

ASIAN VISUAL CULTURES

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Boredom, *Shanzhai*, and Digitisation in the Time of Creative China

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2.1 New Productive Culture

Shanzhai or Second Degree of Creation?

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Abstract

This chapter describes cultural production by the new generation in China and conceptualises it as 'second-degree reproduction' based on what we call '*shanzhai*', referring to an imitation or copycat. In the second-degree reproduction of cultural products as foreign popular culture in the digital space, Chinese youth are able to create an alternative discourse based on the existing controlling narratives in society to challenge the dominant mainstream. While this alternative is seen as '*shanzhai*', it remains marginal in the eyes of the authorities and thus is free to stay intact, reproduce, and regenerate. Through analysis of concrete examples on social media, this paper explores the nature of such second-degree cultural production.

Keywords: *shanzhai*, second-degree reproduction, youth culture, globalisation

Introduction

The discussion of transcultural reproduction is never new in the era of globalisation. As exotic cultural products flow around the world especially through mass media and digital channels, the youth generation who grew up during a period that witnessed the acceleration of globalisation has formed a bicultural identity in which both global and local culture are

mingled.¹ Nevertheless, it would be dangerous to assert that regional markets have all opened to foreign cultural products to the same extent. In specific countries like China, rigid policies and marketing strategies remain powerful in terms of isolating the local market and resisting against globalisation. Admittedly, the state has gradually opened its market to foreign products since its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. However, most of the opening policies are short-term and with obvious restrictions. By promulgating a series of policies that is deemed to be anti-globalisation, the state is still holding strong control of foreign cultural production imported into the local market. Strong ideological censorship is held in industries such as film, TV, animation, newspaper, and even the internet, to halt the import of 'unhealthy' or politically incorrect foreign productions.

To a certain extent, the progress of globalisation seems to be controlled and restricted in China. Foreign culture and products are not, of course, completely rejected by the country. Nevertheless, the policies do prevent domestic consumers from freely choosing cultural products on a global scale. Under such circumstances, the phenomenon of *shanzhai* or 'second-degree reproduction' as it will be referred to here, emerged as a new form of globalisation in China. Instead of the localisation of traditional imported media products or capital such as Hollywood films or McDonalds, second-degree reproductions appears as a self-generated and domestic youth cultural practice that copies, clones, and imitates global culture.

The concept of 'second degree reproduction', as it will be discussed later as the core concept in this chapter, has its similarities with the concept of *shanzhai*, but holds its own features at the same time. Literally referring to 'mountain villages with fences and houses'² in Chinese, *shanzhai* is broadly seen as a copycat culture that reflects the process of modernisation and the potential of grass-roots creativity in the country.³ The word *shanzhai* is thus

1 Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, 'The Psychology of Globalization', *American Psychologist* 57.10 (2002): 774.

2 Lin-chuan Qiu, 'Shanzhai Culture in the Era of the Internet', *21 Century* 112 (2009): 122.

3 Qiu, 'Shanzai Culture'; Jing Wu, 'Shanzhai Economy and New Media Creativity – A Discussion of the Formation of Postmodernist Public Sphere', *China Media Report*, 2010, accessed August 28, 2016, <http://www.chnmedia.com/wordpress/?p=2578>; William Hennessey, 'Deconstructing Shanzhai-China's Copycat Counterculture: Catch Me If You Can', *Campbell L. Rev.* 34 (2011): 609; Lin Zhang and Anthony Fung, 'The Myth of "Shanzhai" Culture and the Paradox of Digital Democracy in China', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2013): 401-16.

usually translated as 'parody',⁴ referring to the entertaining and popular copy of a cultural product. Similarly, Gong and Yang define Chinese parody as an 'alternative locus of power' that has the potential to resist the authoritative discourse.⁵ On the one hand, it means that the format of *shanzhai* products is usually informal, recreational, and even vulgar on some occasions. On the other hand, it implies a reproduced creativity embodied in the process of 'making fun of' or 'parodying' the original product. Nevertheless, the popularity of a *shanzhai* product largely relies on its close connection with the original product or brand. This is precisely the reason why *shanzhai* products in China always have similar names to the products they are copied from. Famous examples include 'abidas', copied from 'adidas', and the online Spring Festival Gala, which is obviously the 'twin' of CCTV's Spring Festival Gala show.

To a large extent, second-degree reproduction is a more radical cultural reproduction than *shanzhai*, because it actually attempts to emphasise a kind of autonomy and self-owned authority, rather than just becoming an entertaining and cheap appendant of the existing products. As the chapter will further discuss, the *shanzhai* culture in popular culture, particularly within the context of globalisation, has become a form of second-degree reproduction that multiplies global contents internally by producing and consuming *shanzhai* products in specific subcultural or non-official spaces. Instead of being officially imported and localised, foreign culture is redone and copied in local products that are produced and consumed domestically by youths, especially by fans of foreign popular culture. Depicting cases mainly from the reproductions of East Asia, especially Japanese and Korean popular culture in China, the chapter examines this cultural practice and its further implications, arguing that second-degree production must be studied as a new form of globalisation with both its countercultural potential for Chinese youth, as well as its challenging relationship with multiple powers, especially the cultural industries.

