

# The Political Communication of *Bilibili* on the Internet from the Perspective of Field Theory: Taking the Virtual Idol "*Jiangshanjiao*" as an Example

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**Abstract:** The official account of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, one of the first political accounts that entered in new media area, announced its launch of League Virtual Idol called Jiangshanjiao in February 2020. However, this virtual idol was hurriedly deleted only a few hours later. China's first trial of personifying a party organization failed to achieve the expected communication effect, which revealed that official media operators still need to improve communication strategies when interacting with the youth. This article adopted the content analysis method to conduct case studies and data analysis on the selected sample videos of Bilibili, reviewed the Communist Youth League Central Committee's attempt to merge into the subculture and discussed the game and interaction of the "two opinion fields" in this event. Based on the field theory, this paper has put forward some suggestions for the adjustment of political communication on the Internet.

**Keywords:** field theory; online political communication; *Bilibili*; virtual idol *Jiangshanjiao*.

## 1. Introduction

On February 17, 2020, the official Weibo account of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League (hereinafter "Central Committee of CYL") released the official virtual idol Jiangshanjiao [1], which was hurriedly deleted in less than 5 hours. As a political symbol, the appearance of the virtual idol "Jiangshanjiao" has failed to win the favor of netizens, and even counterproductively received a lot of criticism. In such a background where people's sentiment is often stimulated by the fragmented information they receive, the public opinion field has impacted the dominant position of the official media through their voice online. This paper attempts to take this as an example to discuss the public's participation and discourse structure in the all-media era, and is expected to provide discourse strategies for political official account operators to refer to so that they can adapt their communication ways to the real situation properly and broaden its thinking perspective.

## 2. Literature Review

In the era of new media, the official accounts tend to be influenced by the We Media and social media's mode of discourse and logic, and the natural conflict between the two opinion fields [2] has become increasingly prominent, which calls for new discoveries from academic research. Based on articles related to this research and with similar purposes, this paper mainly reviewed the previous research content and achievements from three aspects: virtual idols, online political communication on *Bilibili*, and field theory. Based on the review, this paper figured out the deficiency of the current the research and further determined the research scope and analysis direction of this study.

### 2.1 Research on Virtual Idols

From people's worship of totems, psychics and heroes to their adoration of celebrities and grassroots stars, it is clear that idols are no longer natural objects or the natural form of people themselves, but a figurative personality symbol produced through artificial processing. In the 1990s, the concept of virtual idol has been proposed by the Japanese, in which "virtual" refers to a means of digital technology.

In the current research, foreign scholars have mainly investigated virtual idols in different dimensions from the aspects of technical means, feminism, and body as consumer objects. Among them, Robert Hamilton believed that the production of Japanese virtual idol Date Kyoko is a combination of comic industry, film and television industry and advanced computer animation technology, and pointed out that the consumer group of Japanese female virtual idols is mainly dominated by men [3]. Daniel Black examined Japanese virtual idols from the perspective of the body, and discussed the relationship between technological simulation and the body [4].

The research on virtual idols in China started relatively late and there were few about this topic until 2019 when more studies on virtual idols appeared. With the gradual rise of China's virtual idol industry, researchers have explored the generation, dissemination, IP -based development and consumption of virtual idols from different perspectives. Zhou chose to study the most influential virtual idol in China – Hatsune Miku – from the perspective of identity, and finally found that fans' consumption motivation is to achieve self-identity and enhance the sense of group belonging and self-esteem [5].

## 2.2 Research on Internet Political Communication of Bilibili

Political communication is a communication behavior dominated by political organizations. In the practice of political communication in China, political parties, the country and the government are the main bodies of political publicity, and at the same time they are both the producers of political information in political communication and the "gatekeepers" in the process of communication, which is a typical "top-down" approach. As an extension of political communication practice on the new media side, online political communication has changed the discourse monopoly role of traditional media, allowing every citizen to have a voice.

