

Ghost Animal Carnival: A Study on the Community Culture of Video Users in Bilibili

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Abstract. The penetration of new media technology continues to affect the rapid development of Internet communities. Internet users who break through the limitations of time and space start creative practice or communication activities according to their interests, which promotes the rapid rise of marginal youth subculture. Ghost animal video is an important branch of subcultural circle, and its community also presents a unique ecological culture in its self-development. Focusing on the ghost animal video community in bilibili, combined with post-modern characteristics, pastiche and parody, self-identity and other related theories, this paper explores the construction mechanism and existing problems of this community culture, and describes the ritual resistance and group carnival in this community, which has a profound impact on the whole community culture.

Keywords: new media; ghost animal video; bilibili; community culture; youth subculture.

1. Introduction

In February, 2020, Luo Xiang, a professor at the China University of Political Science and Law, gave a lecture on the knowledge of criminal law, and the video soon became popular. With his humorous language style and unique story-telling method, he broke the stereotype that the lawyer's license examination was boring and won the favor of many netizens. Subsequently, Luo Xiang was invited to settle in bilibili. The exaggerated expressions and repeated examples in his videos triggered a creative upsurge of ghost animal video producers, and the related videos quickly swept through bilibili ghost animal areas. At the same time, some fans also spread the Internet meme of Zhang San, an extra-legal fanatic and other hot spots in the video of ghosts and animals, which caused widespread onlookers on various network platforms, and even attracted more people to pay attention to Luo Xiang's popular science video of criminal law. Up to now, the highest broadcast volume of related ghost animal videos in Luo Xiang has exceeded 20 million, with around 40,000 bullet comments. It can be seen that the powerful communication power of bilibili Ghost animal video community is becoming increasingly apparent.

Under the empowerment of new media technology, Internet users can break through the limitations of time and space, gather in the virtual space created by the Internet through different personality performances, and give birth to new cultural communities formed by similar connections. Bilibili, which is dominated by animation culture, is a virtual public place where young people gather, and it is also a new type of community with user-generated content (UGC, henceforth) as its main body. On this basis, the ghost animal youth subculture has gradually entered the public field of vision with its humorous style and relaxing entertainment characteristics. Many official media even actively participated in and promoted its deep integration with mainstream culture. For example, the images of *Jiangshan Jiao* and *Hongqi Man* created by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League during the prevention and control period of COVID-19 were widely praised in bilibili and had a profound impact on the society. The construction of any culture cannot be separated from people, and the development of ghost animal culture cannot be separated from the enthusiastic and active user groups behind it. They subvert the mainstream, refuse authority, and attract more attention by actively creating and spreading high-quality ghost animal works, thus helping this small group of cultures more popular.

Therefore, it is very important to explore the community construction mechanism behind this operation mechanism supported by new media technology to further think about the development

path of today's youth subculture. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the style characteristics of bilibili ghost animal video, specifically explain the interactive relationship between the interactions of the author and audience, such as the formation of psychological motivation, group identification, etc., and focus on the profound influence of this mode on the subculture of ghost animal youth subculture.

2. The Concept and Characteristics of Ghost Animal Video

The concept of ghost animal originated from Japanese Buddhist culture and is used to describe cruel people or horrible stories. In 2008, a ghost animal video *The Final Ghost Animal Blue Road* from a Japanese bullet comment network was introduced into China, and its funny and bizarre sound and picture quickly attracted a lot of attention. Then Chinese netizens used the word ghost animal in the title of this work as a synonym for such videos. As an entertainment video platform where young people gather in bilibili, it has been deeply influenced by Japanese culture since its establishment. The platform first introduced the concept of ghost animal, and set up a special ghost animal video column to encourage the active creation of high-quality ghost animal videos, which provides a sharing space for Chinese ghost animal culture lovers. Through the development in recent years, ghost animal video has gradually derived various styles, such as sound MAD and human VOCALOID, and harvested a large number of loyal fan groups. To sum up, the ghost animal video described in this paper can be defined as an alternative combination of sound and pictures generated by editing and collating materials. It is also a new art form that entertains the public with magical style and brainwashing effect, with distinctive features such as decentralization, rhythm and sharing.

