience viewing experience, Danmu 'cultises' films and relocates them into non-mainstream receptions by a heterogeneous audience who differ in age, gender, education, class, region, etc.

This is a limited study, which introduces a detailed analysis of three examples of film videos into which Bilibili users' Danmu comments are embedded. Below I consider the specific examples of this audience intertextual engagement with cult cinema: Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Assassin* (2015), which is an art film production and in many ways aesthetically innovative, combining elements of classical Chinese and European art traditions; Juno Mak's *Rigor Mortis* (2013), which builds upon the popularity of a low-brow but much-loved local subgenre known as 'jiangshi dianying', a term that translates as 'cadaver movies', based on ghost stories from ancient Chinese folklore (as a supernatural genre film, *Rigor Mortis* cannot be 'legally' shown in mainland China's theatres because of the official 'anti-superstition' censorship guidelines); and Indar Dzhendubaev's *He's a Dragon* (2015), as an example of a film popularised almost exclusively among a certain subgroup of Bilibili users (e.g. female adolescents). As I will now outline, these three films, respectively, as a 'highbrow' art production, a 'lowbrow' genre film, and an unimported, especially non-Hollywood, foreign film, share a non-mainstream status. It is the films' 'cultified status' that is revealed and enhanced by Danmu's intertextual commentary, which expresses a mixture of high and low tastes both moving

beyond mainstream official/commercial discourses. The three examples are shown below. The following respectively presents a brief summary and comparison of Danmu commentary quantities and contents, and Danmu's intertextualisation contributing to the different texts' cultification:

*The Assassin:*

Danmu quantity (updated 7 April 2016): 5286, a relatively small number of Danmu comments sent by viewers;

Danmu content: cinematic versus extra- or para-cinematic responses mix and conflict with each other, e.g. 'I did not notice the low drumbeats on the soundtrack until I saw an earlier Danmu about the sound design', versus 'Pretty sure, art films are not my type';

Danmu intertextualisation contributing to cultifying the film: as a anti-action, unconventional wuxia film, *The Assassin* is marked with many features of 'writerly' arthouse aesthetics – slow- motion techniques, temporal discontinuities, natural lighting, etc. It thus seems purposely difficult or ambiguous, which calls upon its viewers to think about the high-art techniques disturbing or disrupting the diegetic world, such as the 'Drumbeats at Dawn' sound design of the film,[5] as opposed to the centrality of the diegetic world promoted by Hollywood-style films. This leads to a relatively high degree of the audience's interest in 'aesthetic strategies within the text as a closed formal system', rather than the paracinematic attention to excess that seeks to push the viewer beyond the formal boundaries of the text.[6] In her essay 'Sleaze Mania, Euro-trash and High Art', Joan Hawkins argues that '[i]n the world of horror and cult film fanzines and mail order catalogues, as intertextual sites that one could go to explore and pay homage to the films, high-culture art films receive similar receptions as low-culture "paracinema"'. [7] As in the case of this high/low distinction among the Danmu comments in the non-theatrical, non-academic context, the phenomenon can be thought of as an example of art film consumption, incorporating Danmu style, becoming a reaction against the hierarchical power structures of commercial and elite cinema cultures.



Fig. 1: Screen capture from Bilibili.com.

*Rigor Mortis:*

Danmu quantity (updated 7 April 2016): 26265, a relatively large number of Danmu comments sent by viewers, based on a mixture of the audience's 'cinematic' experience of being drawn into the generic diegesis and their 'paracinematic' recollections of the 'prosthetic memory' shared with other fans of the subgenre by using Danmu;[8]

Danmu content: a discussion of Hong Kong 'jiangshi horror' as a subgenre that has long been marginalised within the international/local cinema culture, which simultaneously becomes a way for fans of both Hong Kong cinema and the horror genre to express a sense of belonging. Depending upon a mixture of horror fans' experiences of being drawn into the generic diegesis, and the local cinema's fans' recollections of their 'prosthetic memory', typical Danmu comments are: 'So horrible', 'Danmu, protect me' (as an example of generic responses to clichés while being drawn into the diegesis), 'I miss Lam Ching Ying' (Lam is a iconic actor/director in Hong Kong ghost horror genre, to whom this film pays tribute);