The positioning of *Bilibili* is the China ACG culture video sharing website characterized by its bullet screens. It initially started with the "two-dimensional" culture, and it began to gradually break through their stereotype of niche positioning and develop towards multicultural development after it was listed. Through the search, it is found that articles that take the official account of "Central Committee of CYL" on Bilibili as the research object account for a large proportion of the research on Internet political communication of *Bilibili*. In order to keep up with young people's trend and meet the needs of media integration, the Central Committee of CYL officially entered *Bilibili* in January 2017, and then expanded its communication map with a strong attitude.

The existing studies on *Bilibili's* political discourse vary in their perspectives, with most of which focus on exploring the discourse characteristics and existing problems of political consciousness expression in the context of youth subcultures, and the way *Bilibili* makes it known outside the fixed circle. Li and Lv conducted a discourse analysis of the bullet screens in the videos released by Central Committee of CYL's *Bilibili* account from 2017 to 2020, summed up the problems and their features in the expression of youth political awareness, and pointed out the path to guide the expression of youth political awareness [6]. Chen and Hu discussed the development direction of young people's ideology and faith based on the comments of videos released by Central Committee of CYL on *Bilibili* [7].

## 2.3 Research on the Opinion Fields

Field theory originated from theory proposed by Bourdieu when he studied on Weber's religious thought in the late 1960s. At present, the academia divides opinion fields in multiple dimensions. The concept of "two opinion fields" proposed by Nan Zhenzhong has been continuously supplemented and improved, and formed a widely-acknowledged definition: the two opinion fields include an official public opinion field with official traditional media such as national television, state news agencies, and party newspapers as the dominants; and a non-governmental public opinion field formed platform on the Internet, especially *Weibo*, WeChat, forums, other We Media platforms, etc. The two fields not only interact with each other, but also restrict and counterbalance each other. Deng believed that the development of emerging technologies has made the public opinion field free from

the dominance of the official opinion field and enjoy a larger share. If the two cannot cooperate or communicate well when competing for the dominant place, it will cause various unstable factors to the emotions of the whole society [8]. Hu, through the analysis of the development of public opinions on the speech "Rear Wave"[9] of *Bilibili*, concluded that in the context of the "converged media" era, the two public opinion fields should make more effort in the pre-judgment and judgment of what subsequent public opinion will emerge and how they develop [10].

## 2.4 Summary

It is found that the current studies on virtual idols are mostly concentrated on the aspects of economy, technology, culture, consumption, etc., while there are few on virtual idols in online political communication in the era of all media. Most of scholars hold a positive attitude towards the political communication of official accounts on Bilibili, but current studies are deficient in the communication behavior anomie of official public opinion fields. Although the number of research projects on Bourdieu's field theory has been on the rise in recent years, most of them focuses on the analysis of current domestic hot events, and there are few studies on emerging Internet platforms.

This paper intended to conduct case studies on the Central Committee of CYL's launch of *Jiangshanjiao* on *Bilibili*. With data analysis, it was hoped to summarize the characteristics and generation mechanisms of political communication anomie from the perspective of field theory. The paper also sorted out the factors that affect the public's acceptance of political issues and further discussed how to properly integrate into different circles, play the effect of building identity and cohesion of the community, and finally achieve the goal of political communication.

## 3. Research Design

### 3.1 Research Methods and Sample Selection

The research adopted the content analysis method, selected videos related to *Jiangshanjiao* on *Bilibili* released from February 17, 2020 to August 30, 2020, with *Bilibili* as the main research platform. After sorting out the timeline, 11 videos were selected as the research object. The uploaders are all personal accounts, includes: @polymeat, @大航海的露比("Luby, the Live Streaming Fleet"), @咕噜肉嘎嘣脆("crunchy sweet and sour pork"), @量子少年-赫木("quantum lad - Haomu) @紫芝灵秀("delicate purple Ganoderma"), @半个熟鸡蛋("half of a boiled egg"), @小风一下("breeze"), @后年是龙年("the year of the dragon comes two years later"), @CategoryP, @拔丝仙人球("crisp sweet frying with cactus"), and @梦小强("dream for power").

