Internet Video Culture in China

Examining Internet culture in the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the US, this book analyzes videos which entertain both English and Chinese-speaking viewers to gain a better understanding of cultural similarities and differences.

Each of the chapters in the volume studies streaming videos from YouTube and its Chinese counterparts, Todou and Youku, with the book using a combination of interpretative analysis of content, commentary, and ethnographic interviews. Employing a diverse range of examples, from Michael Jackson musical mash-ups of Cultural Revolution visuals, to short clips of Hitler ranting about twenty-first century issues with Chinese subtitles, this book goes on to explore the ways in which traditional beliefs regarding gender, romance, religion, and politics intersect. Looking at how these issues have changed over the years in response to new technologies and political economies, it also demonstrates how they engage in regional, transnational, and global dialogues.

Comparing and incorporating the production of videos with traditional media, such as television and cinema, *Internet Video Culture in China* will be useful to students and scholars of Internet and digital anthropology, as well as Cultural Studies and Chinese Studies more generally.

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YouTube, Youku, and the Space in Between

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Preface

Life in the fifth dimension

If time can be said to be the fourth dimension, then the Internet must be our fifth. It transcends temporal and geographic space in unfathomable ways. The fact that someone can post a video in Beijing that is seen in Charleston seconds later places Internet-related cultural sharing in a class of its own. Its immediacy across the globe forcefully demonstrates David Harvey's concept of "time-space compression" (Harvey 1990), yet the speed of the ensuing cultural transformation makes a true understanding of this phenomenon a daunting task indeed.

We live in one of the most significant eras in human history—when the birth of computers made way for the Internet age and everything that accompanied it. This ranges from cell phones to robotic trips to Mars; from medical marvels that would have seemed like the stuff of dreams a decade earlier, to a level of surveillance that is reminiscent of a dystopian science fiction novel.

Historically, understanding comes from unexpected places that are often seemingly insignificant and mundane at the time. A casual stroll in an area of Africa known as the Laetoli, created footsteps in volcanic ash that, almost four million years later, became one of the most significant archeological finds in history. In the first part of the nineteenth century, a fragment of a 196 BC royal decree etched in stone, presumably but one of many, became the key to understanding Egyptian hieroglyphics.¹ Who is to say what historians of the future will make of our YouTube videos? What curious misinterpretations will they create? Indeed, even looking at them today, if we explore the cross-cultural sharing of videos, we see an array of nuanced and often contradictory interpretations.

A few hours on the Internet seems like a marvelous science fiction novel for those of us born in the middle of the twentieth century. Our visual culture is a particularly vivid view into our social subconscious. Cinema has transformed vampires from a heavenly curse into a medical disease. Apocalyptic scenarios are linked with viral infection rather than nuclear Armageddon.

This digitally imbued world that we find ourselves in is having a profound influence on human interaction. Students go an entire semester without talking to anyone else in their class, preferring instead to text with already familiar friends on cell phones and laptops. Selfies are no doubt at least in part an outcrop of this new shyness in that we are no longer comfortable asking a stranger to take a picture for us.

While I hope that this book may lend insight into the contemporary moment, I feel an unusual certainty that the work of our era will be read in the future as a way to gain insight into what it must have been like to live through this historically unique transition. So let me tell you, reader of the future, in unambiguous terms. It is astounding, exciting, often a bit daunting, but on a day-to-day basis our lives are often mundane and uneventful. For the most part we are paying bills and falling in love and eating good food when we can. We are worried about our families and our finances and our health. New technologies seem like toys—marvels of pleasure that are somehow unnecessary until we have gotten used to them. Then we can't imagine how we ever lived without them. Our imaginations and creative expressions are increasingly inseparable from cyber pathways, whether in the form of Facebook, reading e-books, or the remarkably social individual expression in YouTube videos. These videos reflect us, they shape us, they are a visual testament to the birth of the digital age—life in the fifth dimension.

Note

1 I refer, of course, to the Rosetta Stone.

Reference

Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

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1 Introduction

New technologies and the interface between local and global cultures

Over one billion individuals visit YouTube each month and 70 percent of its traffic originates from outside of the United States (YouTube statistics n.d.). Yet, surprisingly little scholarship focusing on YouTube or the Internet addresses these new techno-cultures beyond the West. The fact that videos and viewers from different countries are in dialogue with each other is an even more neglected area of study. As we will see in the following pages, even the US-based YouTube server includes a plethora of videos that are posted with a Chinese-speaking viewership in mind. Frequently, people from several different geographical regions post commentary to a single site. At times this results in international sharing, at other times they coexist without interaction—safe behind the Tower of Babel. In many of the videos and posted commentaries that I will present, it is clear that the English speaker is conceptually on the periphery of these spheres.

Worldwide, people watch over one billion YouTube videos a day (Strangelove 2010: 4). In six months, it therefore produces more hours of visual media than the television stations ABC, CBS, NBC combined, for their sixty years of broadcasting, had they each been broadcasting twenty-four hours a day, every day of the week (Wesch 2008). Taken another way, twenty hours of video are uploaded every minute, which is an equivalent viewing time to 114,400 new full-length movies (Strangelove 2010: 10).

YouTube is also increasingly part of global culture. In 2006, 70 percent of its viewers were from the United States; two years later, Americans only accounted for 30 percent of viewers (Strangelove 2010: 11). Clearly, this does not represent shrinking numbers of people accessing YouTube in the US but, rather, an increasing access and awareness of the venue in other areas of the world. Given that approximately 79 percent of YouTube content is user-generated (Strangelove 2010: 10) we can see that we have truly entered a new era of cross-cultural creation and communication. Seeking a better understanding of the multiplicities of Chinese Internet cultures, and the conversation between English and Chinese-speaking fan-created domains, is an important next step in expanding our knowledge of these new techno-cultural formations.

Anthropology in the Internet age

As I suggested in the Preface, the speed and scope of the Internet have arguably introduced us to life in the fifth dimension. YouTube and its international counterparts are some of the most memorable and influential aspects of the Internet age. This world of cross-cultural visual dialogues, in which amateur creations exist side by side with million-dollar productions, allows us to laugh and to cry, to share and to rethink the world around us, and sometimes just to relax for a few minutes at the end of a weary day.

Having had the fortune to be alive at the birth of the digital age, many scholars are excited, perplexed, and a tad overwhelmed by the daunting task of bringing anthropological query to this new medium. In informal conversations I have found that a surprising number of anthropologists are skeptical about whether or not studies on YouTube, and the Internet as a whole, can truly be called anthropological. This dismissal of the modern is hardly limited to a mistrust of digital anthropology. Media Anthropology has long been confronted with skepticism. Visual anthropology has also had to justify its endeavors to the larger anthropological community. As a discipline, anthropology has arguably always had a stubbornly traditionalist streak, with an impulse to force culture into a stasis that reveals an inherent mistrust of global trends, such as the consumption of international cuisine, sartorial choices, and other forms of popular culture. Indigenous choices to use new technologies are conceptualized as a betrayal of their culture; a corrupting influence that “we” have had on “them” (Alemán 2012: 148–150). Not that many years ago I was speaking with an anthropologist in Taiwan whose colleagues told him that his work was not “real” anthropology because he studied people in urban settings. Then and now this seemed to be the tail wagging the dog. Should our goal be to adhere to disciplinary standards, or might it be better to adapt our strategies to fit new environments in order to learn more about the world that we actually live in?

Anthropological theorists have called into question place-based ethnology, pointing out the fluidity of local and globalizing influences (Appadurai 1996; A. Ong 1999). These theoretical models serve as important reminders for those who wish to explore digital culture who are confronted with more traditionalist assertions that prioritize place-based ethnographies (Allison 2012; Cool 2012; Whitehead and Wesch 2012). YouTube is particularly ripe for an analysis of anthropological questions of the day, including issues of identity, invented cultures and cultural imagination, globalism, and localization. To neglect this does a disservice to our field.

Anthropologists’ reluctance to engage with mass media has resulted in other disciplines’ appropriation of the field in conducting work that they label as “ethnographic” (Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 13). Mihai Coman and Eric Rothenbuhler make a call for what they see as the core anthropological focus of media studies. They express the hope that anthropologists adopt traditional methodologies to new media while keeping traditions of thick description and

explaining the meaning and contexts of behavior in relation to larger social processes (Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 2).

Participant observation has long been a cornerstone of anthropological methodology and, for many, this is what distinguishes anthropology from other disciplines. Yet, if we define anthropology by its methodology, does that mean that anthropologists have propriety rights to participant observation? Does thick description belong to novelists or anthropologists, and what is served by trying to stake one's claim in this fashion? How are we to understand new cultural formations if we doggedly clutch at methodologies and theoretical constructs that predate our techno-cultural Renaissance?

Many anthropologists conducting Internet studies have attempted to hold onto traditional anthropological theory and practice when exploring this brave new world. They have practiced participant observation online and many have prioritized the Internet's political effects or sense of community. This has taught us much, but a good deal has been overlooked in the process. Anthropologists working on YouTube, and the Internet more broadly, are also confronted with the question of how we are to study cultural manifestations when their creators make no claims to being a community (although they clearly thrive on social interaction in the form of sharing videos and posting commentary). Patricia Lange suggests that YouTube viewers do not form a community as such but, rather, that they should be seen as sharing videos of affiliation (Lange 2008). Though she problematizes what community might mean in such a setting, she emphasizes that such videos "encourage feelings of connectedness, closeness or friendship" (Lange 2008: 77). If we broaden the discussion to include other cultures, community might be seen as linguistic or cultural proximity. As we will see in the following chapters, at times this divides along regional lines, while in other instances it transcends those very same boundaries.

