

SHANZHAI ONLINE VIDEOS IN CHINA:  
GOVERNANCE AND RESISTANCE THROUGH MEDIA

A Dissertation

by

XI CUI

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: Communication

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Antonio C. La Pastina Cara Wallis
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## ABSTRACT

Shanzhai Online Videos in China: Governance and Resistance through Media.

(August 2011)

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Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. Antonio C. La Pastina  
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This dissertation explores the production, circulation, and regulation of Shanzhai online videos in order to understand how people's everyday lives are governed and how the governing power is resisted through the media system in contemporary China.

This research is situated in the specific socio-cultural and historical context where Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have proliferated among various social strata, where the media are both the propagandistic mouthpiece and a profit-oriented industry, and where people are encouraged to pursue their life goals under a neoliberal rationality that is pervasive in media.

I use a Foucauldian framework to examine the power modalities and power relationships manifested in the Shanzhai practices. I argue that both disciplinary power and the power of governmentality are found in this cultural practice. It is through the production, circulation and regulation of Shanzhai videos that power is exercised on different parties involved in this process as governance and resistance.

This power relationship, I argue, is explicated through a ritualistic view of the reality presented in the trans-media, trans-genre narratives that people internalize in order to develop specific ways of using media to pursue their life goals. Meanwhile, people also employ various strategies to negotiate for resources to achieve these goals. In these negotiations, power relationships manifested themselves as their actions upon each other. Ordinary people are disciplined through patterned uses of media to live their lives and governed by a neoliberal mentality to pursue their life projects on the Internet. However, there is more than one set of discourses with a claim to the “truth” about Shanzhai in Chinese media. Thus, people are also empowered to take advantage of this discrepancy to gain symbolic as well as material favors.

This study examined a nuanced and dialectic power relationship in contemporary Chinese society. First, it is found that people are both empowered and subjected to the ways they use media to pursue personal goals. Second, the resistance in the Shanzhai practices not only brought them symbolic power as much previous literature suggests, but also material resources such as media access and sponsorship. Last, the holistic view of the media system helps us situate Shanzhai online videos in the convergent media environment and draw a better picture of the web of power relationships.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to hundreds of millions of Chinese Internet users. It is they, with every single but significant key stroke and mouse-click, who partly make China what it is today.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my wholehearted gratitude to many people along the road of my doctoral studies. First, I deeply thank Dr. Antonio La Pastina. I can't remember how many times I asked him to meet me when I felt in the dark and frustrated. Talking with him is always pleasant and intellectually inspiring. Second, I want to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Cara Wallis. I admire her constant hard work and meticulous scholarship. She is erudite and insightful on many issues about China. She always comments on my works rigorously and encourages me to go an extra mile on my scholarship. I wouldn't have finished this study without the encouragement and academic insights from the two co-chairpersons. I would also like to thank my committee members. Dr. Eric Rothenbuhler guided me into many new areas and literatures that greatly broadened my academic horizon and benefited my dissertation research. Dr. Patrick Burkart has solid theoretical knowledge and gave me invaluable comments on my analysis. Dr. Gatson provoked my thoughts and interest in research methods as well as the sociological perspective on popular culture. I admire and appreciate their selfless dedication to academic life and their students.

I would like to bow to my parents and my brother. Though many times I was too lazy to even call them, they have been always in my mind and I know that so have I in their minds. It is their selfless and soundless love and trust that enabled me to face many difficult moments.

I must also extend my gratitude to my friends, colleagues, the department faculty and staff for making my time at Texas A&M University a great experience. Without your academic inspiration and sincere friendship, my life in the US would be dismal and lonely. Especially, I would like to thank Lu Jia for all his help and caring to me. His hard work and rigorous scholarship makes him an academic exemplar for me.



## NOMENCLATURE

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CNNIC	China Internet Network Information Center
GAPP	the General Administration of Press and Publication of China
ICP	Internet Content Provider
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ISP	Internet Service Provider
MEI	the Ministry of Electronic Industry
MII	the Ministry of Information Industry of China
MIIT	the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China
MPT	the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication of China
SARFT	the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television of China
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Shanzhai (山寨), translated as copycatting by Google, ranked the first among the top 10 searched words in this search engine in 2008. China Radio International explained Shanzhai as “literally refer[ing] to the mountain strongholds of bandits. First borrowed to describe rip-off products, it has evolved to also referring to homemade products, such as video parodies of movies” (Y. Han, 2009). It has penetrated to various aspects of Chinese everyday life ranging from cell phones to clothes, from fast food brands to celebrity imitators, from grassroots holiday celebrations to amateur video parodies on the Internet.

Some say it is a sign of the liveliness and creativeness of grassroots culture, but some bemoan its lack of originality and possible copyright infringement. On December 2, 2008, one of the most important news outlets, *Xinwen Lianbo* of China Central Television (CCTV), made a two-minute-long report on Shanzhai, covering everything from cell phones to Shanzhai culture.<sup>1</sup> The coverage in the official media invited further discussion in the popular press and cyberspace regarding Shanzhai practices. Three weeks later, the Chinese Communist Party’s mouthpiece *People’s Daily* commented on Shanzhai for the first time. It published an article in the column called “Culture

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This dissertation follows the style of the journal of *Human Communication*

<sup>1</sup> Since mid-2008, there have been multiple reports in China’s news media on the Shanzhai cell phones. These reports are followed by blog posts, discussions in BBS and foreign media reports (Wallis & Qiu, *in press*). The *Xinwen Lianbo* report is the first one that commented on Shanzhai culture, in addition to Shanzhai cell phones.