### 3.2 Analysis Categories and Units

Since *Jiangshanjiao*'s event entered the public on February 17, 2020, a large number of related videos have emerged on *Bilibili*, including reposting Weibo content, point of view sharing, knowledge popularization, original music and other secondary creations content. Taking netizens as the main participants, this article analyzes the following 8 categories of video content:

- 1). Video distribution mode: release time; release frequency.
- 2). Video type: original; reprint; material splicing.
- 3). Video popularity: repost; like; comment; bullet screens.
- 4). The subject of the video content: reprinted on Weibo; the second creation of netizen comments; comments on the event itself.
- 5). Video-oriented information: words; pictures; sounds.
- 6). Comment type: positive attitude; negative attitude; neutral attitude.
- 7). Bullet screens: keyword analysis; the total number; the number of sessions and interaction.
- 8). Video content: keywords of subtitles; keywords of comments; times and frequency that Jiangshanjiao is mentioned.

#### 4. Data Analysis

The 11 sample videos selected for this study were all released from February 17th to 19th, 2020 when this event was gaining more and more popularity and the online community was in a state of resistant ferment. Specifically, the number of videos released on February 17 was 2 and soon reached its peak on February 18 and February 19(with 4 on each day); only 1 video was released on August 30, which is much later than the peak time of this incident.

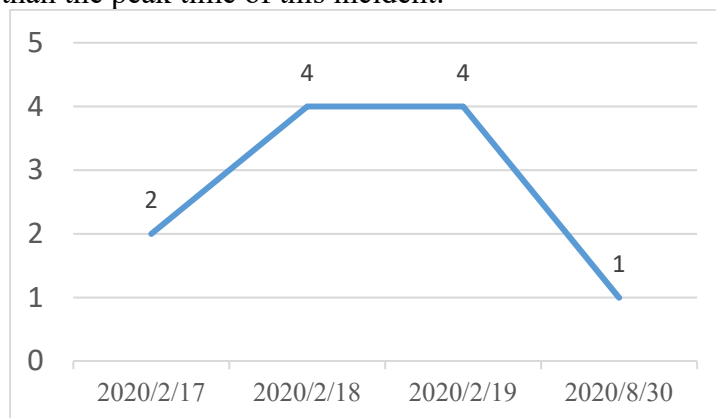
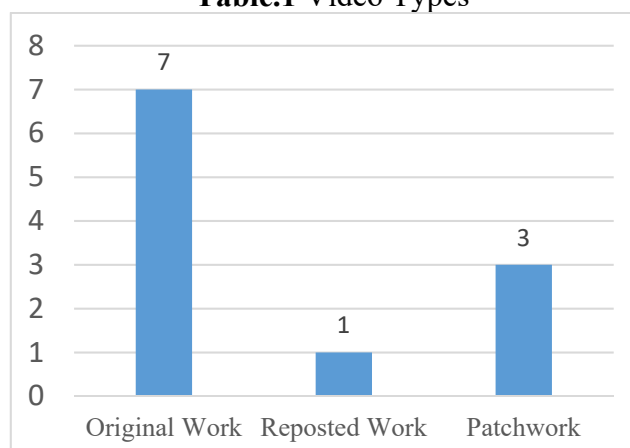


Figure.1 Time Distribution of Video Released

##### 4.1 User Generated Content (UGC) production of Political Discourse

In Table 1, the 11 sample videos are divided into three categories: original videos (7), reposted videos (1), and patchwork videos (3). Among them, original videos account for the largest number with most diverse forms, covering the music area, knowledge popularization area, animation area and so on. The number of patchwork videos occupies the second place, with the content of which are editing and combining information or *Weibo* posts released by the Central Committee of CYL and the comments for their posts. The reposted videos transfer the video for the debut of *Jiangshanjiao* and *Hongqiman*[11] uploaded by the *Weibo* account @江山娇与红旗漫Official ("*Jiangshanjiao* and *Hongqiman* Official"). In general, such a distribution of video types is in line with the UGC production model of *Bilibili* itself. Users active on *Bilibili* often combine the video style of the platform to re-create content related to social and current affairs or even to multiply generate corresponding content, such as texts, emoticons, videos, etc., to bring other users a new audio-visual experience.

Table.1 Video Types



*Bilibili* initially positioned itself as a video platform for entertainment, which makes it easier for them to have ideological and emotional resonance and interaction with young people in this age. From Table 2, the video content topics are rather fixed. Among them, the number of videos directly reposting the official *Weibo* content of the Central Committee of CYL is 3, and that about the re-creation of netizens' comments and the comments about the event itself are both 4.