Danmu's intertextualisation contributing to cultifying the film: according to John Fiske, a 'producerly text' is not difficult to understand, though audiences may feel the desire to complete the meaning that does not come equipped with its own construction or to express themselves through re-constructing it. In this sense, as a 'producerly' homage to recognisable elements (such as a

known cast) from the golden age of the Hong Kong ‘jiangshi horror’ subgenre of the 1980s, the film provides viewers the supernatural horror generic response patterns unavailable in offline theatres. It can also be regarded by the local cinema’s fans as a ‘meta-cult’ object and provokes among them a nostalgia on a purely media-transmitted, subcultural ‘prosthetic memory’, which figures prominently in viewers’ use of Danmu to cultivate a fan base consisting of both those who focuses on horror’s generic conventions and those who focuses on the subgenre’s extra-textual (cultural and historical) references by treating the film as a cult object marginalised by legitimate film culture.

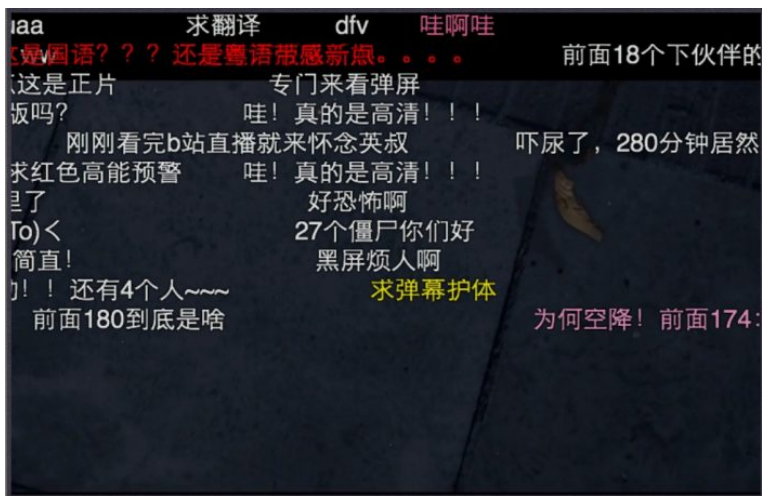


Fig. 2: Screen capture from Bilibili.com.

*He's a Dragon* (which has been deleted by the uploader or the website from Bilibili.com where it originally attracted a large number of views on the platform):

Danmu quantity (updated 17 February 2016): more than 170,000, according to blogger Qingshanshuilong, a very large number of Danmu comments sent by viewers. The response can be seen as a result of viewers’ ‘textual poaching’. In the process, as Henry Jenkins describes, by poaching a media text like *He's a Dragon*, thanks to internet technologies such as the Danmu function, viewers are able to collectively ‘re-write’ it to explore age/gender subcultural issues outside of adult/male cinema cultures;[9]

Danmu content: the focus of the Danmu comments is typical of fans appreciating a 'readerly female romance'. For example, 'My girlish glee!' and 'Shirtless through the whole film!' Danmu also produces here an environment in which the exotic/non-Hollywood romance is used by the viewers to build a collective identity to feel temporarily freed from local and global male-dominated structures of both mainstream and youth cultures;

Danmu intertextualisation contributing to cultifying the film: the 'pseudo-synchronicity' of Danmu gives rise to the blurring of the line between imagining fictional worlds and experiencing real events, which enables viewers to have a space to convey their redefinition of the static readerly texts into fluid intertextual networks and encourages repeated attempts from the audience to participate in a rhizomatic process of creating an environment for cross-cultural cult engagement. It is evident from a considerable number of Danmu that *He's a Dragon* is accepted as a cult film through the repetitive viewing practices of fans.[10] Typical Danmu comments are: 'Watched it for the second time!', 'Third time', 'Specially come to see Danmu!!!'.