Consumption of Japanese Anime in China

Japanese popular culture, especially animations, are highly popular among Chinese youths who were born after the 1980s when *Astroboy* was introduced

4 Zhang and Fung, 'The Myth of "Shanzhai" Culture'.

5 Haomin Gong and Xin Yang, 'Digitized Parody: The Politics of *Egao* in Contemporary China', *China Information* 24.1 (2010): 4.

into the country.⁶ Over a period of twenty years, when the importing policies were relatively relaxed, Japanese anime developed into one of the most influential subcultures embraced by large numbers of fans in China. Popular series such as *Touch*, *Sailor Moon*, *Pokemon*, and *Slam Dunk* were broadcast on TV for years. Pirate manga bookstores sprang up across the country. The emergence of the internet enhanced the popularity of Japanese animation and facilitated the formation of fan groups and related activities both online and offline. Anime clubs appeared to be popular among college students, along with the emergence of comic events, also organised by college students (Sonna, 2014).⁷ For instance, Comic Dive, one of the largest indoor comic events in Beijing, was organised initially by animation clubs from Peking University and the Communication University of China in 2008.⁸ Another comic event, Linjie, has also been hosted by the anime club of Renmin University in Beijing since 2005.⁹ Today, hundreds of comic events and animation festivals are held in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, and Hangzhou each year, including those that have become crucial events in domestic cultural life. In 2015, the Chinese International Cartoon & Animation Festival, held in Hangzhou, attracted more than 1.3 million visitors with over fourteen billion RMB of sales.¹⁰ Basically, Japanese anime and the culture behind it have played an important role in Chinese youth's cultural consumptions and practices.

Nevertheless, for political and economic reasons, the government has established a series of policies relating to importing Japanese animation in recent years. These policies can, on the one hand, be understood as a national strategy in the era of globalisation. To develop and protect the local cultural industry and the related 'soft power', the policy attempts to prevent 'cultural imperialism' in the market and to encourage domestic creativity. On the other hand, as is evident from the 'blacklist' of foreign products, a particular ideology might be politically sensitive to the authorities or the government. Consequently, in 2000, the administration restricted the amount of animation productions that could be imported for TV. In 2006,

6 Zhong-Afu Guan, 'Where is the Path? How Can Japanese Animation Step on Chinese Road?', *Insights*, April 29, 2015, accessed September 4, 2016, <http://culture.ifeng.com/insight/special/anime/>.

7 Sonna, '中国 ACG 圈的发展历史是怎样的, 有哪些重要网站', *Zhihu* 2004. Accessed March 10, 2019. <https://www.zhihu.com/question/22561605/answer/25534694>.

8 See 'Comic Dive': http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=BZqn_EYTpWLYpLQtn6cly9SzJfdCH-WPko6K_xTXeADIGXidRPMHwNQNIlSuymoA5Giox-7poHm8apfjB_wH_.

9 See 'Linjie': <http://baike.baidu.com/subview/4780554/4780554.htm>.

10 CICAFA, 'Introduction of the Chinese International Comic & Animation Festival (CICAFA 2015)', accessed August 28, 2016, http://www.cicaf.com/xwzx/content/2015-01/01/content_5576429.htm.

policies further forbade foreign animation from being aired on TV during the 'golden period', from five pm to nine pm.¹¹ More radically, in 2015, the government banned over 40 Japanese animations from TV. The listed animations, which are forbidden due their 'indecent, violent, criminal or horror' content, which 'may negatively influence Chinese audience cognitively', include very popular blockbusters such as *Death Note*, *Blood-C*, *Attack on Titan*, and *Assassin Classroom* (Guan, 2015; Administration of Culture of the PRC, 2015).¹² In past decades, the TV broadcasting of foreign animations, especially Japanese anime, has been strictly controlled and censored by the government, in the name of protecting domestic youth from 'poisoned content'.

For youths who grew up in the late 80s and 90s, this kind of ideological control policy directly threatens the daily cultural consumption of anime that they are so attached to. Under such circumstances, the consumption of Japanese animations and related products was turned into an underground practice that results in fans playing 'hide and seek' with the administration. In the earlier times, people had access to anime and manga by renting or purchasing pirate copies at illegal DVD stores. Later, fans were able to download video sources directly from fan-subgroups, who record the Japanese original video and translate it themselves. More recently, animation video sites like *ACFun* and *Bilibili* offer more stable and safer online spaces for animation fans to post and watch animations. To circumvent censorship, tricks such as changing the name of *Assassin Classroom* into *Grade 3, Class E* were played by fans. In doing so, fans are still able to enjoy limited animations; no longer from official channels, but in their so-called local space that is shaped by their own efforts to record, translate, and post content. Remaining subcultural and marginalised, such local spaces keep a relatively safe distance from the government's control and restrictions but are embraced by youths and fans as their main habitat in cultural life. In this habitat, youths have access to the foreign products they are fond of and are able to discuss them with others.

Initially, online communities such as *Baidu Tieba* and other theme forums were major digital spaces for youth to talk to each other about certain novels, animations, and other forms of popular culture. Nowadays, newer internet platforms, such as *ACFun* and *Bilibili*, have been established to

11 Guan, 'Where is the Path?'; *Xinhuanet*, 'New Rules by Administration of Broadcasting and Television: Foreign Animations are Forbidden to Air on TV during Golden Period', *Xinhuanet*, 2006, accessed September 4, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-08/13/content_4954807.htm.