Observation,” arguing two potential paths for Shanzhai culture. One would be producing “cultural junk” if Shanzhai solely concentrates on creating fun from imitation or on plagiarism, and the other path is toward “the cultural journey of folk wisdom” if Shanzhai goes beyond imitation and takes on innovation (F. Li & Zhang, 2008). The *People’s Daily* published multiple commentaries on Shanzhai in the two months following. In March 2009 during the congressional session, Ni Ping, a famous television hostess, proposed to “Renounce the Shanzhai Culture and Support the Original Works” (Ni, 2009), which generated great controversy regarding the development of grassroots culture. At the same time, multiple famous Shanzhai online videos and cultural events were circulating and being tracked in various news outlets. Since then, Shanzhai became a prominent social topic and a cultural phenomenon. Netizens, media, scholars, as well as policy makers, all joined the clamorous social drama, both discursively and in actions. Thus, Shanzhai is not only a locus of expressions of different social groups, but also a struggle for construction, transformation, and reinforcement of the social structure through cultural production. In this sense, Shanzhai cultural productions become an ideal empirical site to examine the ways in which different social groups interact with each other, in and through China’s media system.

By examining Shanzhai, this study will try to answer the questions regarding the governance and resistance of expressions through media in contemporary Chinese society. Specifically, I will argue that the processes of Shanzhai production, circulation, and regulation reflect the different modalities of social control that co-exist in contemporary China. In the case of Shanzhai, the power dynamics among different



social groups manifest themselves in the control over and struggle for expressions through specific uses of media. I will examine the cultural significance of some media representations, and their convergence, which Shanzhai videos imitated, the strategies employed by different parties involved in Shanzhai, and the discursive contestation of Shanzhai cultural production. In this way, we can better understand how the modes of social control are transformed and carried out through the consumption and user-led production of media in China.

In this chapter, I will first sensitize the readers to the concept of Shanzhai with a brief historical review. Then I will introduce the framework which I will use to examine and discuss the relationship between Shanzhai and Chinese society. Last, I will preview each of the following chapters.

### **A Brief Introduction of Shanzhai**

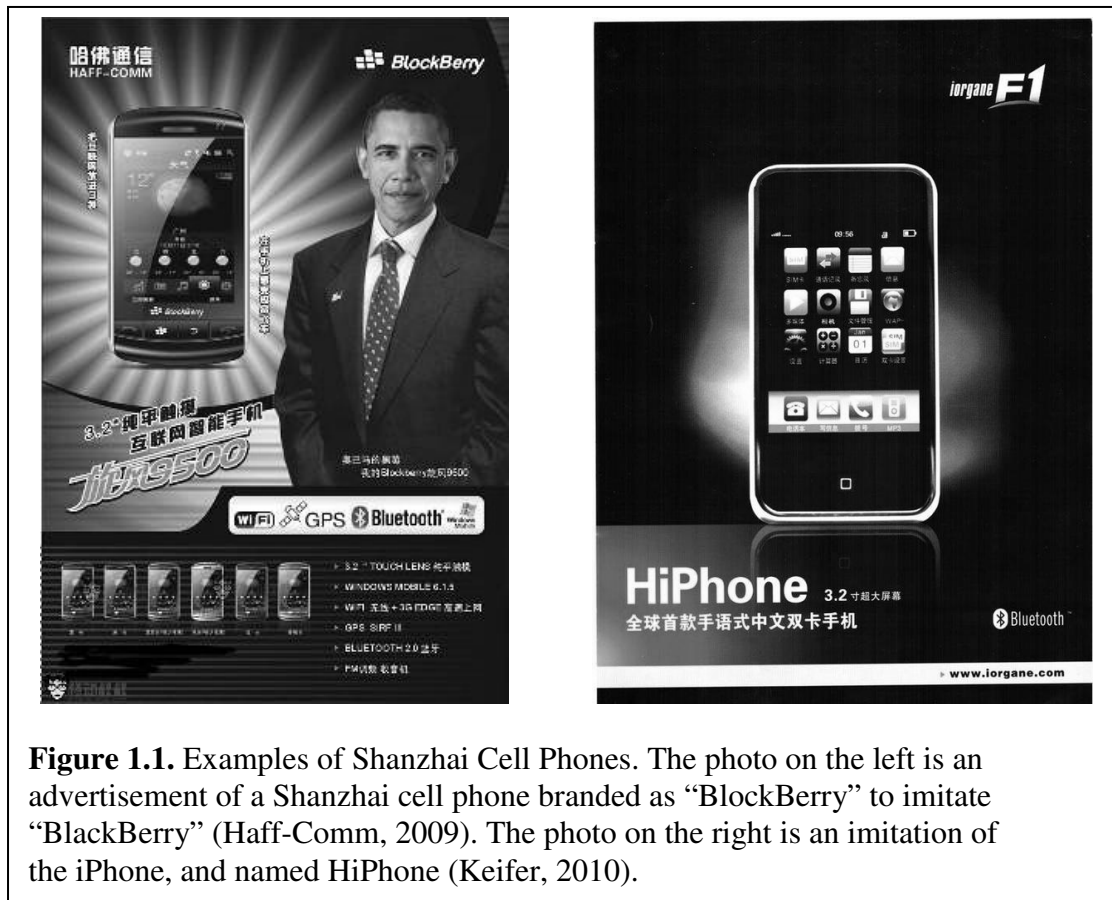
Before being used by lay people, Shanzhai was a professional jargon in a limited circle in the Canton area and had a much longer history than most people know. The word Shanzhai was first used in Hong Kong in the 1970s (Lüqiu, 2009). It literally means mountain village. From the early half of the 20th century through the late 70s, the Lion Rock area, a hill in Hong Kong, had been a very poor community. Many small, ill-equipped workshops with low-paid laborers were located in that area. However, many of these workshops succeeded in their businesses through the owners' and workers' hard work. The Lion Rock spirit is seen as one of the most important reasons for Hong Kong to have thrived in the world economy since the 1970s. Shanzhai factories used to refer to

those small workshops in Lion Rock (Y. Xu, 2009). The connotation was that they were poorly equipped, producing low-end, low-tech products with low-paid labor.