2.1 Decentralization of Video Texts

New media has the characteristics of post-modern culture. Decentralization means rejecting the control and influence of orthodox authority, ignoring the deterrence and command of official authority, and maintaining the freedom, pluralism and vitality of creation in cultural creation (Wang, 2011). As an important part of a subculture, the ghost animal video also shows the post-modern feature, and its content profoundly reflects the idea of decentralization. First of all, ghost animal videos often use a large number of materials from different sources, relying on audio connection, showing a unique form of fragmented text combination. In the collating process, the author generally opposes the traditional linear narrative thinking, and even prefers fuzzy logic connection, focusing on the surface text construction of "no reference". In the uploader @ Chaoshan Good Man's video *Review of ALL the Stars of Ghost Animal Videos in 2021!*, the hottest creative materials of ghost animal, such as *Wang Bingbing* and *High-quality Men* were selected, with a total number of more than 20. The author split these elements into parts into units of frames or seconds to recombine them, which eliminates the coherence of the original material in the meaning construction, and finally integrates them into a new video with a strong sense of banter. Secondly, ghost animal stars in ghost animal videos (that is, people who are often used to make ghost animal videos) are generally in the middle and lower class in society, such as Tang Linkang and Cheng Shulin, who are popular because of their magical singing out of tune. They are not the stalwart images strongly advocated by the traditional mainstream values. The creators chose them not only because of their distinctive character symbols, but also as a result of the non-mainstream ideology that broke the authority center, showing their obvious post-modern tendency.

2.2 The Repetition and Exaggeration of Rhythm of Sound and Picture

The sound and picture of the ghost animal video are often accompanied by a strong sense of rhythm, which is characterized by obvious repetition and exaggeration. Generally, the video material created by ghost animal comes from the popular internet meme for some time. For the sake of entertainment, creators will intentionally edit the material into short-term highly repetitive picture fragments. In the processing of audio materials, apart from repeating the sentences of characters in the synchronized

video materials, popular online songs are often selected to provide a framework for the overall audio splicing, and the original rhythm is rhythmized by the way of changing the sound, accelerating or decelerating, so as to achieve the effect of the brainwashing. In Zhao Benshan: *I am the king of reading poems!* of *The Spring Breeze of Reform Blows All the Ground* in the ghost animal video column of *Ghost Animal Video of China Media Group Spring Festival Gala Evening*, the author took the hot song of *the Spring Breeze of Reform Blowing All the Ground* as the creative framework, filled the classic quotations of Zhao Benshan with lyrics, and combines them in series with the repeated body language and facial features according to the rhythm. This video produces strong sensory stimulation under the exaggerated repetition of sound and picture, and gives the audience a different entertainment experience. As a result, the pursuit of visual stimulation, high degree of entertainment and personalization have become the external signs of video lovers of ghost animal.

2.3 The Interesting Space Constructed by Bullet Comments

Bullet comment refers to the critical subtitles that pop up on the screen when playing the video. Bilibili is a large-scale bullet comment video website in China, which has a long history of bullet comment culture. The instantaneity and fragmentation of the bullet comments in ghost animal videos in bilibili are constantly enriching the user's viewing experience. Instant bullet comments construct an interesting online public space for the video audience of ghost and animal videos. They can watch the existing bullet comments to learn about the introduction of related terms, and they can also have psychological real-time interactions with others in different times and spaces by sending bullet comments. For example, in *Review of ALL the Stars of Ghost Animal Videos in 2021!*, there are bullet comments that mark the source of each material in the corresponding time to help the audience enhance their understanding of the video content. Fragmentation is reflected in the short and striking symbolic expression of the bullet comment text. For example, in the ghost animal video related to *Wang Situ* and *Zhuge Liang*, the bullet comment: "I have never seen such a brazen person before" always screens all the pictures, and even becomes a new Internet meme, which reflects the process that the ghost animal video users creatively interpret the main text and explain it through the bullet comments. And it has formed a unique bullet comment video argot and a network community culture with high emotional resonance, linked by hobbies (Du & Liu, 2018).