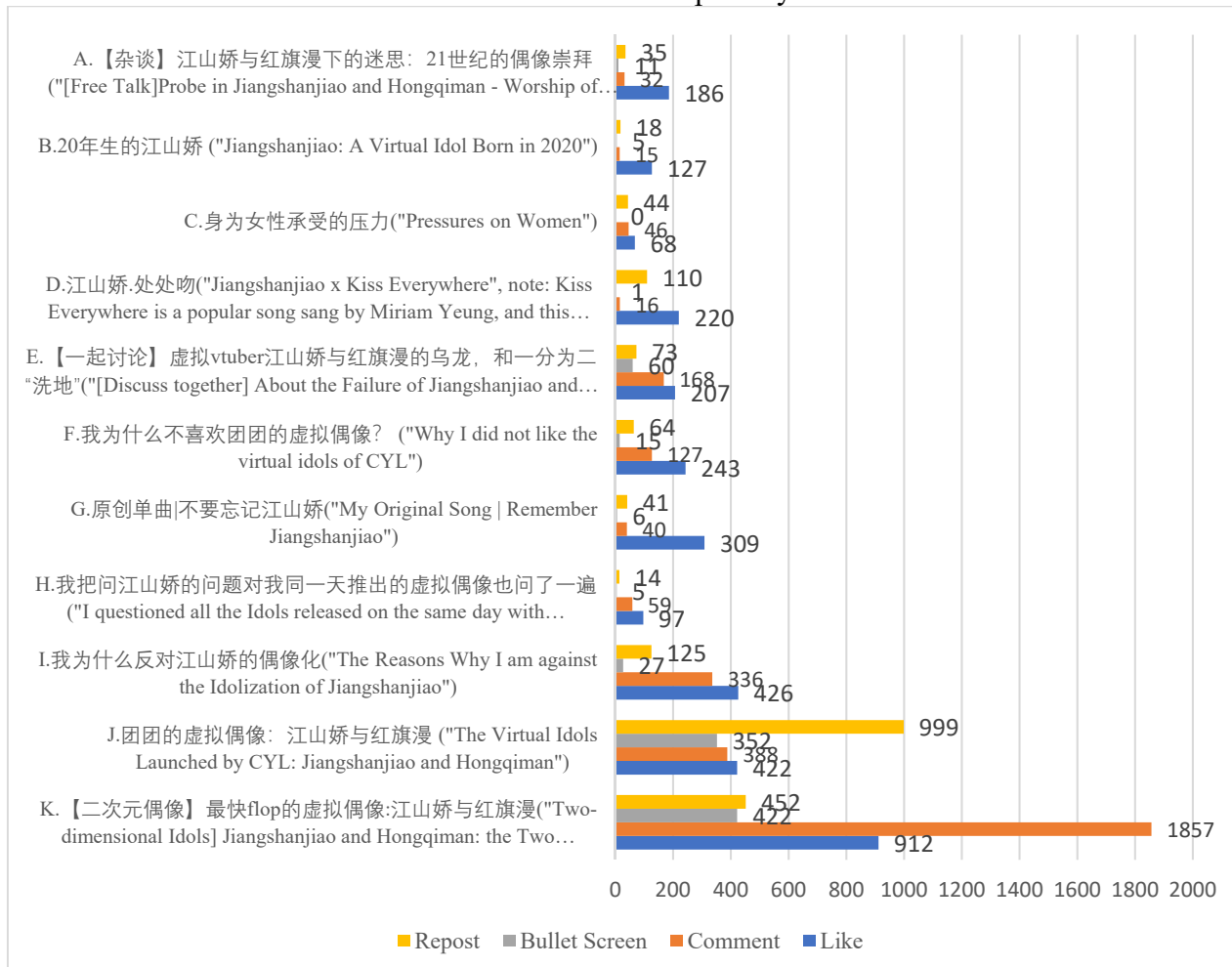
Table .2 Video Content Topics



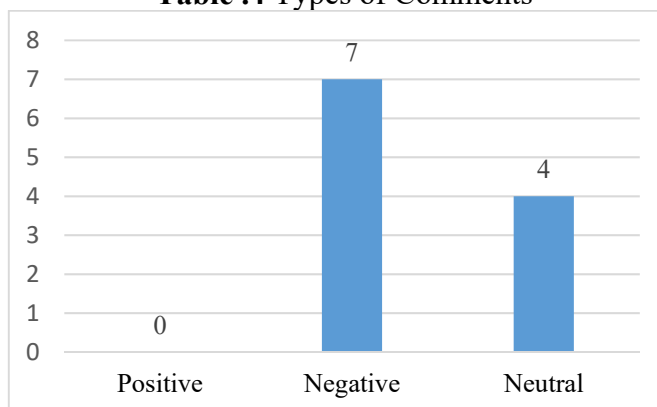
#### 4.2 Competition for the Discourse Power: The Division of the Two Opinion fields

Since everything about "Jiangshanjiao" was erased, many uploaders on *Bilibili* where sub-culture groups gathered have been sorting out the various pieces of information, and rebelled against the mainstream culture by re-producing content related to *Jiangshanjiao*. According to Table 3, although the sample videos with different creative topics and styles differ in their influence, most of the videos related to this event have received great attention, which is reflected in the Users' likes, reposts, favorites, comments and other behaviors on the video. By 7:00 pm on February 15, 2022, the distribution range of the number of likes in the sample data is 68 to 912, the distribution interval of the number of comments is from 15 to 1857, the number of barrages from 0 to 422, and the number of reposts from 14 to 999. Among them, the