Fig. 3: Screen capture from Bilibili.com.

From an intertextuality perspective on the relationship between Danmu and film viewings within cyberspace, when Danmu's intertextual function extends from otaku-oriented media to the outside of the hardcore ACG video scene, it plays a role of intertextualising various media texts, including films. It is obvious from the above three cases that, through Danmu's involvement



with the nondiegetic world and other diegetic worlds, the device delimits the films being viewed into a cultification process. Thus, seen from a spreadability perspective, Danmu is accepted into a convergence of cinematic/paracinematic viewings and represents a synchronisation of experiences in which film texts are simultaneously being read and rewritten. The locality and diversity within the alternative reception of readerly/writerly/producerly texts (in Roland Barthes's terms) are highlighted by the quantities, forms, and contents of Danmu interwoven into the texts, thereby serving as an engaging interplay between the genres and nationalities of films and audience identities within contemporary Chinese cyberculture.[11] As in the examples above, the combination of the availability of films on video sharing websites and the Danmu-based discussion mode circulates as 'spreadable media' within the 'networked audience'.[12]

### **Bilibili, a video-share website as a cybersubculture platform/public space**

By transforming film viewings from 'regular or mainstream' audience modes to 'live-events, within an atmosphere akin to theatrical performance', "being there" and "being part" become important, and technological accidents (like a screening being interrupted) enhance the "lived" aspect of the screening'.[13] Considering its role in generating the atmosphere of 'being there' and 'being part' by relocating its operations into Chinese cinema culture, Danmu is representative of not only viewer construction of agency associated with ACG subculture within its original context, but also audience engagements with the formation of an alternative to offline geographic spaces for sharing certain films and provoking senses of belonging within certain audiences. Meanwhile, as I will argue in this section, rather than oversimplifying from a technological deterministic perspective, such a discussion on the relationship between Danmu and film viewings cannot be made in isolation from the cultural dimensions embedded in the 'convergence' context. As warned by Jenkins, 'the tools available to a culture matter, but what that culture chooses to do with those tools matters more'.[14]

In this section we shall see the importance of the subcultural context for the film viewers' appropriation of the Danmu system. This can be explained by an analysis of Bilibili, the most popular Danmu-featuring video-sharing website. Like otaku (fans of anime, manga, and games) as the website's pre-

existing hardcore user base, they engage deeply in the story-worlds, enjoying a 'detachment from reality' and 'performing the delineation between the 'real' and the 'fictional'.<sup>[15]</sup> By extending the experience of film viewing into the Bilibili platform and its Danmu system, the online cinema within the already subculturalised space has deepened the cult/niche interest in non-mainstream genres and films, thereby establishing and constituting temporary trans-spaces and trans-identities. In her essay 'Platforms, Practices, and Politics: A Snapshot of Networked Fan Communities in China', Ling Yang argues that online fan-subcultural platforms provide Chinese netizens with an avenue for discussions concerning topics that are not necessarily related to the fan objects, and 'seemingly apolitical online fandoms are likely to be embraced by more Chinese netizens as a sanctuary where they can be "empowered to forge new types of consciousness, identity, shared meanings, communities, relationships, space and place" without the unwanted influence of the state'.<sup>[16]</sup> Emphasising Danmu's intertextual, rhizomatic nature in cyberspace, Bilibili's involvement with the subcultural fandom constitutes an alternative public space that relocates film viewer practices into a dynamic/unstable position.

As (currently) the most visited ACG video-sharing website in China (according to the SimilarWeb ranking),<sup>[17]</sup> Bilibili's 'mainstream' atmosphere is based on the Nijigen (2次元, lit. 'two-dimensional space'), related to the Japanese-originated ACG-Otaku subculture. It also extends its service to the Sanjigen (3次元, lit. 'three-dimensional space'), which refers to the real world beyond the Nijigen fantasy space. In the process, film viewings play a key role in reconstructing a '2.5次元' space on the website. The process, in turn, generates a localised, heterogeneous, and re-territorialised cybersubculture.