Imitation was not part of the connotation of Shanzhai until more recently when the term began to be used in the Canton area in southeast China. Following the opening and reform policy,<sup>2</sup> the first special economic zone of China was established in Shenzhen in 1978 when it was still a small fishing village adjacent to Hong Kong. Many factories, especially Other Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) factories, were attracted to Shenzhen because of its preferential policies and cheap labor. Among the products of those factories, there have been knock-off cell phones as early as the late 1990s. However, most of the early knock-off cell phones were made with recycled parts of the copied model. The use of the word “Shanzhai” was largely limited to insiders in the industry (Z. Xu, 2009). It was not until 2003, when a Taiwan-based Integrated Circuit (IC) design company, Media Tek (MTK), developed a set of cheap cell phone chips that Shanzhai cell phones started flooding into markets and became popular (Wallis & Qiu, *in press*). It is around this time when the word Shanzhai started to be publicly used in the cell phone markets, among consumers, and was reported by the media. Figure 1.1 shows two examples of Shanzhai knock-off phones. The one on the left is an imitation of Blackberry, branded as BlockBerry. Its logo is also designed to be confused with BlackBerry’s. The Shanzhai iPhone on the right is branded HiPhone with a logo of an orange, in contrast to an apple.

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<sup>2</sup> The Opening and Reform (*Gaige Kaifang*) Policy was implemented in December 1978 on the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the Eleventh National Congress of CCP, led by the reformist leaders such as Deng Xiaoping. It is seen as a major turning point of China’s political and economic agenda after the Cultural Revolution. Since then, China started to shift its concentration from class struggle to economic construction, and to take a pragmatic approach on political and socio-economic problems.



**Figure 1.1.** Examples of Shanzhai Cell Phones. The photo on the left is an advertisement of a Shanzhai cell phone branded as “BlockBerry” to imitate “BlackBerry” (Haff-Comm, 2009). The photo on the right is an imitation of the iPhone, and named HiPhone (Keifer, 2010).

What makes the concept of Shanzhai popular is not only the cheap knock-off cell phones, but also the brand and design imitations, as well as pastiches of brands and designs, in a variety of other consumer goods in China ranging from fast food to electronics, from architecture to vehicle designs. Some Shanzhai products, such as cell phones, also include different features that were not available in the original designs, such as a Ferrari car design, an external lens for a cell phone’s embedded camera, an embedded lighter, etc. By early 2008, though imitation seemed to be a more important indicator of Shanzhai products since the designs they imitated were dominantly

transnational brands' high-end products, the original connotation of Shanzhai as poorly made, inferior technologies persisted in the popular perceptions about Shanzhai.

More recently, the Shanzhai practices have penetrated into cultural spheres. For example, since 2008, amateurs' imitations of various popular television shows appeared on the Internet and circulated widely in China. They were not necessarily named as the Shanzhai version of the imitated shows by the producers themselves; however, when netizens shared this content, they tended to label each production as the Shanzhai version of the original show. Three prominent cases of this type are the Shanzhai *Chunwan* (Spring Festival Gala hosted by CCTV on every Lunar New Year's eve, hereafter, the *Gala*), Shanzhai *Baijia Jiangtan* (Lecterns for a hundred schools of thoughts, a show of CCTV, hereafter, the *Lecture Show*), and Shanzhai *Honglou Meng* (Dream of Red Mansions, a classic novel which was adapted into TV drama in 1987 by CCTV, hereafter, the *Red Mansions*). They circulated widely on the Internet in China. The producers of these three series of videos did not necessarily share the same motivations, and they were caught in different webs of relationships among government administrators, commercial sponsors, traditional mass media, and audiences. However, the videos are all labeled Shanzhai mainly because of their apparent imitation and reference to the popular original television shows, and also because their production was all done outside of the established institutions and, at least at the beginning, and usually poorly made compared with professional standards. This study is based my in-depth examination of these three cases.

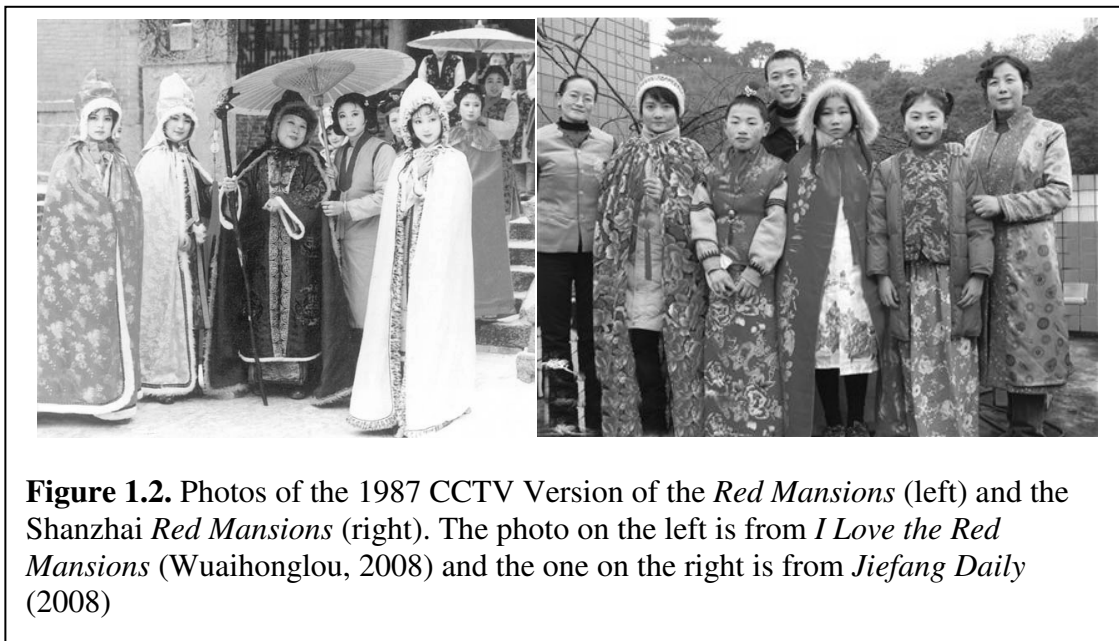
From mid-2008 when these Shanzhai cases became well known, a connotation of resistance to the established powerful institutions became more evident in the word Shanzhai. This contemporary use of Shanzhai, connoting resistance or rebellion, is coupled with its use in a Chinese classic novel, *Shuihu Zhuan* (*The Water Margin*), written in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The novel tells a story about peasants establishing their own armed force and authority in a remote mountain area, and fighting against the Song Dynasty. But at the end, the rebels were enlisted by the royal court into its army. Shanzhai, in this novel, refers to the mountain village where the peasant rebels withstood the royal court. Thus, by labeling cultural practices as Shanzhai, the connotation of resistance is conferred onto it. Sometimes, online discussions also parallel concerns about Shanzhai being assimilated into the mainstream with the failure of the peasants' revolt in *Shuihu Zhuan*.