12 Guan, 'Where is the Path?'; Administration of the Culture of the PRC, 2015.

allow a higher level of participation than merely discussion. These local spaces, which function as platforms for fans to share their own thoughts and works, also encourage the emergence of certain forms of fan creation. Being motivated by strong affection, these creations started from so-called textual poaching, which refers to the rewriting or re-edition of the original text based on fans' own blueprint.¹³ In their continued struggle against the harsh importing policies and the limitation of accessible Japanese anime, such 'textual poaching' is gradually developing into second-degree reproduction that is not only a consequence of affection, but also a consequence of the anti-globalisation policy. Such reproductions do not limit themselves to 'poaching' and 'rebuilding' subtexts based on the original animation or manga, but also create brand new products carrying the qualities and characteristics they love. Consequently, second-degree reproduction is more closely related to *shanzhai* culture and should be considered as a bottom-up and internal version of globalisation, an expression of grass-roots creativity rather than official culture.

Copycat Culture Revisited

The *shanzhai* culture in China can be traced back to its traditional meaning in imperial China, where it referred to mountain villages occupied by outlaw bandits who were evading the imperial court.¹⁴ In the 1960s, *shanzhai* referred to the underground factories in Guangdong and Hong Kong that produce poor-quality and cheap commodities.¹⁵ The later boom in *shanzhai* mobile phones in the early 21st century re-identified the term *shanzhai* as the representation of copycat culture in China, implying the cheap parody of expensive and branded products, especially electronics. A result of the developing economy in the country, 'where global name brand commodities have established their luxury status through profit margins that put the vast majority of the people below the threshold of consumption',¹⁶ this kind of copycat practice and production emerged initially to produce status products at lower prices. Nevertheless, along with the huge popularity of those *shanzhai* products in the domestic market, especially in smaller cities

13 Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

14 Qiu, 'Shanzhai Culture'; Zhang and Fung, 'The Myth of "Shanzhai" Culture'.

15 Qiu, 'Shanzhai Culture'.

16 Josephine Ho, 'ShanZhai: Economic/Cultural Production through the Cracks of Globalization'. Plenary presentation (Hong Kong: ACS Crossroads: 2010 Cultural Studies Conference, 2010), 2.

and villages, *shanzhai* is increasingly understood not only as the production of low-quality imitations, but also as an icon for innovative copycat production and grass-roots rebellion whose unique form of creativity resists 'upper-class' ideology and officialdom.¹⁷

Although studies have argued that *shanzhai* has the potential to evoke alternative innovation in China, rather than simply copying existing products,¹⁸ the cultural implications of the term need to be examined both socially and historically. Closely related to the Chinese traditional ethos of 'robbers as heroes', *shanzhai* is explained by some discourses as the continuity of folk creativity that counters the official Confucian culture in imperial China.¹⁹ As William Hennessey, *shanzhai* emerges as a reaction to the dominant control in terms of both economy and ideology. Similar to humorous stories and popular fictions during the imperial period, contemporary *shanzhai* can also be seen as a counterculture that relies heavily on folk creativity and grass-roots intelligence to speak against the Chinese official bureaucratic culture and its value system. The *shanzhai* Spring Festival Gala, for instance, cultivates an alternative democracy that has embedded political resistance into affection, collective creativity, and self-branding.²⁰ By making a joke about and playing with dominant ideology and established 'high-brow' products, *shanzhai* production gives a voice to the marginalised and trivial spaces that are different from the mainstream and official discourse.

Global products play an important role in this process. The copycatting practice in *shanzhai* culture has a long tradition of imitating foreign products such as McDonalds, iPhones, and Nokia mobiles. On the other hand, as some discourses have suggested, *shanzhai* is at the same time a counterculture, copying luxury goods and turning them into cheap, low-quality products in opposition to the Western 'global innovation culture' and the capitalist system.²¹ In the field of popular industry in China, where cultural products created overseas are restricted by the government, *shanzhai* then becomes a type of struggle against the anti-globalisation policy that prevents people

17 Ibid.

18 Qiu, 'Shanzhai Culture'; Sheng Zhu and Yongjiang Shi, 'Shanzhai Manufacturing: An Alternative Innovation Phenomenon in China: Its Value Chain and Implications for Chinese Science and Technology Policies', *Journal of Science and Technology Policy in China* 1.1 (2010): 29-49; Wu, 'Shanzhai Economy'.

19 William Hennessey, 'Deconstructing Shanzhai-China's Copycat Counterculture: Catch Me If You Can', *Campbell L. Rev.* 34 (2011): 617.

20 Zhang and Fung, 'The Myth of "Shanzhai" Culture'.

21 Ho, 'ShanZhai'.

them from consuming the foreign products they like. Essentially, *shanzhai*, or copycatting practice, occurs when people cannot consume certain products because they are restricted by either price, or policy. Responding to the copying and creation of such products, *shanzhai* becomes a reproductive innovation that produces 'foreign' products locally. Nevertheless, as argued earlier, although a related concept, 'second-degree reproduction' should not simply be equated to *shanzhai* as it involves a more complex relationship between the reproduced and the original product. If we understand *shanzhai* as a creative grass-roots parody of a particular brand or product, then 'second-degree reproduction' claims more productive power to internalise and localise the product within its own creativity. In other words, a *shanzhai* product exists beyond a comparison of the original product and itself. One can enjoy the *shanzhai* Spring Festival Gala because he or she knows the original Gala show produced by CCTV. However, a second-degree reproduced product is usually an independent product, unknown to its audience and with a less obvious connection to the original product. Because of the government's cultural policies, foreign products are mostly blocked in the country. As consequence, one might not even know *Niconico* or AKB48 before they know Bilibili or SNH48 but can still enjoy the products without any knowledge of their origins. In the case of second-degree reproduction, the imitated product does not speak to its origin, as in *shanzhai* culture, but speaks directly to, first, its audience, who cannot engage with certain foreign cultures normally; and second, the 'mainstream' discourse that blocks these cultures.