Internet videos would seem to represent less of a community than shared, if always contested, understandings and appreciations. This focus allows us to examine language and visual narrative, as well as culturally bound knowledge and assumptions of what is and is not funny or appropriate. Here we can look at anthropological work in other spheres to gain inspiration. Some of the best work on visual anthropology includes little to no interviews with the viewers. The same standard has not been held to Internet studies. Those engaging in analysis of the media as a cultural text face the danger of being accused of abandoning anthropology for cultural studies. Jan Fernback posits that anthropology has much to offer in studying the virtual world, in that it is here that "the place of the individual within the collective and the power struggle ... unfolds and boundaries are renegotiated, broken, and formed anew" (Fernback 1997: 53).

Linguistic anthropologists have led the way in anthropological explorations of the effects of new technologies on culture. They have broadened anthropological inquiry to include a discussion of textuality in new cyber discourses ranging from MSN to cell phones.¹ Other linguistic anthropologists have explored the ways that new technologies have profoundly transformed our sociality.² Tom Boellstorff's work on *Second Life* (2008), for example, makes us rethink our

4 *Introduction*

assumptions about what defines human interaction, and what makes a community. He argues that online lives must be taken as seriously as offline communities as viable cultures of their own (Boellstorff 2008; Boellstorff et al. 2012).

Another challenge of studying digital worlds extends to the problems of fieldwork on popular culture as a whole. How does one explore cultural imagination when those interviewed have little to say beyond “I like it” or “It’s funny.” Do we discard what we cannot quantify, though we know it to be an important part of many people’s lives, and therefore an integral aspect to cultural formation? Because anthropologists often spend years in their country of research, how do we model knowledge of that culture from experiences that predate research on a particular subject? If we restrict our research to either online or offline worlds, what is lost in the process? If we try to do both, do we sacrifice depth for breadth? Anthropological methodologies have always left us fairly limited in time and scale in that we tend to interview dozens of people in one locale rather than conducting surveys with thousands across a nation. This has made the analysis of cross-cultural dialogues in this context particularly daunting.

The first scholastic books to come out on YouTube were in Cultural Studies (see Burgess and Green 2009a; Snickars and Vonderau 2009). These works include several important insights but they are far more invested in the political and economic significance of YouTube than in exploring cultural transformation in the anthropological sense. In anthropology, Patricia Lange and Michael Wesch made some of the first steps in using an anthropological lens to investigate YouTube culture. Wesch provides cultural analysis of genres of YouTube videos as new modes of communication by uploading videos on YouTube that are lectures on the topic of the anthropology of YouTube (2007, 2008). As with most of the scholarship that I have outlined here, these anthropological works focus on Western culture.

Patricia Lange’s work on YouTube use among California high-school students (2008) primarily examines offline lives, emphasizing the importance of the act of producing videos rather than the content that is created. In doing so she provides a rich ethnography for their offline interactions, but she provides less of a sense for what was at stake in their online lives. Several other scholars have also explored digital culture with great success (see Boellstorff 2008; Coleman 2014; Jones 1998; Nardi 2010; Taylor 2006), but these studies are also evidence that in dealing with such a broad a topic, one must make hard choices about what to include and what to ignore. It is hardly surprising that the most influential English-language anthropological works on digital culture focus on America, in that exploring the Internet already presents such an intimidating complexity of issues.

The assumption that offline interactions are more “real” than those that take place online is also problematic (Boellstorff 2008; Boellstorff 2016). As Daniel Miller and Don Slater suggest, “In fact this focus on virtuality or separateness as the defining feature of the Internet may well have less to do with the characteristics of the Internet and more to do with the needs of these various intellectual

projects” (Miller and Slater 2000: 5). Offline and online lives converge in important ways. One can maintain friendships in spite of moving to a new location. It is not a stretch to think of academia as a community, though for the most part our face-to-face interactions are limited to a handful of conferences a year and the interactions left to us on Facebook and Twitter.

We must also rethink offline communities. Internet crimes such as pornography, copyright violation, or revealing national secrets have had very real effects on offline lives. Gabriella Coleman’s sensitive account of the hacktivists group Anonymous relates the emotional hardships and prison time that results from illegal online activities (Coleman 2014). Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, and Edward Snowden, who released a breathtaking amount of government documents, have become symbols of heroism to many. But they also serve as a warning for just how dramatically one’s life can be destroyed as a result. Is a family sitting in a room together silently watching television more or less engaged with each other than a group of friends chatting online as they play *World of Warcraft*? With the interactive game *Pokémon go*, where is the distinction between online and offline?

Critiques concerning the flexibility of online identities overlook how malleable our presented personas are in offline contexts; the very different ways that we act with friends, parents, or police, for example. There are, of course, sensory experiences that we are deprived of in our online lives, such as olfactory sensations and the feel of an embrace. Another distinctive aspect of offline life is when we are forced to interact when we do not want to—strained conversations with family members and friends that lead to an emotional depth that one does not develop if one can merely sign off when in a bad mood.

Many people look back on the idea of community with a nostalgic sense of loss but forget the ruthless mechanisms of power that are imposed on those who do not fit society’s image of itself. Others feel that online life can be more sincere and meaningful than offline interactions in which one’s identity has been defined by accidents of birth, or by social contexts beyond their control. Some people might turn to the Internet to leave their wheelchair or terminal illness behind, if only for a moment (Graffam 2012: 142). For gay high-school students in conservative small towns, online companions provide a lifeline that includes far more honest friendships than the hidden and fearful closeted identities of their offline lives. These students might share physical space with classmates but that can hardly be said to be more authentic interaction.

Internet videos as modern mythology

Henry Jenkins reminds us that YouTube was not born in a vacuum but, rather, that its quick growth was largely due to long-standing participatory cultures (Jenkins 2009: 109). Where would YouTube’s current manifestation be without the established enculturation of MTV or television commercials which inform much of our understanding about what short videos should look like (Jenkins

2009)? Similarly, the Internet age offers ease, speed, anonymity and geographical scope that humanity has not experienced before, but this interaction draws on preexisting cultural norms. For a century before the Internet, many people experienced the profound emotional closeness of relationships that were experienced through the postal service. Loves and friendships blossomed without face-to-face interactions in relationships, such as those between pen pals and of spouses separated by the necessities of war.

George Marcus sees the Internet as a cultural extension of ancient narrative forms (Marcus 2012). He points out that anthropology has a long tradition of exploring cultures through their abstract imagination, including mythology and Shamanistic worldviews (Marcus 2012: xv–xvii). Jack Lule makes a similar point when he states, “We should appreciate that in our modern, high-tech, online world, we find stories and practices that date back to tribal times” (Lule 2005: 109). Other scholars have also suggested that mass media, including fiction and the news, can be seen as the mythology of the modern age.³ Although each of these studies have complex arguments in their own right, certain themes do emerge. This includes the idea that news media employ age-old archetypes of good and evil, hero and villain in their portrayals (Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 7; Lule 2005: 102–103), that ritual speech adds to a sense of order in chaos (Coman 2005: 46; Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 9), and that our stories reflect and shape our cultural values (Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 9; Lule 2005). Like mythology, this appeals to the viewer less as rational systems than as symbolic frameworks (Coman 2005: 46; Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 9).

In choosing to attend to the symbols and meanings of cyber culture, perhaps we are returning to even older forms of anthropology when the focus was on symbolic systems of understanding the world around us (Coman 2005: 46; Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 9). When Roland Barthes opined that “Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message” (Barthes 1972: 109) it is hard not to think of Marshall McLuhan’s famous insight that in Mass Media “the medium is the message” (1973). Both statements seem strikingly fitting for studies of digital expression. Our innate ability to create and interpret the symbolic in our online lives, is clearly not as dramatically different as one might first assume (Tufekci 2012: 34).

Early Frankfurt School explorations of popular culture cast a wary eye on the ways that new media can discipline a populace and the manner in which it readies them for their alienated place in the Weberian conformity of industrial social structure (see Adorno 2000; Benjamin 1969). Yet fans are active participants who create their own narratives and thereby transcend the original formations of that media (Allen 1983; Dyer 2000; Jenkins 2008). In addition to situating their analysis in one imagined monolithic popular culture industry, the Frankfurt School also assumed a remarkably unified audience culture. Popular culture industries are engaged in symbiotic relationships (the music and movie industries, for example) but they should not be taken to be unified in their goals or production. Nor should we assume that viewers in Beijing, Atlanta, and Taipei derive the same meanings from what they see.

Walter Benjamin ended his treatise on mechanical reproduction by making a call for art that is politicized as a means of rejecting what he saw to be an entertainment of distraction (Benjamin 1969: 242). Yet the videos I have presented here highlight the fact that the seemingly apolitical nature of popular culture can be far more transformative than a more overt dogmatic propaganda piece could ever be. Hollywood films provide a fecund ground for examining the ways in which popular culture can provide double readings. The film *Die Hard* (McTiernan 1988) is not just about an unlikely hero that does battle with unscrupulous foes. It is also a metaphor for endurance that audience members can relate to their own lives. It is resonant and cathartic because the hero is beaten and punched, made to run barefoot through broken glass and then to use his torn feet to kick in another barrier in the form of a glass window. Every time he stands up after being beaten down it reminds the audience of their own travails—of enduring jobs that they hate, of making ends meet in the face of the ever-expanding financial needs of their children. The movie *Memento* (Nolan 2000) is another example. On one level it is a welcome distraction from the problems of everyday life. Yet it is also a profoundly thoughtful film about the nature of memory, identity, and manhood. The self-constructed hero turns out to be culpable, willfully creating his own fantasy of self and other while neatly obfuscating his complicity in the tragic events that ensue. As with *Die Hard*, *Memento* is cathartic in the sense that the villain is vanquished in the end, but also because one recognizes the traps of masculinity that the film explores. It suggests that culturally viable expressions of desire and love are hampered by the socially acceptable repertoire of men's self-expression. In these films, and many others, the message is far more subtle, and powerful, than a pedantic film on the abuse of women or the trappings, or traps, of masculinity.