These connotations are important because, as readers will see in my later analysis, they are the discursive resource for different social groups to construct Shanzhai under their control or struggle for cultural expressions. The uses of these discursive resources of Shanzhai both reflect different groups' positions in the social structure as well as their cultural/ideological orientations in the global system. These uses also contribute to the political struggle and to the reshaping of power dynamics within Chinese society.

### Three Shanzhai Cases

#### Case one: Shanzhai *Honglou Meng*

*Honglou Meng*, also translated as *The Dream of the Red Mansions*, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, and *The Story of the Stone*, is one of the four classic masterpiece novels in China. The first 80 chapters, the major part of this work, were written in the



18<sup>th</sup> Century by the novelist Cao Xueqin during the Qing Dynasty. The novel provides a detailed, episodic record of the two extended families of the wealthy and aristocratic Jia clan, the Rongguo House and the Ningguo House, who reside in two large, adjacent family compounds in the capital. This work covers various aspects of the life in that era

so extensively and in such detail that a scholarly field, Redology,<sup>3</sup> was developed and devoted exclusively to the study of it. This work was adapted into a television series in 1987 by CCTV (Figure 1.2, left)<sup>4</sup>. At that time, when television sets started to become popular in Chinese families but entertainment was still scarce, this TV drama became part of the collective memory among a generation of Chinese.

Twenty years after the first television adaptation of the *Red Mansions* by CCTV, in 2008, Beijing Television Station announced their plan of remaking the *Red Mansions*. Along with the preparation for shooting, a nation-wide reality show to choose major characters for the remake was carried out in different regions in China. This reality show started with American-Idol-style public auditions nationwide. The final round of this show was broadcast live by Beijing Television and drew extensive attention from viewers and other media.

Amidst this renewed zest for the *Red Mansions*, Chen Weishi, a young college student in Chongqing city, shot an amateur video of a scene in the *Red Mansions* during the family reunion on Spring Festival holiday (Figure 1.2, right). All the actors were his relatives. The video was shot in the living room and bedroom of his family's condo and with very simple props such as using bed sheets as actors' clothes. A series of video was first put online in February 2009, right after the Spring Festival when it was shot. There are four clips so far and each lasts from 4 to 9 minutes. It became very popular after it

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<sup>3</sup> Redology (红学) is a scholarly field that is devoted to the study of the *Dream of the Red Mansions*, one of the four classic novels of China. The topics range from literary critiques to the studies of food or clothing in Qing Dynasty through this novel.

<sup>4</sup> The CCTV version of the *Dream of Red Mansions* released in 1987 was very popular among Chinese television viewers. Along with the television adaptation of the other Chinese classic novels, the *Romance of the Three Kingdom* (*Sanguo Yanyi*), the *Journey to the West* (*Xi You Ji*), and *Water Margin* (*Shuihu Zhuan*). It was seen as the evidences of the revival of popular culture in China (Keane, 2002, 2005).

was posted online, where discussion of it also took place. It is called the Shanzhai *Honglou Meng (Red Mansions)* and widely circulated. One of the characteristics of this case is that, unlike other popular Shanzhai videos, the family crew planned to continue shooting episodes during future family reunions, and their operation has not involved any commercial or government intervention. However, after gaining popularity, the family did get much publicity. They were visited by a famous Chinese television drama director who was working for Beijing Television Station on the remake of the *Red Mansions*. I will explicate the relationships among the actor-selecting reality show for the remaking of *Red Mansions*, the online DIY video Chen's family made as a participation in the media world, and the family's celebrity. I will argue that the Shanzhai *Red Mansions* video exemplifies the mentality of self-motivated democratic participation in cultural expressions through media, a way to govern the society at a distance. Meanwhile, I will contrast it with other cases in order to understand the spectrum of different Shanzhai practices.