Subcultural Space and Second-degree Reproduction

Echoing *shanzhai*, the second-degree reproduction that occurs in the subcultural and Japanese anime fan community reflects how Japanese popular culture is generated in Chinese youth's own cultural practices and production. From genres to language use, the second-degree reproduction conducted by anime fans basically follows every tradition in Japanese ACG (anime, comic, and games) culture. Most of the jargon and slang words related to second-degree reproduction have their origins in Japanese fandom. Thanks to information technology and social networks, many of these vocabularies have transcended the limits of anime fans and are now popular among all youths who are familiar with internet culture. A typical example is the widespread use of 宅 ('geek') and 萌 ('cute') online. The former term is developed from the Japanese word 御宅 (otaku), which literally means

'people who only stay at home'. In ACG culture, otaku refers to those who are addicted to the virtual animated world. The latter word 萌 also originates from Japanese and the word 萌え (moe), which is used as an adjective to describe the cult status of things. Moreover, Chinese female slash fans call themselves 腐女, which literally means 'rotten women'. This word is a straightforward loan from the Japanese word 腐女子 (fujoshi), which refers to the female fans who fantasise about beautiful male couples. When naming their recreation and re-production, Chinese fans would usually use the word 同人 (doujin, as pronounced in Japanese), which is also imported from the Japanese term 'どうじん', referring to 'the recreated work with the same characters'. Terms like *Tongren* use the same Han characters as in Japanese but are written using Chinese Pinyin instead of Japanese Pinyin. Under the umbrella of '同人', subcategories and subgenres of second-degree reproduction are also shaped by Japanese ACG culture (Table 1). By practicing within these genres, China's anime fans are producing Japanese-style cultural products following Japanese innovation patterns.

These terms, which are based on Japanese ACG culture, suggest that the format of second-degree reproduction in Chinese anime fandom is a duplication of Japanese fandom, where fans draw Japan-style pictures, sing Japanese songs, and dance in sailor skirts or Japanese kimonos, but, at the same time, they target these reproductions as 国人作品 ('Chinese fan-work'). Instead of introducing 'exotic' Japanese fan culture and fan work, Chinese fans create their own reproductions with clear Japanese features and that are cultivated in their daily cultural practices and consumptions. In the same way that '*shanzhai*' enables poor people to use self-made, iPhone-like mobiles when iPhones are too expensive for them, this kind of reproduction allows Chinese anime fans to produce and consume Chinese-made but Japan-style contents when the original Japanese anime are strictly controlled by the government.

Many of the important online spaces that eventually become the 'mountain village' for youths to conduct and consume second-degree reproductions are the product of such reproduction as well. One example is the emergence of instant commentary directly shown on the video screen (Danmu, in Chinese), one of the most popular and commercially successful digital subcultural spaces embraced by youth recently. As mentioned earlier, the availability of technology and platforms has enhanced the level of participation from purely discussions to second-degree recreation. These video websites, with a built-in simultaneous commenting system, allow viewers to upload self-made videos and share their comments at any moment during the video play. Once a comment has been posted, it is shown on the screen for anyone to see, as long

2.1.1 Slang words translated from Japanese ACG culture

Japanese term	Chinese term	Meaning in Chinese context
どうじん (Doujin)	同人 (Tong-ren)	Fan's reproduction with elements (character, worldview etc.) in original animation. Genres include fan-fic, fan-pic, cover song etc.
どうじんし (Doujinshi)	同人志 (Tong-ren-zhi)	Fan magazine carrying Tong ren content.
舞ってみた (Watteremita)	舞见 (Wu-jian)	Fan-dancers who post video of their imitated dancing of anime-related dance.
歌ってみた (Utatteremita)	唱见 (Chang-jian)	Fan-singers who post their cover songs of anime-related songs.
突っ込み (Tsukkomi)	吐槽 (Tu-cao)	To tease and to make fun of something or someone.
マッド (Maddo)	MAD	Music Anime Donga, referring to the re-editing anime clips to produce a relatively complete fan-made video with its own theme or narrative.
鬼畜 (Kichiku)	鬼畜 (Gui-chu)	A specific genre in which a song is made by completely splitting and re-editing voice sources collected from various audio or video.
周边 (Shuuhenn)	周边 (Zhou-bian)	Comic and anime related peripherals.
声优 (Seiyu)	声优 (Sheng-you)	Vocal actors.

as they are at the same position. The two largest Danmu websites in China are *ACFun* and *Bilibili*, both of which have adopted the design and technology from the Japanese ACG Danmu website コニコ動画 (*Niconico Donga*). On the websites, animation fans post and repost episodes of Japanese animations, Korean reality shows, and American TV dramas that have already been translated by fan-sub communities. Users can also post self-edited videos such as MADs and MVs (music anime dōga's and music videos), which are created based on the episodes they love. In each video, fans discuss the video content with each other using the simultaneous commenting system. Each of these videos can thus be regarded as a small, subcultural space where fans can enjoy, communicate, and even self-make their favourite videos.