Media Anthropology has much to offer in conceptualizing studies of digital culture. Anthropological explorations of mass media have provided valuable insights into the ways that television, for example, has given us a model to live our lives. Lila Abu-Lughod suggests that Egyptian television melodramas become a “technology for the production of new kinds of selves” (Abu-Lughod 2002: 116). They do so, she argues, by “popularizing a distinctive configuration of narrative, emotion, and subjectivity” (Abu-Lughod 2002: 116). She demonstrates the ways that people might frame their own life stories as if they were heroines in their own melodramas (Abu-Lughod 2002: 124).

Purnima Mankekar suggests that Indian television provides viewers with easily understood models of thought and behavior, such as religious belief (Mankekar 2002: 136) and gendered behavior that viewers can emulate in their real lives (138–139). Mankekar highlights the religious concept of *darshan* (seeing the divine) in Hinduism as taking on new but very literal meaning as one watches a television show about Lord Rama (Mankekar 2002: 137). She goes on to show the very different ways that Muslims and Hindus respond to shows that draw on their religious and ethnic backgrounds, as well as class differences in audience reception (Mankekar 2002: 140–143).

Similarly, the online videos that I have examined here assist English and Chinese-speaking viewers in an effort to engage with international dialogues that at times confirm, and at other moments contradict, their traditional worldviews in surprisingly profound ways. The somber memorializing of state-sanctioned propaganda is challenged by inventive playfulness that has arguably not been seen before on such a grand scale.

Clash of the Titans: when different mythologies collide

The above-mentioned notion that mass media is today's mythology is an important one. Yet we should remember that this is a highly contested domain. Differentiated readings interface with a viewer's gender, ethnicity, economic class background, and generational views. As Mark Peterson reminds us, intertextuality is not only consumption or the creation of texts, but a production that people enact and emulate (Peterson 2005: 130). That one can bond with strangers and friends by citing famous lines from movies and demonstrating knowledge of popular shows and music is another central part of socialization (Peterson 2005: 130). This serves as an important reminder of Michel de Certeau's point that "everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others" (1984: xii).

Anthropologists have drawn on Benedict Anderson's work on imagined communities (2006) to explore the ways that mass media helps to strengthen notions of national identity as a distinctive social, political, religious, and/or ethnic space (see Hamilton 2002: 152–153; Mankekar 2002: 145; M. Yang 2002). At other times that same media is seen as a threat to national unity (see Hamilton 2002: 156; Mankekar 2002: 146; A. Ong 1999; M. Yang 2002). Television, for example, can be used to reconceptualize one's place in the global order in relation to colonial histories in juxtaposition with the contemporary global political economy (Larkin 2002; Mandel 2002; Wilk 2002). Mass media can also help to solidify diasporic viewers' affinity for their imagined homeland (Schein 2002). Ann Hamilton notes that in Thailand, media often ushers in Western worldviews through foreign cinema but that many continue to prefer Chinese or Thai productions and that their choice to do so is considered to be an act of cultural loyalty (Hamilton 2002: 158). At the same moment, "authentic Thai" cinema also carries associations of being dull or banal as opposed to the more glamorous visuality of Western media and its exotic-other actors (Hamilton 2002: 160). As Faye Ginsburg points out, mediascapes "increasingly escape the control of national political structures and economies, rearranging, in the process, the ways in which cultural formations are spatialized and imagined" (Ginsburg 2005: 21). New technologies are thereby eroding national boundaries in favor of cross-cultural flows (Appadurai 1996; A. Ong 1999).

Digital culture creates mythologies that are contested in different regions. A great many people are in dialogue with often contradictory values and understandings that are born of several cultures. Chinese familiarity with popular culture from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States is but one

example. Who is deemed to be the hero and villain of a tale of course varies according to the storyteller. Northern Vietnamese and American depictions of the Vietnam War have very dramatic differences, for instance. Conceptual frameworks revolving around heroic deeds is another example. Rebellion against authority is a much more pervasive theme in US films than in their Chinese counterparts. Obedience to one's parents is framed as heroic in traditional Chinese tales and contemporary cinema to a degree that most people in the US would find surprising.

There is a complex cultural interplay that takes place when visual tales in movies, television, corporate-, and fan-created YouTube videos, are shared between cultures. Internet videos assist us in rethinking our conceptual categories and worldviews. In doing so they help us to do battle with historical phantasms ranging from the Holocaust to the Cultural Revolution, to abuses of power in modern capitalist oligarchies. These moments in history and the contemporary moment are too horrible to truly comprehend. They are very real tragedies, it is true, but they are also reinforced and given life by our more somber memorializing. The videos that I have presented here remind us of our humanity in spite of our knowledge that, in a very Hegelian sense, we are at war with ourselves—caught between a Cartesian mind/body duality that seemingly juxtaposes our civilized forms with our savage impulses. These videos can be seen to free us from the conceptual frameworks that might otherwise inform, yet also encage us. They enact an important remembrance by disarming atrocities through playful irreverence. They undermine current regimes and contemporary mythologies that would have us engage with anything of import with a somber joyless reverence. In laughing at our tragedies and combining disparate elements from the world around us, we remember, reinvent, and reconceptualize. The past, present, and our most hopeful futures thereby become intertwined with our very best nature—to face the hardships of the world with creative playfulness. In doing so, we gain a mastery of the fleeting and most important moments in our lives.

The Internet and visual dialogues between China and the US

The advent of the Internet age is leading to dramatic cultural changes, the scope of which has not been seen since the Industrial Revolution, and which arguably exceeds even that momentous moment in time. Donna Haraway's essay questioning whether or not we are all cyborgs (1991), might once have been read as a somewhat ironic feminist critique. Today it seems to be a rhetorical question.

Visual technologies are transforming individual interactions and, more broadly, the social fabric of Chinese-speaking Asia, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. These new technological milieus feature visual creations in relation to American popular culture as they stand in the forceful tide of globalizing influences. In examining digital culture, the tendency to focus on one language or nationality ignores how porous these boundaries have become. This theoretical embrace of one imagined homogeneous community as a hypothetical

audience fails to explore the intense interplay of different cultural elements that might contribute to mass-mediated culture arising out of local, transnational, and global dialogues. Hong Kong and Taiwan's visual and musical productions, for example, have long been symbols of border-crossing hybridity. Their visual cultures have had a profound influence throughout East Asia and beyond. As such, they are excellent exploratory points to examine the ways in which transnational production becomes part of a cross-cultural communication with the audience, one that engages with musical and visual images of the past and present, here and there.

There are times when digital culture presents strikingly varied voices even within Chinese-speaking Asia. This evinces both the similarities and the differences between local cultures and individual psyches in Beijing, Hong Kong, and Taipei, for example. It also forces us to confront the ways in which cultural production is shared, co-opted, and reinvented in the exchange between the US and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Scholarship on the Internet tends to focus on written texts, but it is important to remember that this is also a profoundly visual sphere. Worldwide, in 2010 there were already two to four billion consumer devices that eased the way to amateur video production on cell phones, video cameras, iPads, laptops, and video recording devices (Strangelove 2010: 17). The Internet's visuality includes photography, moving image, and choices made in presenting texts including font, size, and page layout.

Visually oriented forms of popular culture manipulate our awareness of time and place. As we will see in the following chapters, this spans from depictions of Nazi Germany to the Cultural Revolution, and it combines its imagery with music by artists ranging from Michael Jackson to Taiwan's Mandopop star Jay Chou, to the Korean K-pop (Korean pop music) group the Wonder Girls. These videos thereby highlight the idiosyncrasies of current localized political economies and cultural change in relation to transnational and global interrelationship. These sights/sites and sounds are evidence of complex hybrid cultural forms that transform historical hierarchies from traumatic locally bound events to irreverent transnational sharing and rivalries, imitation and resistance. They do so locally and as fairly limited transnational cross-pollination between East Asian nations. They are also markers of a much larger and ever-expanding global participation.

Sinologists have raised several questions regarding the Internet's profound influences on modern Chinese society: How do Internet creations result in changing viewpoints that may be at odds with the government's desires for its citizens (Herold 2011: 9)? How might it help Chinese youth to give voice to their anxiety about the current job market or find their way in such a fiercely competitive society (Szablewicz 2014: 262)? In what ways are digital media helping people to find or express identities that do not align with mainstream visions of what it means to be happy or successful (Szablewicz 2014: 262, 270–271)? As in other regions of the world, the prevalence of smart phones means video evidence is frequently posted online to give lie to these myths.

In analyzing YouTube videos in both English and Chinese-speaking contexts I believe we can learn more about each culture, and about the fascinating exchange between the two.