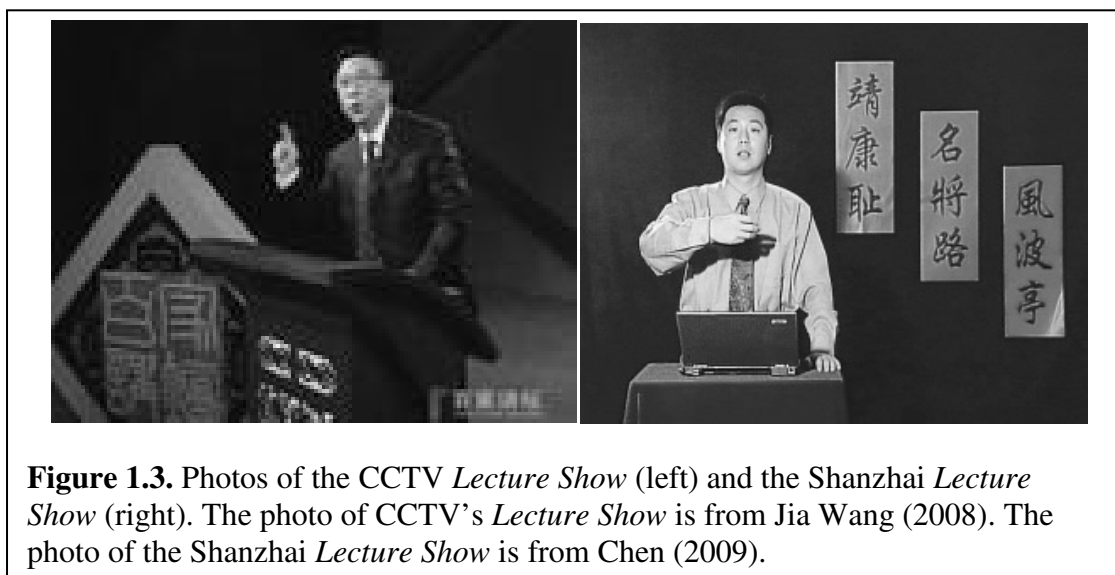
**Case two: Shanzhai *Baijia Jiangtan***

*Baijia Jiangtan*, literally translated as *Lecterns for a hundred schools of thought*, is a daily half-hour show on CCTV's Science and Education Channel (CCTV-10). This show is broadcast at noon on weekdays and has been popular since its start in July 2001. It invites scholars to give a series of lectures on topics like arts and history. The lectures are given in very accessible ways with visual aids added by editors later. The word *Baijia*, or a hundred schools of thought, was used in ancient literature to refer to the co-existence and contestation of many different schools of thought during the *Chunqiu*



(770-476 BCE) and *Zhanguo* (475-221 BCE) eras. Thinkers of various schools during those periods, including Taoists, Confucians, Legalists, Mohists, etc., enjoyed relatively free conversations, what is called *Baijia Zhengming*, or “a hundred schools of thought contend.” More recently, the principle of *Baijia Zhengming*, *Baihua Qifang*, or “let a hundred schools of thought strive” and “let a hundred flowers blossom,” respectively, was adopted as the guideline of socialist literatures and arts by Mao in the 1950s (Hong, 1994). The “double-hundred approach” (*Shuangbai Fangzhen*) in literature and arts was echoed by the Rectification Movement (*Zhengfeng Yundong*) in 1957 that encouraged the democratic parties to critique and offer advice about the Communist Party’s policies. However, in the latter part of 1957, seeing many radical comments and harsh criticism on the Party’s policies from democratic parties and intellectuals, the Party’s Central Committee saw these as threats and started an anti-Rightwing Movement that led to the political persecution of many outspoken compatriots. In 1978, under the leadership of Hu Yaobang, then the general secretary of the Communist Party of China, the Party admitted the exaggeration of the anti-Rightist movement and corrected the wrongs done to many cadres during the anti-Rightist movement. The “double-hundred approach” has been reiterated since then by succeeding generations of leadership in China. Until now, it is still a rhetorical device to demonstrate the openness and livelihood of literature and arts in China.

Han Jiangxue, a 33-year-old unemployed young man in Beijing, loves studying Chinese history. He spent three years writing a book of 600,000 Chinese characters on the Song Dynasty (960-1279). Han tried to recommend himself to the *Baijia Jiangtan*



(the *Lecture Show*, hereafter) twice, and gave the editors his manuscripts. However, he was declined for the lack of a legitimate title or published works. After being rejected, in June 2008, Han shot a 6-hour-long lecture video on the Song Dynasty with the help of some friends. After adding visual aids and sound effects, he put the 11-episode lecture online. It attracted more than ten thousand views every day after it was promoted on the home page of Sina Video (the video sharing service of a major Internet portal in China). This video was named *From the Jingkang Humiliation to the Fengbo Pavilion* by Han himself. However, Han and his works were widely reported, commented upon, and shared with the label of “Shanzhai *Baijia Jiangtan*”. Figure 1.3 includes the screen shots of CCTV's *Lecture Show* and Han's video.

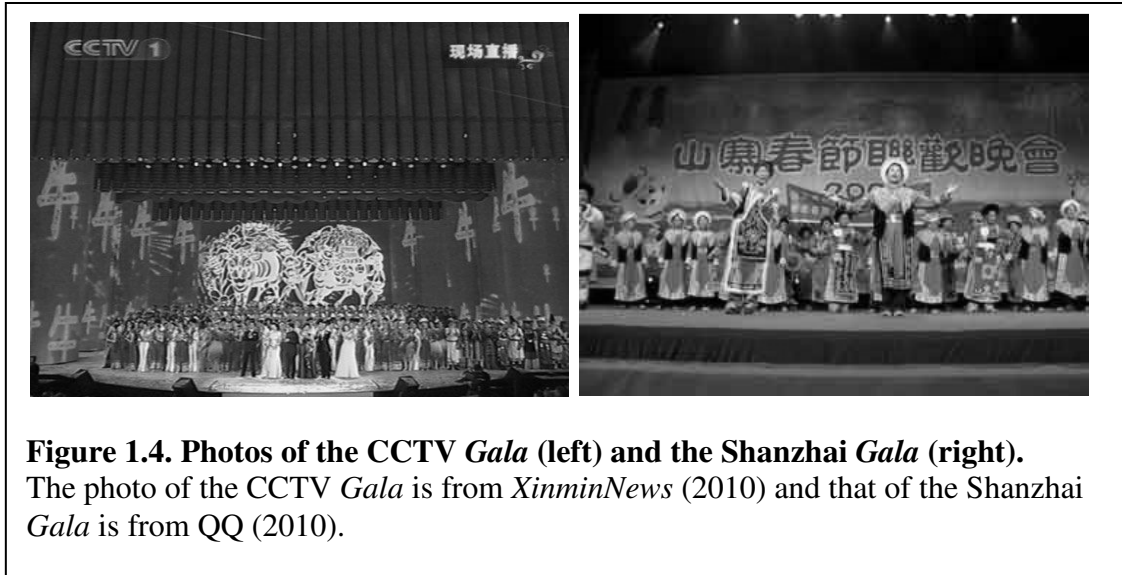
### **Case three: Shanzhai *Chunwan***

*Chunwan* (the *Gala* hereafter) is the abbreviation of the Spring Festival Eve Gala in Chinese. It has been hosted by CCTV since 1983 and has almost become a media

ritual for Chinese people (W. Zhou, 2005). However, CCTV's *Gala* has received more and more criticism every year for its lack of change, less appealing performances, and obvious ideological hype.