Similar to *Niconico*, the most common categories of self-post videos on *ACFun* and *Bilibili* include MAD, fan singing, fan dancing, and a gaming stream. The original texts they refer to might be diverse, but in most cases are globalised content. The reproductions are, like many other fan activities, motivated by affection for the genre. This makes second-degree reproductions very self-reflexive and entertaining and, more importantly,

non-political.²² With awareness of censorship and political restrictions even online, Chinese youths avoid mentioning any political subjects in their daily cultural practices. On websites such as *Bilibili*, any political discussions, whether or not they are noticed by a government department, are deleted immediately by the website administrators. In other fan-based communities, such as discussion boards or in QQ groups, there is always a clear rule forbidding political discussions. The best way for these fans to protect their own space and autonomy is to avoid political issues. These youth cultural practices are thus purely entertaining. The self-censorship, in this case, should be seen as a compromise to maintain as much autonomy as possible. This means that these marginal spaces have become habitats that cultivate a new sense of ideology that might be different from the official discourse, but that is far from radical and mature.

Although there is a complex relationship between China and Japan in terms of history and politics, the government seems to care less about the possibility that Chinese youth may be politically fond of Japan and its culture. The Otaku culture is purely non-political from the perspective of both officials and many of the fans. They would love to watch *APH*, a Japanese-produced animation depicting World War Two that turns the nations into comic characters, but does not link 'Japan' to the real Japan in history.²³ Steering away from politics has successfully protected the local space from official control and has enabled the subcultural community to enjoy a foreign cultural product relatively safely. At the same time, websites such as *Bilibili* have established member examination to ensure the 'purity' of their members. Members must answer a quiz with over 100 questions about ACG culture in order to gain permission to use the commentary system and watch some of the videos. Such a mechanism further ensures the de-politicisation of the websites, because only members with 'plenty of love' are allowed to conduct second-degree reproductions. It makes the community a purer and tighter one, in which everyone wants to protect it from possible restrictions from outside.

To a certain extent, structures like this set a boundary between the subcultural community and the real world. What youths are practicing and

22 Yiyi Yin and Anthony Fung, 'Youth Online Cultural Participation and Bilibili: An Alternative Form of Digital Democracy in China?', in *Media Integration for Participatory Democracy*, eds. Rocci Luppigini and Rachel Baarda (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017).

23 Jenkins, 'The Cultural Context of Chinese Fan Culture: An Interview with Xiqing Zheng', Confessions of an ACA-fan (webpage), January 31, 2013, accessed June 18, 2016, <http://henryjenkins.org/2013/02/the-cultural-context-of-chinese-fan-culture-an-interview-with-xiqing-zheng-part-one.html>.

consuming are thus from this subcultural world instead of from the official media culture of China. In other words, this world informs youths about things they won't get from the mainstream discourse, and it encourages them to disseminate it. *Griever of Ideology* is a case in point.²⁴ In 2016, a girl posted on *Weibo* about her experience of being sexually assaulted in Beijing. A huge discussion about this issue and feminism appeared on *Bilibili* afterwards following the posting of a fan-made ballad called *Griever of Ideology*. Till now, feminism has not been a common subject in Chinese official discourse. Several famous feminist *Weibo* accounts have even been shut down by the authorities in recent years. Nevertheless, the discussion on *Bilibili* survives because of the subcultural 'cover' of the *Griever of Ideology*. This song is composed in the trip-hop genre and features Japanese-style animation. The lyrics are ironic, but without any direct complaints or reference to the social issue *per se*. At first glance, the song is an ordinary work that is common on subcultural websites like *Bilibili*, but, in fact, it has become a forum for youths to learn, elaborate, and discuss feminism, a subject that is not seriously discussed in Chinese reality. This case shows how subcultural practices embrace different ideologies within their relatively marginal space. In the following case studies, the chapter argues how this virtual and subcultural space, with reproduced products, cultivates certain ideologies that are not encouraged or mentioned in China's mainstream discourse.

This world, on the one hand, is a secret base surrounded by foreign cultural products for fans to enjoy. It becomes a kind of utopia that is interesting, entertaining, and cannot be found in the 'boring' reality where the desirable contents are banned. On the other hand, the world is shaped and maintained not only by foreign products, but also by the youth's own cultural practices, namely second-degree reproductions. By continually recomposing existing texts, the reproductions maintain the local spaces as a productive and autonomous system in which youths replicate sources, not only from cultural products, but also from daily life. In practice, they are building their imaginations into a virtual or second-dimensional world that is deeply influenced by foreign culture, especially Japanese Otaku culture.

From Being Globalised to a Globalisation Strategy

What second-degree reproduction implies is not just a copycatting form of grass-roots creativity among Chinese youth, it is a hint to rethink how

24 Yin and Fung, 'Youth Online Culture Participation'.

China, as a country with strict control of imported foreign products, is transitioning towards an alternative form of globalisation. Instead of being globalised by the foreign culture coming from the 'centre', as the structural imperialism theory would suggest, globalisation proceeds from the inside out, as a self-generated and domestic process.²⁵ As a developing country with a relatively weak tradition of cultural innovation and so-called soft power, China is commonly considered as the cultural periphery in both Asia and on a global scale, where Western products and Japanese or Korean pop waves invade the domestic market.²⁶ This post-colonial perspective provides a valuable pattern for examining China's status in globalisation after the policy of Reform and Opening in the late 1970s. During this period, foreign cultural products, such as Hollywood films and Korean TV dramas, were imported into the country. Whereas in recent decades, as the anti-globalisation policy was established by the Chinese government as a kind of resistance to 'Westernisation', a domestic youth culture embracing the practices of second-degree reproduction, emerged as an internally globalisation-sought strategy to play with global culture in local production. This process, different from traditional understanding of localisation which refers to contextualising of the foreign product, is domestically developed by cloning global culture into local production.