As compared with other video-sharing platforms, Bilibili content is mostly submitted by its users from third-party sources such as Noconico, Youku, Tudou, and YouTube, and it has long been under less pressure from copyright holders than the more mainstream video-sharing websites in China (e.g. Youku). Between 28 June 2016 and 28 June 2017, for example, according to the Google Transparency Report, the numbers of requests to remove content due to copyright for Youku and Bilibili are respectively 33,400 and 27,400.<sup>[18]</sup> As the Beijing-based lawyer Mathew Alderson points out, although recent years have seen improvement in copyright protection in China, 'once infringing content has been taken down that's usually where the matter ends', and 'it is very hard to prove copyright damages in Chinese court proceedings'.<sup>[19]</sup> Meanwhile, as a further subfield within a subcultural context,

compared with both the more ACG-themed videos on Bilibili and the films shared on mainstream video-share websites such as Youku and Tudou, the non-ACG film videos on Bilibili, shared by a relatively smaller number of users, enables potentialities for discussions and appropriations in a less noticeable but more active way.

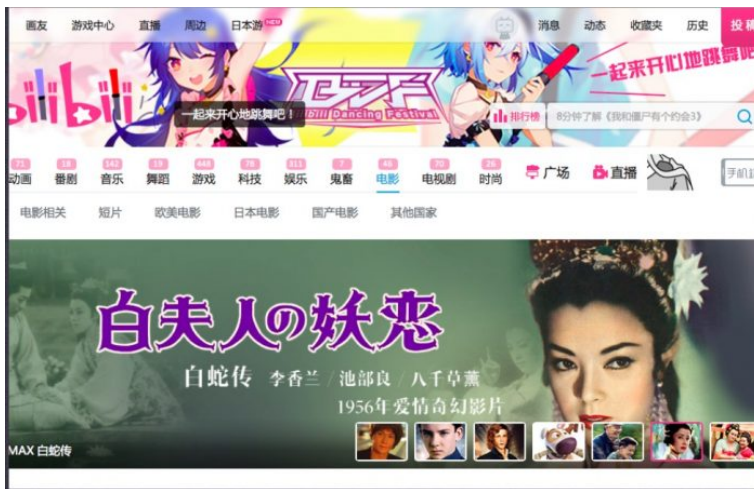


Fig. 4: The ACG atmosphere within the 'Film' section of the Bilibili website; the '2.5次元 space' between the 'fantasy world' and the 'real world' for viewing non-mainstream films, for example *Madame Whitesnake* (Toyoda Shiro, 1956). Screen capture from Bilibili.com.

For instance, between 14 January and 13 April 2016, as the most viewed film on Bilibili during the period, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Burr Steers, 2016) (which was not screened in Chinese theaters, probably due to the limited import quota and the film's supernatural elements) gained 668,000 views and 18,000 Danmu comments. By comparison, the film cannot be found on the Youku and Tudou websites. Another example would be *秀女* (*Xiu Nu*) [alternate title, *裸血* (*Naked Blood*)] (Feng Gao, 1996), which was uploaded on 29 January 2017 and has obtained 1,108,595 views and 5545 Danmu comments on Bilibili until 23 November 2017. The film had been banned, probably due to its sexual content and critical portrayal of contemporary Chinese rural society. Since 2003 the ban has been lifted,[20] thus it also can be watched on some mainstream video portals such as Youku. Nonetheless, the film appeared on Youku seven months later than on Bilibili, and during the period from 31 August to 23 November 2017, it received 8,134 views and no comments.