Shi Mengqi (Lao Meng, or Old Meng, as most people call him), from Chongqing in southwest China, works in Beijing as a wedding cameraman. In 2008, he wanted to organize a Spring Festival Gala with the help of netizens for the migrant workers who couldn't go home during the holidays. He set up a website, stuck a banner saying "Shanzhai *Gala*" on his van, and wanted to select programs from among grassroots performers in an office far from downtown Beijing. His idea was quickly reported by media and drew Internet users' attention. A provincial television station in southwest China and a video sharing website agreed to broadcast his show on the 2009 Lunar New Year's eve. However, because the extensive media coverage raised the government's fear of massive grassroots enthusiasm to participate, the government prohibited the television station and the website from broadcasting the show. The recording of the 2009 Shanzhai *Gala* was only broadcast by a satellite channel based in Macau, which had very limited viewership on the mainland.

In 2010, Lao Meng organized the second Shanzhai *Gala* with his staff and sponsors. It was better produced, and apparently more commercialized. More importantly, it was broadcast by various websites in China with the government's approval. However, Lao Meng was ordered to drop the word Shanzhai and use "folk" instead in the show (J. Yang, 2010). Figure 1.4 are the snapshots of CCTV's *Gala* (left) and Lao Meng's Shanzhai *Gala* (right).



This case puts two spins on the understanding of Shanzhai. First, Lao Meng, as a migrant worker in Beijing, wanted to make a grassroots spring festival for millions of migrant workers like him. This group of people has a marginalized social status compared with urban Internet users in China. Secondly, the *Shanzhai Gala* was both censored by the government's cultural administration in fear of mass enthusiasm for grassroots participation, and was simultaneously pursued by commercial enterprises as a viral advertisement opportunity. The two productions showed a trajectory from a grassroots, spontaneous and resistant attempt of cultural production to a more docile, commercialized, and assimilated one, though there were still struggles in the commercialization process.

These three cases all drew extensive media coverage during the course of their production and viral circulation. Exposure in the traditional mass media as well as conspicuous positions in major Internet portals greatly influenced their development,

such as drawing commercial sponsorship, public figures' comments, public debates, and even government interventions. Media not only reported these cases, but were also deeply involved in and greatly influenced the trajectories of their development. Later, there were also other imitators who "Shanzhai-ed" these Shanzhai productions, which further illustrated the nature of this unique type of cultural production.

### **Theoretical Frame**

In studying Shanzhai culture, I actually intend to explicate contemporary Chinese society from a unique perspective. Shanzhai is the entry point for me, because, first, the production, circulation, and regulation of Shanzhai involve different parties, ranging from grassroots producers, official media, commercial media, commercial sponsors, and government regulators, etc. The strategies and actions of these players toward each other form a web of a power relationship that is unique to China. Second, the roles of media and ICTs are complex and sometimes schizophrenic both as ideological apparatus and industrial sectors, as mouthpieces indoctrinating the people, and economic drives catering to the people. Third, the opening up and reform since 1978 has led to many structural changes in Chinese society, from rural-to-urban migration to the simultaneous growth of wealth and a wealth gap. Shanzhai is a microcosm of the power dynamics manifested in the practices regarding different types of media in these current social, economic, cultural, and historical conditions. Thus, to study the power relationships among different social groups in Shanzhai practices, I propose to use a Foucauldian framework to understand Shanzhai as the site of governance and resistance through media.

### **Disciplinary power, panopticon and governmentality**

Michel Foucault's works concentrate on the issue of power in modern societies. He understands power as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (Foucault, 1990, p. 92). Thus, power has to be found in the process of struggle, in the form of chains or disjunctions, as the strategies that are possible for people to carry out in their actions. Because power is inherently relational, and because it not only exists in but also simultaneously configures relations, it is the "how" rather than "what" and "why" that is the fundamental question on power (Foucault, 1982). Foucault suggests that the term "conduct" helps illustrate the specificity of power relations because, the verb "conduct", translated from the French word *conduire*, has the meanings of both "to lead" and "to behave" (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). The duality of "to lead" and "to behave" shows that power relationships form in "an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future" (p.789).

It is my intention to study the relationships among the different parties involved in Shanzhai production, circulation, and regulation, or the exercise of power in Foucault's words, in order to understand the governance and resistance of the people through media in China. The production, circulation, and regulation in Shanzhai are ceaseless processes of actions which are responses to as well as conditions of other actions.

Foucault also argues that power is not necessarily repressive, but rather productive. Power produces knowledge, disciplines, and human subjects. In *Discipline*

*and Punishment* (Foucault, 1979), he refers to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon as a metaphor of the modality of productive power to produce the "docile body" (Foucault, 1984, p. 179). Bentham's Panopticon is a semi-circular prison with a guard tower at the center. Prisoners' cells are built to form a semi-circular arch facing the tower. The cells are lit up to increase inmates' visibility to the guard, while the visibility of the guard is eliminated by blinds. In this way, the guard can always see the inmates without being seen, and the inmates have to assume that they are under surveillance at any moment. This internalized constant gaze is a process of soul training to align people's behaviors to the norms. This, Foucault argues, "substitute[s] for force or other violent constraints the gentle efficiency of total surveillance, of ordering space according to the recent humanization of the codes" (Foucault, 1984, p. 217). More importantly, the process of soul training is invisible and is exerted through the subjects' internalization of the norms. Thus, while the subjects practice according to the internalized norm, they are also reproducing it. Foucault uses panopticism to refer to a modality of power, the disciplinary power. The Panopticon becomes the archetype of closed social organizations, materialized in total institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons. More broadly, this paradigm is "endemic to modern society" and "a major social process constituting modernity" (Giddens, 1985 in Lyon, 2007, p.14).