The interpenetration and two-way dynamic here reflects the complex contradiction between official anti-globalisation ideology and the non-official desire to consume global contents. At this point, the second-degree reproduction actually creates a relatively safer space where global cultures engaging in cultural consumption are not really 'global'. There are, for sure, potential contradictions between the ideology embedded in foreign popular culture and China's own ideology. Nevertheless, by avoiding politically sensitive issues, the domestic youth culture seems to be no threat to the state and so there is no reason to ban it. The subcultural space has thus become a grey area that is tacitly approved by the government. The government even tends to support this kind of local globalisation to develop the local creative industry and to increase the soft power of the nation.

One interesting case of such internal global content is the initiation of SNH48, a female idol group popular among Chinese youths especially in cities like Shanghai. As one can speculate from the name, SNH 48 is

25 Johan Galtung, 'A Structural Theory of Imperialism', *Journal of peace research* (1971): 81-117.

26 Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical inquiry* 20.2 (1994): 328-56; Yuezhi Zhao and Paula Chakravarty, *Global Communications: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

basically a replica of the Japanese idol group AKB48. Initially, the two groups were co-sponsored by the same Japanese corporation. In 2016, SNH48 was independent from the Japanese corporation and was produced and developed by a local entertainment company in Shanghai. As the Chinese version of AKB48, almost every aspect of SNH48 is similar to the Japanese group, from the group's design, the music genre, and their stage performances. They have produced a lot of replications and secondary productions of AKB48's previous works, including their songs, dancing, and music videos. The costumes are almost the same too and, in many cases, they are very Japanese in terms of style and design. For one of their albums, SNH48 produced a music video where the girls dressed in Japanese high-school uniforms. Since most Chinese students wear sports uniforms in school, the sailor-style uniforms were a clear representation of Japanese rather than Chinese school culture. In another case, the Chinese girls dressed in bikinis, which is also copied from AKB48, dancing on the beach.

Such performances are rare in Chinese domestic productions, and while not totally unacceptable, this Westernised and sexy design is very different to traditional Chinese culture and values. As a domestic Shanghai idol group, what has been reflected in SNH48's works is not Shanghainese or even Chinese, but Japanese youth culture. From music to performance, to the idol selection strategy, SNH48 copies everything from AKB48. In the same way as anime fans consume Japan ACG culture on *Bilibili*, SNH48 should be seen as another example of 'global' content created domestically.

In addition to copycatting Japanese culture in local reproductions, Korean popular culture is also adapted and used in the Chinese domestic idol-training system. For instance, TFBoys, the most popular youth idol group in mainland China in the past three years, is a successful replication of K-pop and the Korean star-production system. The idol group was formed by three male teenagers who have been trained in entertainment from a young age. After several years of training, the boys were presented to the public via their singing and dancing as well as a self-made reality show that was released online. Although the boys are extremely local – they even have Chongqing accents – the idol group copies everything from the Korean idol system: The boys were selected from the 'trainee' system, of the type that is typical to the Korean entertainment industry. Many of their songs and music videos were produced in Korea or by a Korean production team. The group's design is also similar to Korean male groups. The fact that TFBoys's crazy popularity actually started with the groups first hit on *Bilibili* testifies to how this kind of Korean format has been embraced by China's youth. Again, Korean culture has not been introduced to the Chinese public by importing Korean

idol groups or stars; rather, it is embedded in the domestically produced idol groups through the practice of *shanzhai* or second-degree reproduction. In terms of global culture, TFBoys should be considered as another case that internally clones foreign culture in its own market.

However, to keep this internal globalisation safe from the government's control, localisation is necessary in the 'shanzhai-ing' process. Anything that is sensitive to the dominant power has to be removed. For instance, the TFBoys are extremely careful to avoid any behaviours that might be considered as unhealthy for teenagers. The boys are trained to be very polite and hard-working, acting like the best students in the state. In order to not lead other teenagers astray, they must go to school and behave well. For this reason, they rarely sing love songs. Instead, by being sunny and positive, the TFBoys are accepted by the mainstream as good role models for Chinese youth. Like SNH48, the success of the TFBoys can also be seen as a celebration of youth culture in which the globalised culture, or at least the regional culture in Asia, has been developed locally within China.

Evidence also suggests that even some more radical and somehow dangerous replications of foreign culture can also survive as long as they avoid politics. The voting system used to rate SNH48, which was initially copied from AKB48, is an example. Like the voting system developed by the Japanese, every year SNH48 holds an anniversary vote encouraging fans to buy their albums and vote for their favourite members. Based on the results, the top seven members with most votes become the focus of all commercial activities in the following year. Before the final vote, a series of campaigns are held during the weekends. In Japan, the top singers in AKB48 receive around 7-20,000 votes per year. Of course, the political voting system and relevant democratic mechanism are very sensitive to Chinese officials. To avoid ideological censorship, SNH48 came up with a series of strategies to make the voting as non-political as possible. For example, the title was changed from the more political 总选举 ('final election') to the term 总决选 ('final decision'). The format of the campaign was also modified. Consequently, it avoids attention from the authorities by emphasising its non-political nature: It is just a commercial engagement, not a political campaign at all.