3. The Authors' Performance, Pastiche and resistance in Ghost Animal Videos areas

3.1 Performance: The Survival of Users in the Bullet Comment Community in Bilibili

Erving Goffman, an American scholar, put forward the theory of parody, which uses semiotic thinking to understand the socialization process of human beings and regards human social behavior as a dramatic performance for self-image-building. People construct a drama through backstage planning and frontstage behavior to shape their own social value and image, and the audience forms their identity with this person according to this drama (Li & Lu, 2020). Bilibili, as a creative platform with UGC as its main content, accurately provides the creators of the ghost animal video column with a frontstage performance space. The backstage planning, innovative ideas or editing skills and other symbols contained in the videos are of social value, and the interaction between the creators and the audience also helps to shape their personal image. For example, the video view of ghost animal videos created by bilibili upholder @ Elizabethan Mouse, @ Vegetarian Lion, @ Director Itch and @A passer-by have frequently exceeded 10 million with novel themes and excellent production. Among them, the famous works *Jinkela* and *Heiweigou* once dominated bilibili, and they were regarded as classic works by netizens. Their combined image *Four Owed Kings* began to be generally certified by users in this area, and they had a fixed fan base. In addition, the creator's frontstage performance is also a self-presentation to gain recognition and realize the desire to express. Marshall McLuhan once said that today's teachers often find that students who cannot read a page of history books

become experts in code and language analysis (McLuhan, 2000). The anonymity of the Internet makes it easy for everyone to hide the backstage image, extends the ideal scene of the creator's performance, and even makes it a key opinion leader. For example, upholder@ Elizabeth Mouse was just an ordinary student at that time. As a lover of minority culture, her excellent production technology in ghost animal video also lacked room for display in daily life. The ghost animal column in bilibili provides a channel for young people with minority hobbies. The upholder @ Elizabeth Mouse has become a *ghost animal boss*, with a large number of followers through the display of excellent works in bilibili. She has been worshipped and studied by newcomers, making up for the practical shortcomings. The upholder @ Elizabeth Mouse is not an exception. These creators who love ghost animal use their works as performance props and perform hard on the stage in ghost animal areas, constantly shaping their images through audience feedback. With the constant emphasis on their personal positioning and status, they satisfy their psychological expectation of showing their personal value to gain recognition.

3.2 Pastiche: Symbolic Meaning under Technical Empowerment

Pastiche is a way of production, and it can also be regarded as a game activity of cultural adaptation. By selecting and collating all kinds of text symbols, the creator can de-historicize and de-contextualize all the selected pre-text symbols in the meaning system of the surface text. These collaged symbols regenerate a new context relationship in a consensus text space, thus establishing a new meaning and value orientation (Lu, 2016). With the development of new media technology, the creators of ghost animal videos can synthesize a variety of irrelevant elements and dissolve the original discourse structure through powerful software functions, so as to achieve the purpose of purely entertaining or reflecting hot events, and even depict a new textual meaning. For example, in the series of original ghost animal videos of upholder @-The Ancient Said-, the images of emperors played by Tang Guoqiang were animated, and a great deal of knowledge of Chinese history and culture was popularized to the audience. In the series of ghost animal videos of Liu Huaqiang buying watermelons, in the original video, when the hawker was attacked by Liu Huaqiang, people around screamed: "Help!". The creator of ghost animal videos directly collaged it with the homonym of the popular song *Sarilang*. The original tense moment suddenly became relaxed, and Liu Huaqiang, who gave the impression of a cruel villain, suddenly became the synonym of funny. It can be seen that the creators of ghost animal videos adapted the original structure with parody, but created new textual meanings in pastiche. They are not simply poachers, but are playing a common symbolic game as a cultural breeding group.