This approach ushers in additional questions concerning culturally bound knowledge of history and today's world. Do Hitler parodies, for example, mean the same thing in the English and Chinese-speaking contexts? Does the odd blend of futurism and nostalgia of American conceptions of *Star Trek* apply to Chinese-speaking viewers, and what does it signify when examining depictions of race, ethnicity, and the expansion of cultural hegemonies? When The Conan O'Brien Show playfully battles the Taiwan-based Hong Kong subsidiary Next Animation Studio with Chinese-language news 3-D animation videos, what are the cultural perceptions of self and other that are enacted?⁴

Part of what is at stake here are the multifaceted ways that Chinese-language mass media from Hong Kong and Taiwan remap Chinese culture by being so central through their popularity, although geographically and politically they are considered to be on the periphery (Moskowitz 2010, 2011; M. Yang 2002). An important part of their popular culture's distinctively local appeal is the ease with which they are in dialogue with each other, with Japanese and South Korean popular culture, and with Mainland China. Paradoxically, it is precisely this transnational hybridity that defines Hong Kong and Taiwan as distinctive cultural spaces.

In the PRC, visual representations are a particularly adept medium for evading China's Internet censorship, which primarily relies on keyword search functions (Szablewicz 2014: 262). In turn, Chinese-speaking cultures are visualized through the lens of popular culture across mass-mediated frameworks. Any discussion of this topic must therefore include visual representation, ways of seeing, and modes of knowing. It is said that a picture tells a 1,000 words, but we sometimes forget to ask how honest that narrative might be. Nothing conveys truth more quickly or emotionally than a well-placed photo, yet nothing lies quite so gracefully under pressure.

China's Internet and the creative appropriation of other cultural imaginaries

In the year 2000, China had roughly 22.5 million Internet users, accounting for approximately 1.7 percent of its population (Internet World Stats n.d.). By 2014 this number had risen to 420 million, which represented 31.6 percent of its citizens (Internet World Stats n.d.). Although this does not rival the percentages of many other countries, when taking into account China's 1.3 billion people, we are confronted with the fact that there are more Internet users in China than in any other nation in the world.

The PRC's Internet is so focused on local concerns that Guobin Yang has suggested that one can conceptualize it as a distinctive space that might legitimately be spoken of as the "Chinese Internet" rather than just the "Internet in China" (G. Yang 2012: 49). Most Chinese Internet users prefer their anonymity,

for example, and consider their online identities to be quite separate from their offline identities (Herold 2012: 2, 4–5). This lends to the conception that online activities are just play—a cultural zone in which one does not have to be afraid of consequences for one’s actions (Herold 2012: 11).

Perhaps the most infamous aspect of China’s Internet is the degree to which the PRC government continues to attempt to control China’s flow of information. “The Great Firewall of China” has been used to block international sites as well as censoring anything with politically sensitive keywords such as “Tibet.” In truth, these restrictions are not overly difficult to evade. One can purchase a VPN (virtual private network) connection, which tricks firewalls into thinking that a computer is accessing the Internet in locales such as Buenos Aires or Dallas. Ultimately this adds to the expense of accessing the Internet, however, which is already significant for many in China. Also, as in the US, one never really knows the degree of protection that a VPN can buy in hiding one’s identity from the State. Even with the options available to gain access to the outside world, approximately 96 percent of Web traffic in China is local (Roberts 2011). This is partially the result of China’s Great Firewall, to be sure. Nevertheless, people in China also avoid Internet sites outside of the PRC because of problems that include unusably slow speeds, time outs, and the difficulty of maneuvering with other languages (Herold 2012: 2; Roberts 2011).

Many forget that China’s cyber culture also extends across the globe. A significant number of written commentary posted to YouTube videos designed for a Chinese-speaking audience feature simplified Chinese characters, which are used in the PRC. This highlights the fact that the Great Firewall is not as imposing as some might suggest, while also reminding us of the millions of Chinese-language speakers living in other areas of the world.

In spite of our understandable concern with China’s somewhat Orwellian attempts to limit the flow of information, we should remember that English speakers are no strangers to censorship. American mass media features seemingly ubiquitous mechanisms to censor what is shown in relation to nudity and sexuality. US legal regulations concerning copyright violation evince a semi-religious faith in the rights of individual creators, though often downplaying the needs of individual consumers who wish to appropriate those products in mash-ups and other forms of fan production. In contrast, China’s government cares little for protecting US copyrights. As a result, videos using copyrighted materials are frequently removed from YouTube but remain on the Chinese video server Youku. In the context of China’s attempts to control information this is in some sense surprising. It also places accessing pirated copies of films and books, whether online or in other forms, as a potentially moral and liberating act.

The PRC has also been remarkably tolerant of individuals’ video rants against the State, though it quickly removes anything that shows flash mobs or other public gatherings from Youku for fear of public unrest. Discussions of censorship in China and the United States necessarily respond to a particular set of cultural values. Viewers’ written and verbal commentary on censorship respond in

equally culturally bound ways that revolve around, and call into question, the value of free speech, democracy, traditions, and global participation.

In spite of its continued efforts to limit the flow of information, the PRC's control of media in the first few decades of its rule stand in stark contrast with Chinese people's relatively abundant access to news today. In 1979, there were only sixty-nine newspapers in all of China (Shirk 2011: 7–9). By 2005 there were over 2,000 newspapers and 9,000 magazines (Shirk 2011: 7–9). Beginning in the late 1980s, the PRC established its first Internet links, although this was exclusively between Chinese universities. In 1994, China's Internet connected to US servers, followed by two years of expansion that created links to Japan, Southeast Asia, and Russia (Herold 2011: 1). It was only in 1997 that private citizens were allowed to use the Internet (Herold 2011: 1). The PRC continues to use a relatively heavy hand in its efforts at censorship, however. As but two examples, it continues to attempt to control the flow of information by attempting to force Google to censor certain politically charged topics, which resulted in their leaving the country, and it prohibits foreign journalists from posting articles to Chinese-language sites. China's leader Xi Jinping seems intent on strengthening government control through increasingly heavy-handed mechanisms such as censorship and linking credit scores with compliance to State doctrine.

The PRC's efforts to control public opinion on the Internet are also exemplified by the 50 Cent Army (*wu mao dang*). This is a colloquial term that refers to the government's practice of employing individuals to post comments online that align with the State's political opinions. For this service, they are provided with a commission of 50 cents RMB (*wu mao*) for each comment that they post.⁵ Andrew Jacobs has documented the 50 Cent Army's intrusion into the Western Internet with the example of a Twitter account that claimed to belong to someone named Tom Hugo who posted opinions on Tibet in order to sway global opinion (Jacobs 2014). It was later discovered that Hugo was a PRC-fabricated identity and that his picture was in fact that of a Brazilian model (Jacobs 2014).

One unintended consequence of the 50 Cent Army is an increasingly cynical public that is wary of any comments that might align with the government's stance. This creates an atmosphere in which someone who sincerely and independently makes a nationalistic comment may be mistrusted as a government plant (Link and Qiang 2013: 91; Shirk 2011: 26–27). This can result in the self-censorship of people who might otherwise show support for the government because they do not want to be mistaken for the 50 Cent Army (Shirk 2011: 26–27). Whether this is ironic or poetic justice depends on one's political stance. Regardless, it has certainly had a profound influence on people's already heightened level of cynicism in China. The 50 Cent Army has become such a well-known phenomenon that its meaning now extends to anyone who apologizes for the PRC regime, as when Henry Kissinger praised China's leaders (Link and Qiang 2013: 92).

The government has responded to this widespread cynicism by shifting its strategy. In addition to posting obvious propaganda statements that refute comments that are not approved of by the State, the 50 Cent Army now floods the

Internet in response to topics that it does not approve of, in the hopes that this will distract readers from the topic (BBC News 2016a). By one estimate, the 50 Cent Army accounts for 488,000 posts a year (BBC News 2016a). This shift from overt propaganda to one of distraction shows the growing sophistication of the PRC in handling mass media. It should not be overlooked that the model for flooding the Internet with tales of distraction was arguably inspired by the US.

Although the PRC has become increasingly savvy about the Internet, public maneuvering on the Internet is not without its ironies. In 2015, China's president Xi Jinping signed up for a Facebook account to promote his trip to the US, in spite of the fact that Facebook is banned in China (S. Yan 2015). The man who is widely credited with creating China's Great Firewall accessed a blocked Internet site with VPN in front of his audience (BBC News 2016b).

Cynicism pervades contemporary Chinese culture and it is the foundation for a good deal of its humor. Cynicism and irony in China are born of the same political and cultural environment, and to some degree they arise from the same set of sentiments. Yet they often work in oppositional ways. Hans Steinmüller suggests that "irony leaves space for interpretation, whereas cynicism closes this space and implies radical criticism, denial or resignation" (Steinmüller 2016: 2). Cynicism and irony define inner and outer circles of like worldviews and moral alliances (Audin 2016: 103; Steinmüller 2016: 2). Cynicism might be seen as the complacency that allows the system to continue. Irony contrasts this as a voice that undermines the State's attempts at maintaining an Orwellian doublespeak.

In China, cynicism is in large part a result of living in a relatively totalitarian society that speaks of socialist revolution even as it embraces an exceptionally corrupt oligarchic capitalism that is reminiscent of the early industrial West. The fact that government officials, businessmen, and gangsters are at times indistinguishable categories does not help. Part of the reason people can mediate so readily between official discourse and the economic realities of contemporary life is that people (cynically) see official discourse as a purely cynical public manipulation that lacks sincerity to begin with (Osburg 2016: 48). In this cultural milieu, officials who speak of bettering society are often thought to be most callously exploiting the system (Osburg 2016: 49).

Judith Audin notes that an anthropological examination of irony also "allows us to move away from normative paradigms and binary oppositions such as cooperation or resistance from Chinese citizens towards the Chinese state" (Audin 2016: 117). In turn, Susanne Brandstädter points out that irony subverts state discourse and that its "tactics confound fundamental political categories, and [...] def[y] categorization by uniting moral and political opposites in one person" (Brandstädter 2016: 123). Irony also forces us to discard our assumption that meaning is bound to authorial intent in that ironic readings can quite easily become the primary meaning for most (Latham 2016: 157).