As new business models such as those employed by the TFBoys and SNH48 emerge, what could such developments mean for youth culture? As discussed above, its non-political nature protects it as a safe and marginalised subculture that is far from the government's purview. However, as capital is involved, the subculture has started to step into the public sphere. As the most popular idol groups in China, neither SNH48, nor TFBoys can be seen as completely trivial or marginalised. Along with the process

of commercialisation, the subcultural space is now gradually morphing into a mass cultural space. At this stage, the youth culture must negotiate with the dominant power. In the past two years, websites like *Bilibili* and *ACFun* have continuously changed their own policies for governing video and comment content. Groups like TFBoys and SNH48 have also tried to present some 'mainstream' songs. By being politically correct, youth culture is attempting to protect its autonomy.

New Derivatives: Imported Global Culture Manufactured

As second-degree reproductions like the TFBoys and *Bilibili* become popular in China, capital, both local and global, is playing an increasingly significant role in this process. Although trivial and marginal in the eyes of government, the virtual world has developed into an attractive investment. As more and more youths devote themselves to the subcultural space and cultural practices such as second-degree reproductions, they also become important target consumers in the domestic market. Advertisements target youth under 25 and pay attention to the ACG culture. Indeed, ever more advertisers consider *ACFun* and *Bilibili* as ideal platforms, because they are websites where young people gather. Till 2015, *Bilibili* had attracted more than 50 million users. More than 75 per cent of them are youth under the age of 24. Benefitting from ads and other commercial collaborations, the company Tencent estimates *Bilibili* has reached a value of 1.5 billion RMB in 2015.²⁷ The fact that youth are generating a lot of revenues based on Japanese animations and other globalised contents has pushed the industry to look into the contents that they find desirable.

To further explore the capital value of this internal global culture, a new trend has emerged as a calculated strategy for manufacturing global culture outside China that can then be imported back into the country. Instead of passively adapting popular global elements into local investments, this new strategy of the Chinese creative industries allows a certain degree of contra-cultural flow in the form of investing and participating in global production. For instance, two animations, *从前有座灵剑山* ('*Reikenzan*') and *雏蜂* ('*Bee*'), were imported to China in 2015 and 2016. The two animations were both adapted from manga produced by Chinese authors, which were

27 Techweb, 'The Bullet-comment Website Bilibili is Invested by Tencent with 1.5 Billion Market Valuation', *NetEase*, November 9, 2015, accessed September 4, 2016, <http://tech.163.com/15/1109/14/B802872P000915BF.html>.

completely Japanese-style in terms of their genre, characters, narratives, and drawing style. As typical cases of second-degree reproductions, these domestic manga were proposed to Japanese animation corporations as a collaborative project with China. As a consequence, the foreign-style animations were allowed to be imported into the Chinese animation market because they were originally made by Chinese authors.

As most globalisation studies argue, inequality among nations and regions leads to structural cultural flow from the centre to the periphery. The aforementioned strategy actually proposes the possibility to engage in a circulation where certain culture moves from the periphery to the centre and then flows back to the periphery again.²⁸ By investing capital in the entire trajectory of circulation and distribution, there is, as shown in many Hollywood blockbusters, such as *Ironman 3* and *Transformers 4*, a chance for a reverse cultural flow occurring in global culture manufactured at least partly by Chinese industry.²⁹ As cases like *Bee* imply, the next step after the *shanzhai*-ing of global culture, is to merge this domestically produced 'foreign' culture into the global innovation culture, making it appropriate to be imported or reproduced again in China.

Potential Contradictions: Ideal World vs. Reality

As stated above, this new form of globalisation is relatively 'safe' because it makes itself marginal by replicating foreign popular culture locally, and more importantly, by erasing any political traces that might be embodied in foreign cultural products. However, being non-political and of no interest to the government does not mean that this kind of alternative globalisation has no cultural and social impact in China. On the contrary, it is the non-political that has sheltered the potential social power embedded in specific cultural practices so that the current youth culture might have a long-term impact on Chinese society.

Firstly, this kind of second-degree reproduction per se has become a challenge against the anti-globalisation policies set by the country. Blooming in local spaces, foreign cultural products have merged into cultural life,

28 Galtung, 'A Structural Theory of Imperialism'; Huaiting Wu and Joseph Man Chan, 'Globalizing Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Global-Local alliance and the Production of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon', *Media, Culture & Society* 29.2 (2007): 195-217.

29 Richard A. Rogers, 'From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation', *Communication Theory* 16.4 (2006): 474-503.

especially among the youth. Whether it is a signal of cultural homogeneity or cultural hybridisation is beyond the scope of this chapter, but what is certain is that the cultural flow has penetrated into the domestic market. Having access to mass media products that are banned by the state means that youths are still able to choose what they'd like to receive, despite the pressure of the dominant ideology.

Furthermore, the contradiction between youth culture and the anti-globalisation policy parallels with another potential contradiction that exists between the youth's imagined world versus the reality. Simply put, similar to what cultivation theory has suggested, a long-term exposure to foreign products may influence subsequent generations' own ideology, even though the contents themselves are non-political. These ideological changes then shape their imagination of an ideal world that is, in some cases, significantly at odds with the dominant ideology in China. For example, the anime *Attack of Titan*, despite its implication of militarism, portrays a world where characters imprisoned by the authorities (in this case, 'the wall') struggle and sacrifice in a fight against the undefeatable power (the Titans). Depicting how characters fight together everyday against the Titans, the theme of the animation is overthrowing the controlling authority and power and finally reaching a free world. Another animation, *Naruto*, emphasises the appeal of fighting for a peaceful and equal world where power is used to protect rather than control people. Both animations, in fact, are creating an unreal and idealised world where the dominant power or authority is portrayed as evil or a barrier. In the Chinese reality, the authority of the party and the state clearly does not welcome questioning or resistance. Influenced by the ideal created by these global products, youths are more likely to be sensitised to aspects of individual equality, human rights, and democracy, ideas that the Chinese government find challenging.