3.3 Resistance: The Ritual Uproar in the Deconstructing Wave

With the development of new media, the one-way point-to-plane communication of traditional media has been gradually replaced by two-way point-to-point interaction, and the channels of social expression are diversified. The function of the topic setting of the power center in the past has been greatly weakened. Especially in literary and artistic creation, influenced by post-structuralism thought, minority culture has set off a deconstruction wave that challenges truth and authority. It advocates tearing down the strict logical chain nonsense and subverting the mainstream elite culture in a confrontational way, which has a profound impact on the construction of subcultural communities. It is in this style that ghost animal video creators mark their identities, entertain and popularize serious issues with a casual attitude, express their thoughts and attitudes, and seek rituals of group resistance. In the work *Trump, I Love You China*, the upholder @ Snowcakehusky created ghost animal videos in the form of human VOCALOID, and made Trump, the American leader who was supposed to speak on formal occasions, sing the song *I Love You China*. This video directly mocked the original serious and orthodox content, and expressed the confrontational spirit of the creator's intention to dispel the class aura. In addition, some creators are also willing to discuss taboo topics in ghost animal videos. For example, some creators recreated Fei Yu-Ching's classic words *heiheihei* and gave Billy Harrington's wrestling video homosexual sense, which showed that ghost animal creators are trying

to challenge orthodoxy and export the youth value system as a kind of resistance.

4. Recreation, Poaching and Identification: Users in Ghost Animal Area as Audience

4.1 Recreation: the Use and Satisfaction in Spoofing Culture

According to the theory of use and satisfaction, the audience has different psychological needs, and they choose the media independently according to their impression of media to meet their needs. The change of new media technology has given birth to social transformation, during which social contradictions are frequent, and the youth groups growing up in multi-culture are facing the risk of losing their faith and disorderly behavior. Faced with the information overload environment and the saturated traditional media market, they are in urgent need of new discourses full of absurdity and ridicule to act as decompression valves. The essence of ghost animal is actually a kind of spoofing culture, which depicts marginal discourse, is characterized by simplicity and ugliness, and meets the requirements of shallow reading habits in the Internet era through superficial text design. Its purpose is to establish a free and open *image utopia* for young people who suffer from the pressure of reality or lose their ability to adjust. Ghost animal lovers admit that they regard the viewing process as a cathartic game, especially when they see the classic works being broken and reconstructed. Sometimes they can have emotional resonance, and their psychological anxiety disappears unconsciously. For example, in the well-known ghost animal video *Patrick Star Daoxiang*, the song *Daoxiang* was sung in the image of *Patrick Star*, and the lyrics were changed to a description of the typical pressures faced by young people in real life, and many warm words of encouragement were inserted. For a time, many audiences used bullet comments such as “tears” and “moved”, and even left messages in the comment area. They thought that such ghost animal videos greatly eased their anxiety and provided inspiring power.

4.2 Poaching: Identity Change in the Secondary Adaptation

American scholar Henry Jenkins regards fans as readers who actively misappropriate texts and reread them for different purposes. They are no longer just audiences of popular texts, but active participants who take part in constructing and spreading the meaning of texts (Jenkins, 2000). This behavior of breaking raw materials and reconstructing them individually is called text poaching. If the creator collages and replaces the materials from different sources to make the ghost animal videos as a text poaching process, then the audience actually have the re-stealing behavior of the poached text, and realizes the identity transformation at two levels in this process. First of all, some audiences will intercept the interesting parts of the ghost animal video and make them into emoticons or animated pictures, or directly carry out the second poaching with an eye-catching language symbol as the code name of the segment. Apart from the closed sharing and communication within the group, community members will also actively spread to other platforms in the Internet space to help them move out of the subculture circle. Under this mechanism, they have the dual identity of communicators. For example, in the aforementioned Luo Xiang's ghost animal videos, some audiences made the clips into emoticons and posted them on social platforms, which became an opportunity for more people to pay attention to Luo Xiang's ghost animal videos. In addition, the core theme of the videos in bilibili is that everyone can create it, which blurs the boundary between the audience and the producer, and provides the basis for the audience to change to the creator status. Many ghost animal video lovers, out of interest or following psychology, will change from simply watching to participating in their own creation, misappropriating, or poaching excellent works released by mature creators. And then they assemble their videos according to their personal style. This relatively simple imitation method often becomes their first choice in the learning process.