In his later work, Foucault started to concentrate on governmentality as a modality of power. As I mentioned previously, Foucault argues that power is the "multiplicity of force relations" that can only be studied in the exercise of it. The relationships of subjects under disciplinary power are formed in a closed environment

such as penitentiary prisons; thus, the norms are prescribed, pronounced, and internalized. Disciplinary power in an enclosure is a specific “mold” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4) of actions upon actions. Governmentality, as Foucault argues, is a different modality of power in modern societies. “[G]overnment’ did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). In other words, “[t]o govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others,” (p. 790) or to govern with a specific mentality.

In this way, Foucault’s theory on power grants more agency to human subjects in societies and meanwhile subjects humans to governance at a distance. In this power modality, there are a variety of possibilities of actions that are opened up for subjects under a certain logic of calculation. The precondition for individuals to use the rational calculations to configure their actions, or the way power exerts on individuals, is freedom. Meanwhile, freedom also implies resistance in the form of “the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Power and freedom’s refusal to submit to it exist in “a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle” or “agonism” (p. 790).

Foucault’s governmentality focuses on the governance of the state in modern societies. Similar to the modality of disciplinary power where subjects internalize the norm, in the modality of governmentality, people internalize certain rationality and ethic codes to direct their actions (N. Rose, 1992), or what Deleuze calls the “modulation” in contrast to the disciplinary power as a “mold” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4). Foucault argues



that the rationality underlying this modality of power, or the “art of government” (Foucault, 1991, p. 89), is used by states to improve the prosperity, security, and well-being for both the states and the individuals. In advanced liberal societies, the wellbeing of social, political, and economic existences should be ensured by “the ‘enterprising’ activities and choices of autonomous entities- businesses, organizations, persons- each striving to maximize its own advantage by inventing and promoting new projects by means of individual and local calculations of strategies and tactics, costs and benefits” (N. Rose, 1992, p. 145). In this context, personal freedom and liberal democracy become what Foucault calls the “technologies of the self” that “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain numbers of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

The relationship between citizens and societies in the proliferation of neoliberal mentality has been discussed in various contexts. Deleuze (1992) argues the “societies of control” which rely on governmentality are replacing the “disciplinary societies” which feature internalized gazes and enclosed institutions. The new power modality of the “free-floating control” in developed countries has relegated the production of products with raw materials to the Third World, while, itself, concentrates on providing service and buying stocks. The societies of control work on the “capitalism of higher-order production” (p. 6). However, this dichotomous view of the disciplinary societies and the societies of control, of the developed world and the developing world, is too rigid.

Scholars have argued that situations are much more complex in terms of governance in modern societies, especially in the non-Western context (Ong, 2006; Ong & Zhang, 2008; Sigley, 2006; Wallis, 2008). In China, although there is an evident expansion of the governance at a distance, the disciplinary modality and even authoritarian domination have not diminished. The power to the self-regulation is introduced to East and Southeast Asian countries as an exception to their postcolonial, authoritarian, or post-socialist governance. Meanwhile, there are also exceptions to neoliberalism to structurally disfranchise certain groups of people from the chances of social mobility and self-improvement (Ong, 2006). However, Wallis (2008) in her study of rural-to-urban migrant workers in China showed that different modalities of power are exercised on this marginalized group of people simultaneously. The Chinese Party-state, in promoting the socialist market economy, rather than transforming itself linearly to the neoliberal governance with a retreat of itself, actually regrouped itself to promote a situated governmentality in the non-Western authoritarian context.

Using the Foucauldian framework to examine Shanzhai helps me understand the governance and resistance through media in the contemporary Chinese society. First, with the government's resolution to develop the economy and an increasing global influence on urban culture, the neoliberal mentality has great impact on the way ordinary Chinese people live their everyday lives. Second, the involvement of grassroots people, government agencies, commercial, official, and even overseas media, and business sponsors in the Shanzhai practices can reveal a more complex web of power relationships beyond that among citizens, corporations, and the state.

However, as Lyon (2007) argues, Foucault didn't mention the role of mass media in his analysis of the exercise of power in modern societies. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, Shanzhai exists in the convergence of various media. The media not only report the development, but also contribute to the formation of this cultural phenomenon. Oftentimes, the actions of Shanzhai producers, sponsors, as well as government regulators upon each other are taken toward media or in the spotlights of media. To a large extent, the governance and resistance in the Shanzhai cases are manifested through media. Thus, in the following, I will also introduce the concepts of synopticon and assemblages into my theoretical framework.

### **Synopticon and media**

One of the critiques of Foucault's lack of recognition of mass media is Thomas Mathiesen's *The viewer society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' revisited* (Mathiesen, 1997). Mathiesen raised the concept of synopticon where the many watch the few and compared it to the panopticon where the few watched the many. He sees synopticon as a symbolic display and confirmation of power which invites admiration. Mathiesen first paralleled the development of mass press in 1700-1800, or the synoptic conditions, to Foucault's analysis of the rise of the panopticon. Thus, rather than a fundamental transformation from the public display of physical punishment to the panoptic discipline as Foucault argued, Mathiesen argued that the spectacle where the many watched the few actually persisted. He also argued that the spectacle, from its ancient origin, has emphasized the "maximum diffusion from a few leading figures of visual impressions, sound impressions and other impressions" (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 222) of important people

or symbols. Only in the modern society, especially in the 1900s, the spectacles are more and more mediated under new organizational and technological conditions. This perspective is very much in line with media scholar Nick Couldry's critique of the "media world" and media power which argues that the mediated images for "the many" have tremendous cultural power (Couldry, 2003b). More importantly and relevant to my argument is that, historically, panopticism and synopticism have been involved in "*intimate interaction, even fusion, with each other*" (Mathiesen, 1997, pp. 223, original emphasis).