Similarly, fans of SNH48 are familiar with the relatively democratic civic power instilled by the group's campaign and voting system, mentioned earlier. In the process of ranking and electing a 'top girl' for SNH48, fans absorb the democratic habits of selecting and supporting their own leaders. As the voting is held publicly on WeChat, a highly popular social media platform in China, this kind of participatory democracy then moves beyond the subcultural local space to a very public space. It also implies the potential of youth culture to become a kind of social power that may challenge the dominant ideology. When subculture becomes a part of daily life, the youth learn rules and ideology from the desirable products they are exposed to. Admittedly, as Meng has argued when discussing the reality show *Super Girl*, this kind of 'democratic' practice is far from a radical challenge to the existing

social order and authority.³⁰ However, it does not deny the progressive value of practicing certain behaviours such as voting and campaigning, especially when *Super Girl*, a reality show aired on TV, has been largely limited and censored by the authority, while cases like SNH48 remain largely subcultural products. But clearly, the SNH48 subculture is growing as replicas in the form of BEJ48 and GNZ48 in North China and South China, respectively, have now emerged.

The youth not only find certain social rules and ideology in their ideal world, but also their own social models. The new generation no longer regard models seen in the mass media, such as Chris Li – a pop idol – or political prototypes promoted by the state, such as Leifeng – a communist legend – as society's political leaders. Now, growing up with the internet, youth actively search for ideal types or models that are specifically relevant to them; consequently, there are fewer 'big idols' than there were for the previous generation.³¹ In the same way as they regard the animated world as the ideal, many youths also find the virtual characters in animations relevant, charismatic, and desirable. They learn not from models in reality, but in the animation, which might affect their attitude towards so-called real practices. A noticeable theme in many popular Japanese manga and anime, especially in certain genres such as *Shonen* ('youth') manga, is adventures in which the character fights against strong and powerful enemies. This influences the youth in terms of how they understand community, social relationships, class, and power. While the government, or the 'adults' consider animations and other subcultures as trivial and childish play, the youth are actually building their own world based on these productions.

Conclusion: Producing Youth Culture

All these potential consequences of long-term practices imply the possibility that the current youth culture in China may become a significant social power in the future. There is a non-political but still rebellious and subcultural challenge posed towards the dominant ideology. By making sense of the ideal world, the youth have their own rules, policies, and worldviews

30 Bingchun Meng, 'Who Needs Democracy if We Can Pick Our Favorite Girl? Super Girl as Media Spectacle', *Chinese Journal of Communication* 2.3 (2009): 257-72.

31 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 'How Did Idolization of Chinese Youth Change', 2015, accessed in June 20, 2017, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/z/hzcc/2/32764/document/1433818/1433818.htm>.

that originate not in the 'real' Chinese society, but in the virtual and ideal world they have imagined. As the state bans foreign content that has political tendencies, the youth are actually practicing their desirable and globalised subculture locally within China through *shanzhai* practices.

This chapter has illustrated a new form of globalisation that is self-generated and domestically produced. It also examines how *shanzhai* culture or second-degree reproduction encourages such alternative forms of globalisation in the complex dynamic between commercial culture and the nation's anti-globalisation policy. As the chapter argues, second-degree reproduction has created a new youth culture in which discourses that potentially contradict the state ideology are emerging and developing in their own local spaces. Second-degree reproduction currently remains subcultural, if not underground, but as the rhizomes penetrate via the internet, subcultures grow and are starting to surface in all major cities. As these subcultures spread across the Chinese territories, it may not be long before the state or mainstream media recognise that these subcultures are the mutations of today's youth culture.

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2.2 Creative 'Shanzhai Labour'?

Leung Mee-ping's 'Made in Hong Kong/Shenzhen'

Louis Ho

Abstract

Shanzhai is a term that encompasses a wide range of concepts including copy-and-paste, grass-roots cleverness, and even anti-authoritarian culture. In traditional Chinese, *shanzhai* refers to 'villages in the mountain with stockade houses' and, in Shenzhen, there is a real village called Dafen Oil Painting Village, which is famous for making 'shanzhai art' – replicas of oil paintings by globally renowned artists. The Hong Kong artist Leung Mee-ping carried out a project called 'Made in Hong Kong/ Shenzhen', in which the artist produced a series of 'Hong Kong-themed' paintings with the 'techniques' she learnt at the Dafen Village. This chapter attempts to explore the cultural dynamics of Leung's project by rethinking various related notions, including authorship, creativity, *shanzhai*, and appropriation art.

Keywords: *shanzhai*, shanzhai art, creative labour, craft labour, Dafen Village

Introduction

In 1998, one year after the handover, the Hong Kong government announced a proposal to construct the West Kowloon Cultural District.¹ After a series of slogans, debates, controversies, and propaganda,² a development plan

¹ *South China Morning Post*, '1998 Former Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa Announces Plan to Develop the West Kowloon Cultural District', September 30, 2011, p. 3. See also West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (webpage), assessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.westkowloon.hk/>.

² Chi-fai Cheung, 'Planners Throw Out Arts Hub Objections Board Confirms Zoning Blueprint Giving West Kowloon Developer a Free Hand', *South China Morning Post*, December 13, 2003, p.1;