Louis Althusser outlines the ways that States enforce ideology, not only through top-down control such as the military, police, and prisons, but through ideological state apparatuses such as religion, educational institutions, literature, and mass media (2014). China proves to be fecund ground on which to apply

this analysis. Yet we should not think of “the State” as one unified body with a coherent set of goals. This would neglect a wide array of political and private entities, as well as the reality that individuals within these systems have their own set of preferences, biases, and agendas.

In spite of the PRC’s reputation as a top-down regime, in many ways it is one of the best examples of a political culture that is shaped by popular consensus on the Internet. Jürgen Habermas’ notion that a great deal of public policy and popular opinion was formed in informal settings such as clubs and coffee shops has much to offer here (see Habermas 1991). China’s Internet can be seen as a modern-day extension of Habermasian theory in action (X. Wu 2007). Nonetheless, the Internet’s playfulness also challenges the normative structure of rationalism conceptualized in Habermas’ theories of the public sphere (Burgess and Green 2009b: 102; Herold 2011: 11). It simultaneously creates cultural solidarity through shared worldviews and rebels against commonly held notions of a unified discourse or culture.

China’s Internet has created a space to expose corrupt officials, individual cases of abuses of power, and scandals that the government has attempted to cover up. This includes train crash mortalities and reckless drivers literally getting away with murder because they are the offspring of the rich and powerful.⁶ One of the reasons Internet uprisings can be so effective is that officials are keenly aware that public scandals can later be used against them if they are caught up in a power struggle, and it makes them easy targets for scapegoating should higher-ups need a sacrificial victim (Link and Qiang 2013: 85).

Censorship and a constant threat of imprisonment are certainly not forgotten by those on the Web, and even instances of more positive change have their limitations. The Internet has shifted China’s public attention from large-scale social transformation that might threaten the status quo, to fixing specific problems such as individual cases of corruption and animal abuse (N. Zhang 2014). In a sense, Internet protests still serve the State because in allowing an online space for dissent, it helps the government to keep angry mobs off the streets (Shirk 2011: 7). One could also argue that online protests are less a subversion of authority than a safety valve, something that makes an untenable situation bearable (Herold 2011: 12; H. Li 2011: 85).

It is impossible for the Chinese government to completely limit the flow of information, both within and beyond its borders. China’s Internet has provided a new sphere in which users can have a surprising degree of autonomy and room for creative and social exploration. This seems to be nothing less than a newly given space for citizens to explore new identities and to build their own appreciation of the world around them (Clark 2012: 190). Although the Internet has changed the lives of people of all ages, it has had a particularly strong impact in allowing youth culture to emerge in a nation that is primarily controlled by older members of society (Clark 2012: 190).

Paula Voci takes issue with the oft-heard claim that Chinese people are passive users on the Internet in comparison to their Western counterparts (Voci 2010: 118). She points out that this bias stems from the assumption that the

English-language domain of the Internet is of prime importance (Voci 2010: 118). Speaking in code is but one example of the creativity that saturates China's Internet. Paul Clark provides several examples of this:

5843344521 sounded almost like *wo fashi shengshengshi shi wo ai ni*: "I pledge generation after generation that I love you." Similarly 7456 stood for *qisi wo le*: "I'm really fed up." Numbers could also play on foreign languages. For example, 121 (in English, one to one) was a way of saying "I want to speak to you person to person (one to one)." Using "007" meant "I have a special secret I want to share with you," based on the reference to the James Bond films.

(Clark 2012: 179)⁷

As with so many aspects of Internet culture, speaking in code draws on the remediation of older traditions. In the 1990s, Taiwan's television programs featured commercials for Straw Hat Pizza which had been savvy enough to choose 5252 (*wu er wu er*) as part of its telephone number because this sounded like "I am hungry, I am hungry" (*wo e wo e*). One also frequently saw commercials for "female masseuses" that included 5454 (*wu si wu si*) in their telephone numbers because it sounded like "I am horny, I am horny" (*wo se, wo se*). Undoubtedly, these traditions date back to far earlier than this.

Speaking in code also becomes a handy way of avoiding censorship on the Internet. The use of the term "grass-mud horse" (*caoni ma*), for example, is a homonym for the popular insult "fuck your mother." This took on a visual dimension as this newly created mythological being was presented on the Web in the form of stuffed toys, drawings, and a fake children's song.⁸ In 2018, the PRC government banned all images of Winnie the Pooh because people were circulating pictures of Winnie the Pooh and Tigger, with direct comparisons to the relatively portly Chinese leader Xi Jinping walking side by side with the tall and lean Obama. As with other images circulated on China's Internet, pictures of Winnie the Pooh neatly bypassed the keyword searches of censorship bots. Of course, the government's decision to censor images of Winnie the Pooh only drew attention to the comparison, both in China and in the West.

It is relatively easy to trace the Internet's effects on political unrest, the demand for social justice, or other demonstrable actions or goals. It is far more difficult to examine the ways in which the Internet captures viewers' imaginations and shapes their conceptions of the world. Online satire is an emotional expression that provides us with insights into new cultural views of the digital generation (Gong and Yang 2010: 4). Rather than simply measuring this along political lines, perhaps we should instead see these new values and sensibilities as the more profound and far-reaching set of cultural changes.

The long reach of the law: political alliances and the shifting Chinese market in East Asia

In 1988, when I first lived in China, if a Hong Kong film was dubbed into Mandarin Chinese it inevitably featured a Taiwanese accent. Almost immediately after Hong Kong was repatriated to Mainland China in 1997, dubbing switched to the northern Mainland Chinese accents that are associated with China's capital in Beijing. This clearly reflected a change in politics with an eye to who had the power to decide what would, and would not, be screened in the increasingly important PRC market.

Today, Chinese-language news media continues to be geographically distinctive. Taiwan's newspapers are politically aligned with either the pro-Taiwan independence or pro-unification camps. Next Animation Studio Taiwan, a Hong Kong conglomerate subsidiary that I will focus on in Chapter 6, does not take a clear position on Taiwan's independence but it is known for its pro-democracy stance. In Hong Kong this is synonymous with a desire to be free of PRC rule. My interviews at Next Animation Studio Taiwan took place just after the birth of protests for democracy in Hong Kong. At that time, Next Animation Studio was particularly controversial among the ruling elite in the PRC for a long-standing stance on this issue. In response, the PRC government had blocked the Mainland Chinese links of both Next Animation Studio, and its subsidiary news agency *The Apple Daily*. When I asked Jessica Wu, the International Marketing Manager at Next Animation Studio Taiwan, if they had any problems with PRC censorship she replied:

WU: The Chinese government hates us. Right now, because of the Hong Kong [pro-democracy] march, hackers have been attacking our web site both in Hong Kong and Taiwan. We're pretty sure it's from China. [She laughs.]

MOSKOWITZ: How do you respond to that?

WU: Our IT guys try to make sure our web sites don't go down. But they've been going down more frequently. Because in Hong Kong they also had their vote a week or two ago. Anything they do also affects our operations.⁹

When Wu referred to "their vote" she was referencing widespread protests in Hong Kong because the PRC was providing two candidates to lead Hong Kong, for people in Hong Kong to vote on, rather than allowing them to choose their own candidates. An estimated 600,000 people voted in an unofficial poll about democratic reforms, although the PRC government specifically warned against this. The protesters had to extend the polling for a week because of frequent cyber attacks that most attributed to the PRC. Wu was therefore pointing out not only that Next Animation Studio was an emblem of the pro-democracy movement, but also that it had been swept up in geopolitics that were much larger than itself.

Michael Logan, Next Animation Studio's Director for Content Development, leads its international news division. I also asked Michael Logan about censorship.

LOGAN: The stuff that we produce is not politically sensitive. Everyone who does media in China knows that there are topics that if you cover them will get you banned. We certainly don't cover those. I mean, my team does because we work on Japan and the US. For the most part we don't do anything that is sensitive. But because of who we are, that content can't get distributed in China. We've tried distributing our international news reports there. We've put it up on Tudou and Youku but it just gets taken down.

MOSKOWITZ: In the United States when something is taken down it often pops up again somewhere else because someone just copies the video and puts it back up. Does that happen with your videos?

LOGAN: People do copy our stuff and upload it to the various Internet servers in China. A fair bit of The Apple Daily [a subsidiary of Next Animation Studio] content in Hong Kong gets ripped off and copied and uploaded. The people that are in China are able to do that and they don't encounter any problems. So, it really depends on who's doing the uploading. If it's anybody within Next Animation Studio trying to upload something they will figure it out pretty quickly.¹⁰

The culture of re-posting has very different implications, depending on whether one looks at it from an economic or a political perspective. On the one hand, creators of the videos are cut out of the profit-making for their production. On the other, these pirated postings disseminate cutting-edge news and transnational worldviews in China. In China, as well as in other areas of the world, it is easy to overlook the ways in which mainstream media can also be quite subversive.

Mark Peterson reminds us that demonstrating knowledge about popular media is a form of symbolic capital and a core aspect of socialization, "People become performers of texts, and they also become producers of texts, weaving elements from the media they have consumed into new narratives and artifacts that can be displayed to construct particular forms of sociality" (Peterson 2005: 130). In turn, he notes, "Much of this behavior becomes itself the subject of public discourse, as religious leaders, lawyers, educators, psychologists, and others speculate on the moral effects of such intertextual play" (Peterson 2005: 130).