4.3 Identification: Group Belonging under the Social Carnival

Carnival theory eliminates any closeness, mutual contempt, pulls in distant things and aggregates separated things (Fu, 2018). Bakhtin's carnival theory explains a vision of the spirit of freedom. In the carnival ceremony, people from different social backgrounds can gather here, break through class barriers, not stick to any rules and regulations, and realize equal interaction with others. There is a natural conflict between subculture and mainstream culture. The ghost animal culture, as an important branch of it, has been misunderstood and questioned in daily life. Ghost animal lovers often get lost in the anxiety of not being understood, and lack a sense of identity and belonging. However, in a virtual carnival field set up by the Internet in bilibili ghost animal area, or an electronic tribe, the audience often breaks away from the shackles of the rules in real life by interacting with bullet comments and leaving messages in the comment area. They can also join the group carnival square by learning the unique symbolic narrative system or aesthetic criterion of Ghost Livestock Area, so as to realize their self-identity in a free and equal atmosphere. At the same time, the minority characteristics of ghost animal culture endow this carnival with a strict access mechanism and a clear group edge, which reinforces the self-identification of this group again. For example, some bullet comments in ghost animal videos often need the audience to know some classic ghost animal works before they can understand their special meaning. For example, "there is a bald head in the crowd", which seems to be an incoherent statement, actually refers to what dubbing actor Ge Ping said to a bald child at an audience meeting. Later, because of its strong brainwashing effect, after the clip was created as a ghost animal video by netizens, it gradually became a famous meme in this group.

5. Problems and Development of Contemporary ghost Animal communities

The vigorous development of the Internet is the cornerstone of the popularity of new culture. As a new Internet phenomenon with great characteristics, the concept of ghost animal is also showing a surge in its fan community base. More and more young people regard bilibili ghost animal area as a resort for recreation, and quickly become a member of community construction. However, while the active factors of ghost animal community culture are stimulated, some pickles are hidden under the interaction of the community also emerge.

5.1 Frequent Infringement Disputes: Creator's Indifference to copyright

Ghost animal video is a secondary creation, which is edited and assembled by collecting the existing video materials on the Internet. In the process of misappropriation, a series of infringement disputes may arise. First of all, the materials of ghost animal videos are generally from a wide range of sources, which makes it difficult for creators to obtain authorization one by one. Most people simply choose to ignore this problem directly. Moreover, the spoofing nature of the protagonist in the ghost animal videos also makes them often forget that it may involve problems such as damaging the reputation of others. For example, in 2019, Cai Xukun, a young artist, quickly became the favorite image in the ghost animal area of bilibili because of the brainwashing background music and the joyful action of playing basketball in his self-introduction video. Subsequently, the team of Cai Xukun sent a lawyer's letter to bilibili complaining about the infringement of these videos. However, some creators did not think so. When refusing to remove the video, they even made more videos to blame the sensitivity of Cai Xukun's team.

The lack of copyright awareness revealed by such incidents shows that the ghost animal community needs corresponding guidance and restriction. In December, 2021, China Netcasting Services Association issued the *Detailed Rules for Auditing Standards of Network Short Video Content*, which stipulated that the short video without authorization to cut and adapt the content of film and television as illegal categories, and constantly strengthened the crackdown on infringement in this field. As a key link in China's copyright protection system, the new media platform should also actively respond to the call of the state, conduct regular checking through technical means, remove unqualified ghost animal videos in time, and improve the release and review system of new

videos, so as to keep the copyright protection clear. For creators, it should be clear that marginal discourse is not the reason for vague infringement, consciously understand the relevant legal system, keep awe and respect for copyright protection, and create a good production atmosphere for their beloved culture.

5.2 The Serious Tendency of Kitsch: The Loss of Audience's Psychological Value

As mentioned before, ghost animal video is a new creative form with a strong ironic sense and dispelling the mainstream. Creators often choose strange themes to share the pure concept of enjoyment. As a multicultural community with strong influence, bilibili is mostly a young group, among which many teenagers are inexperienced and lack independent judgment ability. Postman's media ecology pointed out that, just like discussing the relationship between fish and water, the media has been integrated into our lives in all aspects. People get rich emotional experiences in the mimicry environment created by the media, and they are defined by the media while shaping their own reality (Li, 2022). As a medium, ghost animal video builds an Internet ecological environment full of entertainment and revelry. It has recreational content to ease emotions, and it will inevitably contain kitsch dross. Teenagers are often unconsciously and passively immersed in it, confused by virtual and real dimensions, resulting in the loss of psychological value.