As discussed by Lev Manovich in his research into 'part of a public sphere' constituted by contemporary interactive media and technologies,

what before was a mental process, a uniquely individual state, now became part of a public sphere. [...] Interactive computer media perfectly fits this trend to externalize and objectify mind's operations. [21]

Through the Danmu system the viewers collectively participate in a movement of mingled 'modern construction' and 'postmodern deconstruction' of film meanings. Accordingly, instead of discussing Bilibili as either a modern, fixed structure or a postmodern, fluid neo-tribal phenomenon – that is, in terms of conventional Euro-American definitions of subcultures – we can explore it as an alternative public space moving back and forth between modern and postmodern notions of audience reception.

### **Film viewing as a modernisation/postmodernisation experience**

If we hope to pursue the theoretical possibilities for the presentation of Bilibili user film-viewing experiences, it is also important to make connections between the cultural moments and theoretical conceptions concerning contemporary Chinese audiences cinema-watching habits. As we have implied above, Bilibili and other similar popular sites like Acfun,[22] as environments that rely heavily on the audience's use of Danmu technology, contribute to a 'subculturalisation' of 'co-watching' the user-uploaded 'cultified' films.[23] There are debates in the literature that posit the subcultural engagement of the experience against the more mainstream legalisation and commercialisation of film viewings. Such debates can be confusing because the cyber-turn in culture has a different meaning in different contexts. One prominent contemporary focus for debate concerns the experience of creating and using a new film-viewing space, notably the experience of using Bilibili as an alternative space for film viewing that is rooted in a specific temporal and spatial framework. Yizhou Xu, Junhua Bie, and Shengjun Wang considered viewing videos on Danmu platforms like Bilibili to be a post-sub-cultural, nomadic practice that is inseparable from the formation of a post-modern aesthetic, thereby flattening the hierarchies between the content producers and consumers 'by reorienting the temporal and spatial relationships between content and comments'.[24] This was countered by Yiyi Yin,

Anthony Fung, Yue Chen, Qin Gao, and Pei-Luen Patrick Rau, who argued that audience behaviour in Danmu sites like Bilibili pose ‘a different discourse alternative to or opposing to the power, mainly the authorities’ top-down control on the Internet, mass media, and other public channels’, which tends to be an attempt at a modernisation and privatisation of experience rather than a fragmentation and deconstruction of experience in a postmodern age.[25]

Considering the film-viewing ‘multiple otherness’ on Bilibili, in terms of its marginality, excluded both from the official/commercial, academic/elite cinema cultures and from the ACG-Otaku youth/fandom subculture, I suggest that the audience experience is relocated between the forms of midnight underground screenings and individual home-viewing habits, while simultaneously existing within a legal and political gray area. Yet this alternative cyberspatial dimension of Chinese cinema culture has often been overlooked by scholars due to the dichotomous narratives of the postmodern and the modern, such as ‘distain toward the grand narrative’ vs. ‘pursuit of the grand narrative’, depthlessness vs. expressivity, and critical vs. depoliticised conceptualisations. As indicated by Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu,

one cannot periodise historical process so neatly in the Chinese case, and there is no clear temporal pattern of the supersession of the ancient world, modernity, and postmodernity as in the West. Contemporary China consists of the superimposition of multiple temporalities; the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern coexist in the same space and at the same moment. Paradoxically, postmodernism in China is even more spatial and more postmodern than its original Western model. Spatial coextension, rather than temporal succession, defines non-Western postmodernity. [26]

Rethinking the urbanisation/individualisation audience experience within contemporary post-socialist/post-1989 China’s cinema culture, an alternative modernisation within the audience’s experience can be considered a dual-track process. For example, China’s box office revenues increased to a record \$6.78 billion in 2015, marking the highest rate of growth since 2011.[27] Also, 1,015 cinemas and 5,397 screens were added in 2014 for a total of 23,600 screens.[28] As explained by a number of existing studies, movie-going has become a way for a growing domestic middle class to experience ‘China’s ongoing modernisation’.[29] On the other hand, against the same backdrop, online film sharing becomes a strategy for generating a modernisation experience in contemporary post-socialist China, thereby acting as a construction of a post-Habermasian public sphere, where a higher diversity of films are

viewed, discussed, and form connections between seemingly unrelated audience communities. Meanwhile, according to contemporary thinkers like Gianni Vattimo, whereas Habermas looks for consensus between different contexts enabling the emergence of 'universal' rationality, Vattimo underlines 'local' rationalities and 'heterotopian' possibilities.[30] As a significant example of such an alternative public sphere in cyberspace, the Bilibili platform, which, because of its position between dominant and underground cinematic spaces, is actively appropriated by Chinese netizens to articulate and mediate an experience of an alternative cinematic modernity.