Jean Burgess and Joshua Green take issue with what they see to be a "false opposition between market and non-market culture" in that commercial media on YouTube has been a driving force in making videos appealing to mass audiences who then come to participate in creative acts through the venue (Burgess and Green 2009b: 76). In the West, labeling videos as amateur and professional have become confusing and, for many, irrelevant (Peters and Seier 2009: 193). Swedish professional YouTube personality PewDiePie nets several million US dollars annually. He frequents talk shows and is a household name among American youth. In China, some bloggers have become arguably as famous as stars represented by the movie and music industries.

YouTube's Carnival and other elements of play

Academic discussions about YouTube frequently evince a certain mistrust. Alexandra Juhasz labels YouTube videos as banal (2009: 145), undemocratic (146), and possessing questionable ethics (145–146). In turn, scholarship on YouTube has also all but ignored the issue of humor. Indeed, when humor is mentioned, it more often than not takes the form of a condemnation of the videos' irreverence. This includes critiques of particular YouTube videos as cruel (Andén-Papadopoulos 2009: 22–23), insulting (Moor et al. 2010: 1538), racist (Andén-Papadopoulos 2009; Saul 2010: 471), unoriginal (Juhasz 2009: 147), violent (Andén-Papadopoulos 2009), and vulgar (Andén-Papadopoulos 2009: 23). Humor is also mentioned as instilling capitalist values in the guise of rebellion against the system (Juhasz 2009). Others warn of its insidious political effects in the context of corporate stealth campaigns disguised as fan creations that are in need of “inoculation” to protect the viewer (Lim and Ki 2007). In the handful of times that humor is mentioned without censure, it is often subsumed into a metanarrative concerning the ways that humor serves a higher power than itself, such as when it influences an electoral process.¹¹

Scholarly reticence to approach YouTube humor as an aesthetic choice with its own cultural significance is somewhat surprising considering the veritable cornucopia of videos dedicated to making people laugh or, indeed, the centrality of humor in any culture. Arguably, scholars' mistrust of this antic frivolity comes from academia's inherited puritanical associations of the clergy with book learning. In part, avoiding the issue of humor is also simply linked to the cumbersome nature of unpacking what makes us laugh. For many, analyzing a joke has all the charm of dissecting a cat to prove one's love of animals. Yet to ignore this genre of visual creation is to miss a central component of the Internet, and perhaps the best of what this new media has to offer. As Dick Hebdige has pointed out, play, and popular culture more broadly, has a surprisingly sophisticated stance in that it “exploits its own contradictions instead of trying to resolve them” (Hebdige 1988: 140–141).

Online communities also demonstrate the vitality of Internet humor. Hacker culture is profoundly nuanced to a sense of playful defiance (Coleman 2013: 7; Coleman 2014; Danet 2005). One can even demonstrate a sense of wit and playfulness with computer code (Coleman 2013: 17, 93–94; Danet 2005: 234). Brenda Danet celebrates the profoundly playful nature of hacker code, stating, “Hackers cherish virtuoso play with symbols, words, typography, and spelling, often deliberately transgressing customary usage to challenge readability” (Danet 2005: 234). This demonstration of wit can put one at the top of a meritocratic hierarchy among hacker peers (Coleman 2013: 93–94).

Gabriella Coleman reminds us that this playful worldview has far-reaching implications for social solidarity when she posits “As this playful practice usually induces laughter—a state of bodily affect that enraptures an audience—humor can potentially produce forms of collective awareness and shared sociality” (Coleman 2013: 103). She goes on to highlight the point that hacking as a

group endeavor marks a tension between individuality (talent and humor) and ever-present sociality (Coleman 2013: 103).

Humor is a central way that people socialize while demonstrating individualistic intellectual prowess. Guobin Yang has noted, “Parody is as old as human civilization, but it has never enjoyed such a renaissance as in Chinese cyberspace today” (G. Yang 2009: 77). Yang further suggests, “Play has a spirit of irreverence. It always sits uncomfortably with power” (G. Yang 2009: 224). Indeed, the breadth of humorous expression on the Internet necessarily sets up political contention with the authorities, who have a far more limited set of responses (G. Yang 2009: 78, 90).

According to Carl Jung, a trickster, like a poltergeist, is dreamlike and frightening in that his shape-changing has unpredictable and at times grotesque results (Jung 1972). The trickster’s nightmarish potential is familiar to human needs and wants but he provides solace because we can say that we are not like him (Jung 1972: 144). Trickster Spirits, Court Jesters, stand-up comedians, and animated comedy such as *South Park* (1997) serve as ribald critics of society. Because of their particular place on the periphery of mainstream society, they are allowed to say things that no one else would dare.

The trickster spirit uses craftiness as a way of maximizing a structurally weak position including women maneuvering in patriarchal society (Landay 1998), and the slave in the antebellum South (Roberts 1989). Like the trickster spirit, YouTube humor displays a certain shape-shifting, irreverent, and often gleeful and unapologetic immaturity. It mocks historical figures and relives tragedies of a bygone age with a whimsical glint in its eye.

YouTube humor allows for the renegotiation of historical narratives. George Lipsitz reminds us of “the indispensable dialogue with the past that accompanies any present” (Lipsitz 1990: 81). For the YouTube videos that I examine here, the more obvious temporal, geographical, and cultural disjuncture immediately hits one’s senses as Hitler rants about Bollywood films (Swiv2d 2009) or is informed that he has won the Nobel Peace Prize (hitlerrantsparodies 2009). Slamming history and the present moment together in this fashion is a profound revisualization of both historical events and the contemporary era.

In a similar fashion, these genres of YouTube videos provide laughter to ease the pains of the day. It may not always take place on an analytical level, but emotionally one immediately recognizes the important insights of these seemingly frivolous genres. This humor takes on very different meanings depending on one’s knowledge of the historical context or the particular cultural milieu that they play with.

Benedict Anderson’s examination of the birth of print media as unifying culture (2006) seems pertinent here. Print, he argued, was a unifying force that shaped people’s ways of thought concerning religion and society and this played a very important role in the birth of nations. YouTube, and the Internet in general, demonstrate a similar unifying force, but on a global scale with near simultaneous transnational interactions that were unimaginable in the pre-Internet age.

Rey Chow points out that Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin share a common view that aligns art with modernity as a profoundly disorienting event (R. Chow 1995: 5). Yet, at times, this is precisely the goal. Several scholars have drawn on Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of Carnival to explore the ways in which Internet humor in China allows for the suspension of everyday political oppression.¹² Bakhtin's Carnival is blasphemous and irreverent; it is a celebration of life, with a thumb to the nose for those in power, that employs parody, laughter, and grotesque images to rebel against normal life (Herold 2011: 12).

Brazilian Carnival has been identified as a mischievous celebration of excess that simultaneously helps one to forget and to remember—a ritualized inversion that allows us to come to terms with the tragedies of everyday life (Goldstein 2003: 33; Scheper-Hughes 1992: 482). In her study of Brazilian shantytowns, Donna Goldstein states, "Unable to revolt, they use their laughter to oppose official Brazilian racial, class, and gender ideology. Laughter reveals the fault lines in social relations" (Goldstein 2003: 35). Irreverent humor about the most traumatic moments in our daily lives thereby becomes a form both of survival and resistance, in what Goldstein has called "laughter out of place" (Goldstein 2003). Humor can mark a coping mechanism for those surviving inhumane conditions, ranging from Jewish humor to that of people surrounded by lawless violence in shantytowns (Goldstein 2003).

We should not mistake this carnivalesque humor for a purely emancipatory act, however. Carnival shifts between being a conservative and a liberatory force, in that it is a sanctioned exception that arguably reinforces the boundaries of what is considered to be the norm (Goldstein 2003: 33; Scheper-Hughes 1992: 482). Irony and satire have also arguably always been part of establishing the social order (Bakhtin 1984). Perhaps, then, YouTube satire provides an outlet that gives the system a needed bit of flexibility, without which it would break. The Internet may be a carnivalesque sphere that fosters democratic impulses, while at the same moment adding to the resilience of an authoritarian State (Balla 2014: 227). Internet satire, and even outright condemnation of the powers that be, is thereby paradoxically both a subversion of the system and a way of helping to preserve it (Balla 2014: 227).

In truth, Bakhtin also allows for this "ambiguity" in the realm of folk humor. In Bakhtin's view, Carnival represents a "bare negation" of social values, whereas "folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time" (Bakhtin 1984: 11–12). For my analysis here, the integrity of Carnival's position as a pure act of resistance is less important than Bakhtin's point about the "ambivalence" of folk culture (Bakhtin 1984: 12). In the YouTube videos under examination here, the salient issue is exactly this ambivalence. It is an act that simultaneously undermines and reifies normative beliefs, which both enforces order and paves the way to change the status quo.

As John Fiske has pointed out, Carnival is also profoundly concerned with bodies and an assumed lived materiality (Fiske 1989: 243). Online videos transcend this corporeal limitation, as well as time and space. We should also remember that many people we interact with in our offline lives are often no

more tactile than when online. We sit at a table and talk but do not touch—we experience each other through sight and sound in classrooms and meeting rooms, parks and office spaces.

One of the lines of inquiry that I will pursue in the following pages has to do with cultural proximity to the historical event being manipulated. Are Hitler videos more humorous to people in China and Taiwan because they are less threatening or does cultural proximity to videos such as these aid in viewers' appreciation? In what ways do musical appropriations translate more readily, and how can subtitles be used for subtler cultural appropriations? A central theme of this book is an examination of humor as a form of cultural critique that reinvents history and the contemporary moment. This study also explores the manner in which English-language and Chinese-speaking digital cultures are in dialogue with each other, and the ways that we must rethink traditional paradigms about cultural understandings in the YouTube age.