materials patchwork video was titled: 【二次元偶像】最快flop的虚拟偶像:江山娇与红旗漫 ("[Two-Dimensional Idols] *Jiangshanjiao* And *Hongqiman*: The Two Virtual Idols That Flopped At The Soonest), which ranked first in the number of view counts, likes, collections, and comments, maintaining a high exposure rate. Its influential scope was so wide, and the original video 团团的虚拟偶像: 江山娇与红旗漫 ("The Virtual Idols Launched by CYL: *Jiangshanjiao* and *Hongqiman*") witnessed the highest amount of reposts with high popularity.

Table .3 Video Popularity



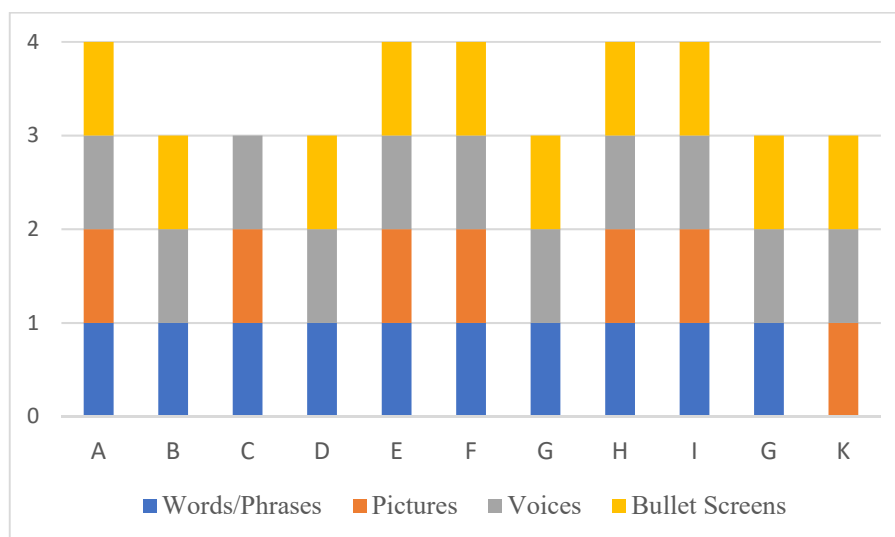
**Table .4** Types of Comments



According to Table 4, the Weibo official account of Central Committee of CYL's attitude and performance in this incident triggered many netizens' disgruntlement and rejection. Among all the selected videos, seven hold a negative attitude, clearly criticizing the CYL's trial for integrating into minor circles out of political communication purpose; the rest of them have a neutral attitude; none of the sample videos have a positive attitude.