As reflected by the coexistence of transgressive/fragmented, subcultural/post-subcultural tendencies in the Danmu comments on the Bilibili platform, the film-viewing experience within the contemporary Chinese context, as abundant existing studies have demonstrated, evidently displays postmodern aesthetics and cultural characteristics such as intertextuality, depthlessness, and fragmentation, as well as characteristics of 'the premodern (traditional or, more precisely, prerevolutionary China)', the multinational capitalism and the anticapitalist, anti-enlightenment discourses.[31] In the de-territorialised and re-territorialised world, the mixture of alternative discourses move between multiple roles of deconstructing enlightenment, globalisation, hegemonic, and nationalist narratives. Symbolised within the case of the Danmu film viewings on Bilibili, a collective/counter-elite discourse is then synchronised with a private/counter-hegemonic discourse. Thus in recent years, to attract a younger audience, some Chinese cinemas introduced Danmu into their theatre screenings. However, following the controversial receptions the cinemas received from not only the mass/elite audiences but also the Danmu-Bilibili-youth-subcultural audience, on one hand, the introduction of Danmu was regarded as an intervention into immersive/private film viewing experiences, on the other hand, it was considered to be an incorporation of the subculture into the dominant hegemonic cultural form.[32]

As Lawrence Grossberg reflects in his book *MediaMaking: Mass Media in a Popular Culture*:

the problem with the narrative of the modern and the postmodern, and indeed the problem with any grand narrative that attempts to describe the world and its history on such a scale, is that it tends to assume that its descriptions are universal in character and that they are shared by everyone. [...] Modernity and postmodernity are

relevant particularly to industrialized western nations and do not necessarily describe life in other places. [...] even within a nation, different populations may have different experiences of the same events and apaces. [33]

Taking into account the mixed, in-between, and unstable modernity/post-modernity within the Chinese postsocialist cultural context, the phenomenon discussed here can be seen as a symptom resulting from the subculturalisation within the film-viewing experience in cyberspace, as well as an assemblage of engagements between modernisation and postmodernisation in the audience experience.

## Conclusion

By exploring the cultural context of the Danmu film viewings on Bilibili as an alternative public space, I argue we should pay attention to the heterogeneous locality of the (post-) youth subculture experienced by the viewers. Therefore, film viewing in this intertextualised context reflects the synchronised processes of construction and deconstruction of an unstable public space within contemporary Chinese cinema culture.

As David Bell points out, cyberspace is not static. If the website falls into mainstream global-level copyright or national-level censorship patterns, it may further marginalise its film-sharing section and increase focus on purchasing ACG-related content licenses to consolidate its hardcore users, and it may develop an advanced Danmu-comment filtering system.[34] While this article has only been a preliminary survey of the issues raised by this topic, I would like to express my hope for further collaboration between sociologists and film analysts in the study of this phenomenon.

## Author

Yeqi Zhu is a PhD candidate at the School of Liberal Arts of Nanjing University. She was also a visiting student in the film department at University of Southampton, sponsored by a China Scholarship Council scholarship from September 2015 to September 2016. Her research explores the relationships between literary adaptations, cult films, postmodern authorship, and trans-cultural adaptations.