China at play

Humor is one of the largest cultural gaps between China and the United States. Chinese humor frequently revolves around slapstick or puns that employ its many homonyms. This repertoire is expanded with Hitler rants and Cultural Revolution mash-ups drawing on contemporary American pop music, which are also uploaded onto Youku. The Chinese-language written commentary, which viewers post to the video sites on YouTube, shows a strong appreciation for this humor.

Part of the politically subversive nature of Internet play must be taken in the context of Chinese elites' long-standing mistrust of humor as undignified. Early Confucianism, for example, had a great disdain for publicly displayed humor, insisting that the proper gentleman should be reserved and somber at all times (Voci 2010: 123; W. Xu 2004). Viewed in conjunction with China's authoritarian style of rule, it is evident that political satire packs far more of an emotional punch than a similar spoof would have in the United States.

Christopher Rea states that historically in China, joviality could be deemed as nothing less than a medical malady, "Doctors of imperial China diagnosed excessively frequent or hearty laughter as being a symptom of mental illness, demon possession, food poisoning, poor circulation of the *qi*, or illness of the viscera. A common prescription: stop laughing" (Rea 2015: 7). Similarly, in the late Qing (1644–1912) and Republican (1912–1949) periods, writers continued to be mistrustful of the social and political effects of humor as distracting from the serious social matters of the day (Rea 2015: 13).

This was, of course, a contested domain. As Rea notes, there was a long history of humor in China that coexisted with this somber memorializing. This included street humor, jokes in periodicals, and books, among other venues. Importantly, Rea goes on to explore the range of writers who used this somber attitude as objects of satire. At the turn of the twentieth century, Western medicine and culture had influenced Chinese thought to the point that doctors began to advise laughing more for its health benefits (Rea 2015: 12).

Youmo, a direct transliteration of “humor” in English, was introduced to Chinese in 1924 by social commentator Lin Yutang (Rea 2015: 38). Today, few Chinese speakers realize that *youmo* originated from English. This is primarily because they were raised with this term as part of their lexicon. It is also because *youmo* incorporates practices, attitudes, and cultural productions that existed long before the term. This included laughter, joking, play, and satire—all of which had a vibrant history in China.

Paul Pickowicz explored political humor in China that used leaders from the former Soviet Union, from Lenin to Gorbachev, as objects of derision as a safe topic for which the clear underlying criticism was really aimed at its own communist leaders (Pickowicz 2013: 60). These jokes, usually told over dinner or drinks, were particularly popular among well-educated urbanites, but in particular among party members who lived and breathed the contradictions of communist rhetoric as it met naked capitalist desire (Pickowicz 2013: 74). Not surprisingly, this form of humor also found its way to the Internet (Pickowicz 2013: 75).

As Guobin Yang points out, play on the Internet can have remarkably serious implications,

The most unorthodox, imaginative, and subversive ideas can be found in Chinese cyberspace. Authority of all kinds is subject to doubt and ridicule. Ordinary people engage in a broad range of political action and find a new sense of self, community, and empowerment.

(G. Yang 2009: 2)

For the great many who cannot afford to travel internationally, or even within their own country, Internet venues such as YouTube represent a profound introduction to the outside world. Digital culture helps to reinvision the past, present, and future, with an almost tactile expression of play. Seemingly frivolous videos posted to YouTube, Tudou, and Youku are opening pathways to new aesthetics and sensibilities of what is considered to be funny. These videos serve as a fun-house mirror—an intentional mimetic distortion with a wink toward the playfulness of that very endeavor. Perhaps more subtly, they are also transforming people’s understanding of self and other, history and the contemporary moment.

Notes

- 1 See Bell 1991; Cody 2009, 2011; Hull 2012; Jaffe 2009a, 2009b; Silverstein 2006.
- 2 See Baron et al. 2005; Gershon 2012; Schieffelin et al. 2011; Squires 2004, 2010, 2012.
- 3 See Berkowitz 2005; Bird 2005; Coman 2005; Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005; Danet 2005; Liebes and Blondheim 2005.
- 4 At the time the video was created Next Animation Studio was called NEXT Media.
- 5 For more on this, see H. Li 2011: 79–80; Shirk 2011: 14.
- 6 For more on train crash scandals, see Link and Qiang 2013: 85–86.
- 7 For more on speaking in code, see Link and Qiang 2013.

- 8 For more on this, see Clark 2012; Link and Qiang 2013; B. Meng 2011.
- 9 Interview. July 2, 2014.
- 10 Interview. July 2, 2014.
- 11 See, for example, Hediger 2009; Powell 2010.
- 12 For examples of this, see Herold 2011: 12, 2012; H. Li 2011: 72; B. Meng 2011: 46; G. Yang 2009: 77, 89–90.

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In turn, this is often in dialogue with popular culture from South Korea and the United States. The periphery also becomes a slippery conceptual tool when one broadens the discussion from transnational East Asian dialogues to globalized spaces of discourse. For the videos I have presented here, as well as other Chinese-oriented content, the sites for these YouTube videos cannot be seen as a Western space as much as a transnational or border-crossing domain among Chinese-language speakers. It is a free zone to share, to interact, to accuse, to berate, and to laugh (either at each other or with each other). It is a space to reify sociopolitical differences or to transcend them—and, at times, to paradoxically do both in the same moment.

Notes

- 1 To view this performance with its original sound, see Kwkwkwkw 2007.
- 2 See Hi 2007.
- 3 For a more detailed analysis of this issue in relation to Mandopop, see Moskowitz 2009, 2010.
- 4 Cawelti 2001: 205.
- 5 Goodwin 2000: 260.
- 6 Judging from his use of complex characters, and the content of several other videos that he posted on his YouTube page, I am guessing that Orangebigbig is a male from Hong Kong.
- 7 These statements were all taken from the Tudou site: huaxiazi487 2010.
- 8 For more on this, see Moskowitz 2010.
- 9 See, for example, the comments posted to madeinmother 2010.
- 10 For more on this, see Moskowitz 2010, 2011.

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The humor in all of these examples is one of connecting disjointed realities—a re-examination of an often-painful past subjected to playful torture through the interjection of contemporary commercialism, sexuality, and self-serving individualism. In appropriating these historical narratives in this way, one disarms them. The more wary might warn that this has the potential to trivialize, and thereby erase, the past. George Lipsitz draws on Nobel prize laureate Czesław Miłosz in suggesting that events such as the Holocaust were so horrific that many find it easier to just forget rather than “take on the burdens and responsibilities of remembering” (Lipsitz 1990: 22). Yet the humor of these videos is based on remembering the events, for if it was not Hitler ranting about iPad or Tiger Woods the videos would not be funny. YouTube provides video makers with a playing ground to reinvent history and rethink the contemporary moment. In doing so they create a space for viewers to re-envision the world that they live in. They allow us to re-examine this horrific past with a humorous vision that reappropriates through a conscious mimetic excess. In reshaping historical narratives in this fashion we do not forget. Rather, we internalize forces of evil and absorb their power in a repetitive and visually ritualized cannibalistic rite.

Notes

- 1 For more on this, see Dikötter 1995; Farrer 2002: 32; Morris 2004; Moskowitz 2008.
- 2 For more on this, see Moskowitz 2008.
- 3 For more on this issue, see Hartig 2013.
- 4 For more on the oddly fond racial profiling of Jews in China, see Sebag-Montefiore 2012.
- 5 For more on the ways that Chinese people looked to Nazi Germany as a model for the paths that China might take in creating a national identity, see Jones 2001: 50.
- 6 For more on Google’s acquisition of YouTube, see Burgess and Green 2009: 1.
- 7 For more on this, see Burgess and Green 2009: 32–35; McDonald 2009: 387.
- 8 The YouTube video was removed but an online report (*ETtoday* n.d.) outlines her sermon using several lengthy direct quotes.
- 9 See, for example, Rapturous Floating Cloud for You 2011; Tragedy No. 1. 2010.

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science fiction, combined with their unusual English skills and elite education, meant that they were also far more articulate and thoughtful about the materials we discussed than most people I had showed the videos to in either the US or Taiwan. As such, they were in many ways the perfect people to interview but, for that very reason, they were somewhat atypical. Whether we should think of them as an anomaly that is not reflective of the whole, or as an exceptionally expressive voice of their generation, I will leave to the reader. Regardless, these interviews are a reminder that “youth culture” cannot be envisioned as one homogeneous group, even within one nation. Their comments also served as an important reminder that cultural proximity does not inevitably lead to greater affinity, as is often claimed.

For the club members, as well the creators and fans of humorous videos revolving around the *Star Trek* universe, these visual creations are an emblem of a more hopeful future. They offer a dreamscape that provides a respite from our daily travails and the more dystopian reality that accosts us daily in the news. *Star Trek*’s characters also provide us with the tools to explore alternative versions of society, and ourselves; of who we are and who we want to be. That these fan-created videos appropriate these creative building blocks in such a playful and joyous nature may be dismissed as frivolous or shallow by some. But they are also a reminder of the best of what humanity has to offer—of our creativity, our playfulness, and our willingness to laugh at ourselves and with each other. And, in the true *Star Trek* ethos, they do so with love and hope, rather than with derision.