In addition, the researchers noticed that four kinds of oriented information (words, pictures, voices, and bullet screens) are commonly found in the sample videos (the oriented words and phrases, here defined as keywords showing audience's emotion and opinion like "haircut", "sickening", "feminist" and other similar keywords; oriented pictures refer to screenshots of Weibo netizens' comments, emojis to express emotions, etc., and oriented voices refer to voice-overs that mobilize the audience's emotions), as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Oriented Information in this Video



### 4.3 Reconstruction of "Jiangshanjiao": Deconstruction of Gender Image in Political Context

As a way of expressing their opinions, bullet screens on *Bilibili* form a virtual communication space free from the time and space limitation, which aggregates its users' emotion in the online community, reinforcing a high sense of group identity as a reflection of collective effervescence. Therefore, it further forms a sense of companionship and common collective memory among the users.

From Figure 2, the bullet screen discourses in the sample videos show obvious feminist attitude. "Jiangshanjiao, do you have period?", "Jiangshanjiao, can you catch up with boys' achievements after high school?" A series of questions about "Jiangshanjiao" have emerged on the screen, involving all kinds of injustices and misfortunes a girl may face in different scenarios. These





cultural barriers between mainstream culture and subcultures and seize the right to guide online discourse in publicity work.

Inspired from idol culture, two-dimensional art culture and virtual idols generated by digital technology, CYL created a personified image of an online political opinion leader, trying to penetrate into the youth group with an animated figure and a personalized narrative perspective. *Jiangshanjiao* was named after a line of Mao Zedong's poem, "Come and see our mother land so rich in beauty". The announcement wording of *Jiangshanjiao* and *Hongqiman* was also an adaptation of Mao's poem: Recalling the past, *red banners wave freely in the west wind*. We now leaning on a balcony and looking at distance; Observing the current, *come and see our mother land so rich in beauty*, we now welcome the come of a new spring's dance. From the meaning of the name alone, *Jiangshanjiao* was set as a cute, tender and idealistic girl. But in terms of external image, *Jiangshanjiao* was more highlighted in her cute appearance as the image in two-dimensional culture. It can be seen that when creating the virtual idol *Jiangshanjiao*, CYL tried to highlight the young and lovely characteristics of the characters, in order to cater to the modern audience's stereotyped appetite for girls: girlishness, cuteness, and thinness as beauty.

At the beginning of the creation of the virtual idol *Jiangshanjiao*, the CYL tried to build a perfect image and resonate with young people by using the words of fandom circle. It attempted to convey the official ideology in an entertaining and youthful way, and weaken the former superiority, a serious and unapproachable official image. However, while satisfying the audience's desire and fantasies about virtual idols, the characteristics of de-realization and virtualization make *Jiangshanjiao* a utopian image, which only display her *jiao* ("loveliness"). Worse still, the deficiency of profound connotation and distinctive character turns *Jiangshanjiao* a failure as political metaphor at the ideological level. It reveals the oppression and hegemony of mainstream consciousness.

On the platforms spreading subcultural circles represented by *Bilibili*, the paradoxical sense of *Jiangshanjiao* is gradually amplified, so that in the hyperreal world, the blurred boundary between real and virtual begins to reappear, the internal contradictions between the multiple binary relationships between politics and entertainment, state and citizens, and official and private relations have also become acute again. In addition, the "fan culture" overly worshipping idols, in essence, is to a certain extent an escape and passive resistance to the real world, and there is a natural incompatibility between the political communication based on the narrative of the real society. As a result, this political communication could not achieve the expected effect of building an identity and cohesive community.

## 5.2 The Game and Interaction of the Two Opinion Fields

Under the combined effect of mass entertainment culture and consumerism, the status of the two public opinion fields began to change. The mainstream status of the official opinion field consisting of traditional media was severely impacted, while the public opinion field, which often becomes the "igniter" and "fermentation ground" of public opinion events, has more right to speak.