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## Notes

- [1] Satoshi Hamano put forward the term 'pseudo-synchronicity' to refer to the simultaneous experience generated by the Danmaku's (Japanese term for the format) function in synchronising the comments from users watching at different times. See Hamano 2008, p. 197.
- [2] In *The Cybercultures Reader*, David Bell defines cybersubcultures as social formations that either signal 'an expressive relationship to digital technology ... or make use of it to further their particular project' (p. 205). For the purpose of this study, the definition may be applied to the case when cyberspace technology is used to compensate for the comparative scarcity of real-life communication between displaced individuals, such as the Danmu film scene.
- [3] See Deleuze & Guattari 1987, pp. 9-10.
- [4] See Eco 1987, pp. 3-12.
- [5] In the *Film Comment* interview, Hou explains that the 'Drumbeats at Dawn and Dusk' sound design had to do with historical detail: 'I tried to close in on some key details of daily life, and then zoom out to a wider canvas. For example, I learned that at dawn and dusk, the sound of the beating of drums would fill the streets. According to Tang custom, 3,000 drumbeats would sound from the imperial quarters.' See 'Killer Technique' at [www.filmcomment.com/article/hou-hsiao-hsien-interview/](http://www.filmcomment.com/article/hou-hsiao-hsien-interview/) (accessed on 10 April 2016).
- [6] See Sconce 1995, p. 387.
- [7] See Hawkins 1999, pp. 14-29.
- [8] The term 'prosthetic memory' introduced by Alison Landsberg in her article 'Prosthetic Memory: *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*' gave insight into the role of the filmic medium as 'a metaphor for a kind of prosthetic imagining'. As Landsberg states, '[b]y prosthetic memories I mean memories which do not come from a person's lived experience in any strict sense.' In this sense, I argue, *Rigor Mortis*, as a (meta-) Hong Kong ghost horror film making a number of references

to the 1980s-1990s Hong Kong 'Jiangshi' ghost horror cinema, by way of remembering and relocating generic conventions in a present-day pastiche, becomes what John Fiske termed 'producerly' texts, being synchronised/intertextualised with both the passive responses and an active engagement with a distant and supernatural memory, within the Danmu comments from the young audience in mainland China.

- [9] See Jenkins 2013, p. 114.
- [10] As Barbara Klinger says, '[r]epeated experiences with the same film can operate normatively, continually reaffirming appropriate gender identities, for example. By the same token, favourite texts can continue to inspire feelings of liberation in women looking for strong role models (even in what appears to be a compromised genre such as the chick flick).' See Klinger 2006, p. 188.
- [11] See Barthes 1974, p. 4.
- [12] See Marwick 2013, p. 213.
- [13] In the 'Editorial Introduction' of *The Cult Film Reader*, the editors Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik give a definition of 'Liveness' as a feature associated with the consumption of cult film. As for the atmosphere within the Bilibili website, in my view, it can be seen that an alternative 'liveness' is enhanced in the space.
- [14] See Jenkins 2009, p. 8.
- [15] See Mathijs & Sexton 2011, p. 123.
- [16] See Yang 2017, p. 380.
- [17] SimilarWeb. 1 May 2017. [www.similarweb.com/top-websites/china](http://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/china) (accessed on 29 June 2017).
- [18] Google Transparency Report, 28 June 2017. [www.google.com/transparencyreport/removals/copyright/domains/bilibili.com/](http://www.google.com/transparencyreport/removals/copyright/domains/bilibili.com/) (accessed on 29 June 2017).
- [19] See 'The China Film Industry: An Update' at [www.chinalawblog.com/2016/03/the-china-film-industry-an-update.html](http://www.chinalawblog.com/2016/03/the-china-film-industry-an-update.html) (accessed on 10 April 2016).
- [20] See 'Without Fear of Being Banned, *Naked Blood* Boasted Unleashed Desire' (不怕被禁 电影<裸血> 标榜解禁情欲) at [www.huaxia.com/yl/yysj/00169723.html](http://www.huaxia.com/yl/yysj/00169723.html) (accessed on 23 November 2017).
- [21] See Manovich 2001, pp. 60-61.
- [22] <http://www.acfun.tv/>.
- [23] As analyst Zhong Qi has pointed out, '[a]s video streaming and sharing sites become the main channel for Chinese people to watch foreign movies and TV dramas [...] AcFun, Bilibili, and some cloud storage service platforms have become unofficial channels for many Chinese to watch US and UK dramas.' See 'China's ban on foreign content on Bilibili, AcFun is not about piracy' at [www.scmp.com/business/companies/article/2102948/chinas-ban-foreign-content-bilibili-acfun-not-about-piracy](http://www.scmp.com/business/companies/article/2102948/chinas-ban-foreign-content-bilibili-acfun-not-about-piracy) (accessed on 20 November 2017).
- [24] See Xu 2016, pp. 436-451; Bie 2016, pp. 43-44; Wang 2015, pp. 110-112.
- [25] See Yin & Fung 2017, pp. 130-154; Chen & Gao & Rau 2017, pp. 731-743.
- [26] Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, 'Global POSTmodernIZATION: The Intellectual, the Artist, and China's Condition,' in Dirlik & Zhang 2000, p. 158.
- [27] See 'Global 2015 Box Office: Revenue Hits Record \$38 Billion-Plus' at [www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/global-2015-box-office-revenue-851749](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/global-2015-box-office-revenue-851749) (accessed on 10 April 2016).
- [28] See 'China to become world's largest movie market within 2 years' at [www.ft.com/cms/s/0/90810812-9ccd-11e5-b45d-4812f209f861.html#axzz467ovvzgf](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/90810812-9ccd-11e5-b45d-4812f209f861.html#axzz467ovvzgf) 7<sup>th</sup> (accessed on 10 April 2016).
- [29] See, for example, discussions in Wilson 2011, p. 4; see also Neves 2013, pp. 28-38.
- [30] Vattimo 1992, pp. 8-9, 76-89.