Notes

- 1 For more on this, see Geraghty 2006.
- 2 Daniel Bernardi presents *Star Trek* fans’ discussion about whether or not Ferengi are meant to signify Jewishness (1998: 171–175). A casual search on the Internet will bring up a number of other discussions ranging from overtly denying the connection, to self-professed neo-Nazis who assert that the Ferengi are certainly Jewish, warning against the show because of its Jewish cast members.
- 3 Women’s fiction revolving around *Star Trek* is primarily a female response to a mass-mediated framework that, more often than not, caters to male audiences (Bacon-Smith 1991: 240–241). For an exploration of the psychological dynamic of women who write erotic fantasy that is centered around Spock and Kirk, see Bacon-Smith 1991: 247–250. For another example of sado-masochistic scenes, see alexanderabd 2006.
- 4 See alexanderabd 2006; bionic1013 2009; ImaginarySanity 2009; JohnnyDeppHouse4us 2010; talitha78onLJ 2009; and there are many more.
- 5 For more on this, see Consalvo 2004; Dove-Viebahn 2007.
- 6 C. Liu 2016. See also, J. Xia 2016.
- 7 For more on this, see Moskowitz 2004; Moskowitz 2010.

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influence throughout East Asia and beyond, is a perfect exploratory point to examine the ways in which transnational production becomes part of a dialogue with the audience, one that engages with musical and visual images of the past and present, here and there.

Similarly, *Perhaps Love* forcefully demonstrates the importance of shared understandings, such as the ways that it draws on common understandings of religious frameworks which provide important tools for understanding the motivations of characters who are trapped in forces beyond their control—in their past lives, their present incarnations, and the next. This shared cultural understanding is necessary to be an informed viewer, both in better comprehending the characters themselves, as well as the ways in which a character's behavior draws on particular cultural understandings of regional differences concerning gender and politics. Seeing Hong Kong productions is thereby both a form of knowing and creative appropriation—for the moviemakers, for the audience, and for fans who create their own narratives with the new tools that are available to them.

Notes

- 1 Because I am specifically looking at the Mandopop industry here I have chosen to use pinyin for Mandarin, rather than a romanization of Cantonese pronunciations.
- 2 The 2006 Hong Kong Film Awards were: Best Actress, Best Art Direction, Best Cinematography, Best Costume and Makeup Design, Best Original Film Score, Best Original Film Song. It was nominated for Best Director, Best Film Editing, Best Screenplay, and Best Sound Design. The 2006 Golden Horse Awards were: Best Actress, Best Cinematography, Best Director, Best Original Film Song. The nominations were: Best Action Choreography, Best Art Direction, Best Film Editing, Best Makeup and Costume Design, Best Original Film Score, Best Sound Effects, and Best Visual Effects.
- 3 As late as 1977, 70 percent of Hong Kong's radio broadcasts were Western music (Chen and Chen 1997: 5).
- 4 P. Fu 2003: 60. For more on this, see H. Ceng 1997: 79, 84; Chen and Chen 1997: 3–4.
- 5 For more on this, see Chen and Chen 1997: 3–4.
- 6 In the 1960s, Hong Kong also benefited from Filipino musicians living in Hong Kong (J. Wong 1997: 106).
- 7 For more on this, see J. Wong 1997: 98.
- 8 For more on this, see H. Ceng 2000: 192; M. Zhang 1997; Y. Zhu 2000: 25. Part of this was because in 1972 copyright legislation was enacted which attracted a good deal of new talent (J. Wong 1997: 107). It was really only in the mid-1970s, as Hong Kong's economy was booming and there was a new consumer market, that Cantopop began to compete with the Mandopop market in Hong Kong (J. Lee 1992: 132).
- 9 In 1982 a Japanese textbook which whitewashed Japan's role in China created another wave of songs focusing on Chinese identity, expressed through songs like "I am Chinese" (*Wo shi Zhongguoren*) or Hong Kong Singer Zhang Mingmin's "My Chinese Heart" (*Wo de Zhongguo Xin*) which were broadcasted repeatedly at the same time that Sino-British negotiations were underway on Hong Kong's repatriation (F. Feng 1982; M. Zhang 1982; for more on this, see Gold 1993: 922; W. Ho 2000: 344; Y. Zhu 2000: 255). Similarly, if self-censorship was the rule of thumb in Hong Kong's music industry, the Tiananmen massacre made Hong Kong pop more political

- than it had ever been (W. Ho 2000: 345; K. Liew 2003: 224). Cantopop and Mando-pop songs were used to rally Hong Kong protests against the Tiananmen massacre in Beijing (Erni 1998: 61). Though this faded within a couple of years, it highlights the political framing of a seemingly apolitical musical genre.
- 10 For more on the relationship between Chinese movie industries and pop music see Chen and Chen 1997: 4; W. Jian and Z. Guo 2004; W. Tsai 2002: 6–7.
 - 11 For more on this, see Chen and Chen 1997: 5.
 - 12 For more on this, see Chen and Chen 1997: 5.
 - 13 For more on this, see H. Ceng 1998: 189–190.
 - 14 For more on this, see J. Zheng et al. 2004: 56.
 - 15 For more on this, see K. Liew 2003: 225.
 - 16 For more on this in relation to the Singaporean market, see K. Liew 2003: 227.
 - 17 For more on this film, see Moskowitz 2004.
 - 18 To be more precise, there are two occasions that Zhou Xun's character sings outside of the musical. One instance is in a flashback when she is performing at a cabaret set ten years earlier. The other is when she is peddling a pedicab. Both occasions are portrayed as just a normal person singing with no embellishment, however.
 - 19 For more on depictions of north as masculine and south as feminine, see Baranovitch 2003: 20–22, 130–131; de Kloet 2005a: 230–233; 2005b: 611; 2005c: 322–323; Farrer 2002; H. Huang 2003: 186, 195; Jones 1994: 159; Moskowitz 2010.
 - 20 *Women zhijian de juli xiangcha buguo haoli*.
 - 21 For more on gender stereotypes in Shanghai, see Farrer 2002.
 - 22 J. Ji and J. Cheung 2005.
 - 23 J. Cheung 2005c.
 - 24 A second set of transitional themes occurs with buses. A third set of liminal imagery is water and ice.
 - 25 *Fangshou ba. Rang wo chenwei ni de huiyi*. Sun Na.
 - 26 J. Cheung 2005a.
 - 27 J. Cheung 2005c.
 - 28 For both videos, I use the date of uploading to YouTube. The production dates may have been earlier if the videos were pulled and re-uploaded.
 - 29 The fact that East Asian audiences are aware that Takeshi Kaneshiro's father is Japanese, adds to the transnational feel of the film. Takeshi Kaneshiro's presence is also iconic of Taiwan's much-lauded cultural difference from China because of its fifty-year history as Japan's colony.
 - 30 For more on this, see Moskowitz 2010.
 - 31 See Adorno 2000; Benjamin 1969.

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As noted above, the Uncanny Valley Effect's lack of attention to aesthetic choices needs to be better addressed. Yet we also saw that those in the robotics and animation industries can attest to experiencing consumers' reactions of eerie discomfort when viewing certain images of the uncomfortably close doppelgangers of the living and the lifeless. As with our near fluent speaker, the Uncanny Valley would also seem to be an apt metaphor for ethnic and regional divides between those in the PRC and Taiwan, for example. The unsettling feeling one might have when people confront distorted mirror images—similar yet different in subtle and unsettling ways.

The majority of Taiwan's population is ethnically Chinese and speaks one or more of three Chinese dialects (Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka) but it has not been under Chinese rule for well over a century. It has also borne tremendous cultural influence from being a Japanese Colony for fifty years (1895–1945) and a strong American influence since then. When Mainland Chinese troops fled the communist revolution to Taiwan between 1947 and 1949, the Taiwanese had been sufficiently influenced by Japan that they found the Mainlanders to be both foreign and uncouth (Morris 2004). Even for the pro-Chinese portion of the population, the initial glee at being reunited with their “homeland” soon gave way to despair. In turn, the Chinese KMT government evinced an intense unease with the Taiwanese whom they felt had become far too Japanese (Morris 2004). The ensuing tensions led to the February 28 massacre of Taiwanese civilians by the newly established Chinese KMT government. The massacre was followed by “the white terror,” a period in which those deemed to be aligned with Taiwanese, rather than Chinese, identities were imprisoned or simply disappeared. This mimetic misrecognition of self and other lends insight to some of the continued tensions across the Taiwan straight.

In the PRC, most people see Taiwan as indisputably part of China, conceptually rendering cultural differences to be nothing more than regional identities that one might find in other cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, or Hong Kong. Taiwan's citizens gaze from the opposite side of the looking glass in which they highlight differences in culture and identity from China, proudly calling themselves Taiwanese. This necessitates a constant negotiation of their ethnic heritage and the ways that Taiwan's economy is increasingly becoming inseparable from the PRC. Mimesis is therefore both self-regulatory and an attempt at self-knowledge. The Internet videos that I have presented in this book offer doppelgangers with shared Chinese ancestry a chance to gaze through this mirror reflection of contemporary cultural variance and differing political economies. They reveal cultural proximity that offers shared understandings of humor and visuality, even as they highlight the unsettling differences between the two.

Notes

1 See bellerbysclip 2016.

2 At the time the video was made, as well as during my interviews, Next Animation Studio's name was NEXT Media.

- 3 See E. Yang 2010.
- 4 This occurred on December 12, 2014 when Next Animation Studio was still called NEXT Media.
- 5 All of the excerpts from Michael Logan's interview in this chapter took place on July 2, 2014.
- 6 All of the excerpts from Jessica Wu's interview in this chapter took place on July 2, 2014.
- 7 See CNBC Videos n.d.; Furness 2016.
- 8 See Furness 2016; Pearce 2016.

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