In the *Jiangshanjiao* incident, the different perspectives of the "two public opinion fields" in constructing, interpreting and publicizing *Jiangshanjiao* have their own distinct characteristics. The Central Committee of CYL directly employed the discourse mode and operational logic of Japan's ACG culture and "fan circle culture", trying to establish a sense of closeness with young people psychologically. However, in the eyes of young people, the appearance of *Jiangshanjiao* is more out of date, as is displayed in the public's criticizing opinion and opposition for *Jiangshanjiao*, which shows their distrust of the content of official media and doubts about its attitude.

In the sample videos, *Bilibili* uploaders of the knowledge popularization area discussed the phenomenon of political entertainment when he shared his view on *Jiangshanjiao*'s failure of being launched. As shown in Figure 5, words frequently seen in the subtitles of "[Free Talk] Probe in *Jiangshanjiao* and *Hongqiman* - Worship of Idols in the 21st Century" include "idol", "history", "fantasy" and so on. It is believed that the image of a country should not originate from virtual idols born for entertaining audience.



works and interpretations about the incident have emerged on the subculture-aggregated platform *Bilibili*, which has impacted the official and the dominant discourse power in the public opinion field.

Pierre Bourdieu pointed out that the social structure in the field is not fixed, the social relationship is constantly changing, and there are interactions and influences between various fields [14]. With people's rage accumulated within the field, the public opinion field represented by *Bilibili* showed strong distrust and hostility to the official opinion field. In the case that the official opinion field remained silent, the public opinion field, by deconstructing *Jiangshanjiao* and emotional expressions, supplemented information in this incident, which aroused widespread attention from the society and promoted the resolution of the incident. The official opinion field responded by deleting the announcement, and at the same time deleted the comments made by netizens, making this incident come to an end.

### 5.3 Adjustment of Internet Political Communication under Field Theory

In the *Jiangshanjiao* incident, there are many factors that affect the acceptance of political issues in the public opinion field. The society environment and public opinion environment in the age of COVID-19 are two of the reasons for people's rage. Moreover, *Jiangshanjiao* in essence is inseparable from the "fan circle culture" characterized by irrationality, worshipping idol and looking down upon self, and indulgent attachment, which are all contradictory with what political publicity should display. There is a logical conflict at the core that is difficult to reconcile. At the same time, as a cultural commodity, there is a huge logical gap between idol and the national image that derives from a long history and community memory of Chinese people. As the bullet screen posted by users of *Bilibili* said, "I am your citizen, not your fan."

This case of anomie in online political communication reminds the official media once again that when trying to integrated into others' circle, they need to maintain their official identities and be regulated by responsibilities. They must clarify the communication characteristics of emerging online platforms and the user portraits of their audience before making an attempt in case they offend people in the target field. As the "fan circle culture" gradually penetrates into a wider network space, with the extreme enthusiasm of the fan circle, a large number of topics can be generated to attract more attention, which can be a possible way to effectively communicate with the youth subculture and builds the emotional identity of the youth. However, it is worth noting that the reason why virtual idols are followed by young people is that they carry a certain cultural spirit and values, instead of being a cold and lifeless machine. Due to the lack of research and judgment on the information and public opinion environment in advance, the Central Committee of the CYL is incompatible with diversified interpretations and it presented a top-down form of communication, so the deep logic contradiction between the virtual idol culture based on fan imagination still exists.

In any field, the struggle for discourse power is ubiquitous. In response to the "rebellious interpretation" displayed by the public opinion fields, the official media should hear the rational speeches and demands of the people, and make use of the guidance of public opinion to find the "discourse consensus" of the "two public opinion fields". In this incident, the Central Committee of CYL did not grasp the dominance of discourse from the very beginning. In the face of the public's questioning about its entertainment of politics and the promotion of women's rights and interests, it did not respond positively, either. Instead, it was in a relatively passive position, and finally hurriedly deleted the information related to *Jiangshanjiao* and netizens. However, such a move made some netizens reckon that the official media turn a deaf ear to the demands of the people, which leads to an adverse effect: the public paid more attention to the matter, and more people voiced their opinions. In the discussion of sensitive issues, the official opinion field should speed up the establishment of a sound guidance mechanism, form an orderly mechanism for online political participation, and avoid group polarization and loss of control.

## Reference

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