- [31] Xudong Zhang, 'Epilogue: Postmodernism and Postsocialist Society— Historicizing the Present', in Dirlík & Zhang 2000, p. 410.
- [32] See, for example, 'Fun or Infuriating: China Opens Movies to Live On-Screen Commenting' at [www.blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/08/21/fun-or-infuriating-china-opens-movies-to-live-on-screen-commenting/](http://www.blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/08/21/fun-or-infuriating-china-opens-movies-to-live-on-screen-commenting/) (accessed on 10 April 2016); 'Chinese Cinemas' Danmu Screenings Received Polarised Reviews' (弹幕電影愛惡兩極) at [www.sina.com.hk/news/article/20140827/0/1/4/弹幕電影愛惡兩極-4490860.html?cf=o.news](http://www.sina.com.hk/news/article/20140827/0/1/4/弹幕電影愛惡兩極-4490860.html?cf=o.news) (accessed on 10 April 2016); 'Danmu Fever? It's Time to Throw A Wet Blanket' (弹幕狂热? 是时候泼桶冰水了) at [www.geekpark.net/topics/210438](http://www.geekpark.net/topics/210438) (accessed on 10 April 2016); 'Let Danmu Bullets Fly: A Discussion of Danmu Cinema from A Bilibili User's Perspective' (让弹幕飞: 从一名 B 站用户角度看弹幕电影) at [Danmu in Bilibili a case study .doc www.ifanr.com/444836](http://www.ifanr.com/444836) (accessed on 10 April 2016).
- [33] See Grossberg 2006, p. 62.
- [34] Since 12 July 2017 Bilibili has taken a large number of user-uploaded foreign films and television dramas offline, which is still not clear whether the removal is due to copyright issues or to censorship requirements. Whether this type of film viewing will continue into the future remains to be seen, thus further research needs to be developed before any firm conclusions can be drawn. See 'Video-Streaming Site Bilibili Surprises Viewers by Taking Almost All Foreign Films Offline' at [www.chinafilm Insider.com/chinese-video-site-bilibili-takes-foreign-programming-offline/](http://www.chinafilm Insider.com/chinese-video-site-bilibili-takes-foreign-programming-offline/) (accessed on 13 July 2017).