As the most active domestic platform for the creation and release of ghost animal videos, bilibili plays a leading role in guiding the community. Therefore, the platform should first set up strict platform specifications, and explicitly reject vulgar content. At the same time, it should encourage creators to produce ghost animal videos with correct values, eliminate the prevailing kitsch atmosphere, and actively guide the audience. In addition, as the specific area, sometimes there are vulgar or harmful contents that intensify group conflicts in the bullet comment area in bilibili. The platform should strengthen the bullet comment check mechanism, clean up the low-quality war-inducing bullet comments in time, and create a positive and healthy real-time communication environment for the audience of ghost animal videos. In addition, the audience should consciously strengthen the cultivation of media quality, improve the ability of independent thinking and information screening, and enjoy the happiness given by ghost animal videos under the positive values.

5.3 Increased Media Dependence: The "New Container People" Created by Bilibili

The container people theory holds that the inner world of modern people who have grown up in mass communication, especially in the media environment dominated by television, is similar to a can-shaped container, which is isolated and closed (Wang & Gu, 2008). The development of the mobile Internet makes people escape from the shackles of reality, and it is extremely easy to seek spiritual shelter in virtual space, which intensifies the psychological closeness phenomenon. It is especially for the younger generation, who have become new container people, and are increasingly pursuing autonomy under the empowerment of new media. As the main entertainment, rejuvenation and profound post-modern brand, bilibili ghost animal area provides a natural virtual container for this kind of people. In the ridiculous and exaggerated ghost animal culture, they can easily get rid of preaching and ethics and highlight their own uniqueness. However, the growing sense of dependence also indicates that the outer wall of the container is quietly thickened, which makes the distance between the young people and the real world become longer unconsciously. When they finally realize that they should try their best to make a cry for help, they can only hear their own echo. For example, the symptoms of expressive aphasia of many users in this area are due to their long-term infiltration in ghost animal areas, forming special language habits and jumpy language styles, thus showing the disorder of language system in real life. They become silent, indifferent and irritable, and they are clearly separated from others. In addition, some fans have become social barrier patients who are out of touch with the society because they can satisfy their desire to express themselves in the ghost animal area. Therefore, the ghost animal videos increase their dependence on virtual communities, and lose their confidence in real communication.

Mainstream media guidance will become a practical solution. They can take the initiative to change their voice, adopt the elements of ghost animal that are in line with the aesthetic interest of fans, integrate positive mainstream values into them, and guide them in a healthy and positive way imperceptibly, so as to encourage them to return to life. For example, CCTV once officially edited a ghost animal video at the end of the program *Thank You, My Home*. This video was full of fun and conveyed the mainstream values of attaching importance to the inheritance of family culture and being grateful for the love of loved ones, and guided young people to return to their families. In addition, the fans of ghost animal should also strive to improve their self-cultivation, rationally plan their entertainment time, attach importance to active dialogue with others in daily interpersonal communication, expand their interests to enrich their present life, and finally get out of the container barrier.

6. Conclusion.

Under the environment of new media, the ghost animal culture is constantly expanding its influence, and the ghost animal video user community in bilibili also shows its unique cultural features in its development. Because of their love for the style of ghost animal video, the members highly gathered, and achieved secondary creation or communication in interaction and communication. They also liberated their own potential, completed the group and self-identity, and finally formed a specific subculture group with a high degree of individuality, cooperation and belonging, which had a positive impact on the development of the whole ghost animal culture. We recognize its unique cultural value, but also need to be alert to the proliferation of bad habits such as kitsch tendencies and internet addiction. Perhaps in the future, the regulated or guided ghost animal community will welcome more new members. And they will devote themselves to the creation and promotion of related videos and surrounding areas with a more enthusiastic look, pushing ghost animal culture, a minority youth culture, to a broader development path.

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