Mathiesen's arguments give great attention to the media's role in modern society and put the power relationship in the mediated synopticons to the foreground. Like the highly visible location of cathedrals and the events of military leaders victoriously entering the city, synoptic moments shape people's experience of panopticon through the mechanism of scopophilia, a concept borrowed from psychoanalysis referring to "a love of looking that is characteristic of a particular stage of childhood development vital to our ability to see ourselves as others see us" (Lyon, 2006, p. 28). Norman Denzin (1995) used the metaphor of cinema to illustrate the internalization of the "voyeur's gaze" and exercise of surveillance over themselves in the modern society. Through the mass media system, surveillance is normalized and de-stigmatized, and even rewarded, like the stars in all kinds of reality shows. Audience/performers see being seen, mainly in media nowadays, as gratifying and an important part of their identity formations, while media also take efforts to "cast people who have a natural openness" (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 106).

Here I need to clarify the differences between my uses of synopticons and panopticons in this study and Foucault's original uses. First, the difference between Foucault's public spectacle in ancient times and Mathiesen's synopticon on which I draw in my arguments is that Foucault's spectacle is to single out and humiliate the deviants violating the norm, while Mathiesen's synopticon, especially in its modern mediated form, picks up both deviants, such as the crime reality shows, and the highly "normal," or the models, for public display. Second, Foucault uses panopticon as a metaphor of modern institutions that force people to internalize surveillance and behave in disciplined ways to avoid being seen. However, I use panopticon as a metaphor of the current media system which, many times, rewards the people being seen with celebrity and status. Thus, rather than designed to single out deviants and possibly apply punishment (negative reinforcement) in Foucault's original use, the panopticons of media today, such as reality shows, online viral circulation, or even news reports, often single out model citizens, grant celebrity and status, and thus, are rather a positive reinforcement of social norms and certain rationality and is usually desired and competed for. However, in Foucault's uses of panopticon, Mathiesen's uses of synopticon, and my uses of both of them in this study, we agree on the function of social sorting of the surveillance system. Lyon (2003) argues that the surveillance systems have criteria to follow. They sort the monitored objects and single out either deviants to punish or models to reward. Foucault calls this sorting standard "a law of truth on him [object] which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him" (Foucault,

1982, p. 781). This sorting mechanism, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, exercises power on Shanzhai producers and their production.

These characteristics of synopticon and its interaction with panopticon have explanatory power on the Shanzhai cultural phenomenon. The Shanzhai producers, in their everyday media consumption, are not only monitoring the spectacles of CCTV's *Spring Festival Gala* celebration, the ways unknown intellectuals gained celebrity status and expressions in the *Lecture Show*, and the "democratic" opportunities for grassroots people to express themselves on the Internet, but they also internalize the connections between a Spring Festival gala and holiday celebration, between an unknown speaker of a TV lecture show and celebrity, and between a random video on the Internet made by some ordinary person and its viral popularity. The synoptic spectacles instill into people's minds the logics that become the rationality underlying people's everyday lives. Meanwhile, these Shanzhai producers, as well as many ordinary media audiences, also want to be seen in media like the previous successful examples they witnessed. Thus, the media synopticons are not only cultivating a certain rationality, but also motivate people to act in certain ways. Audiences, such as reality show applicants and also Shanzhai producers, constantly assume that the media, like a panopticon, are watching them, and they constantly try to perform in the way that draws media's gazes. In this way, the combination of media synopticon and panopticon actually governs the way some people express themselves, or more broadly the way these people live their everyday lives, from a distance through the governmentality embedded in it.

However, there are also a few points in Mathiesen's arguments that are not satisfactory. First, just like the example of cathedrals and military leaders' victoriously entering cities, the power of church or the military leader, put in the synopticon to fit their status, is taken for granted. It is as if their power to be admired has been there before the creation of the synopticon. The role of media synopticons that grant power to the media personas is not critically examined. Especially in the Web 2.0 age, when many people could potentially enter the media world and become a media person in viral sensations, this power should not be taken for granted, but should be attributed partly to the social construction which itself greatly relies on media. This complicated social construction/competition of Shanzhai producers' images as media personas will be critically examined in my study.

Secondly, in his examination of the combination of panopticon and synopticon, Mathiesen assumed a monolithic power structure that operates the two elements in the surveillance system. Haggerty and Ericson (2000) argued that Foucault focused too much on the state as the agent of surveillance while, instead, both state and non-state institutions are involved in massive efforts to monitor different populations. In the same vein, the invisible gaze exercising the panoptic surveillance in order to pick out the model "inmate" for synoptic display should not be assumed as consistent or without internal conflict. The simplified view doesn't work well for the Chinese media system, as I will summarize later.

### **Assemblage and rhizomatic surveillance**

The problem of the single and monopolistic surveillance agency is partly solved by Haggerty and Ericson's application (2000) of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblages (1987) in surveillance and social control. Deleuze and Guattari introduced the notion of assemblage as an ontological view. Assemblages consist of a "multiplicity of heterogeneous objects, whose unity comes solely from the fact that these items function together, that they 'work' together as a functional entity" (Patton, 1994, p. 158). Deleuze and Guattari propose seeing the assemblage as the ontological foundation of the postmodern society. However, when Haggerty and Ericson borrowed this notion to theorize the surveillance in the informational post-modern society, they concentrated on the totalizing potential of the networked surveillance more than the internal tensions and chances of changes. Under this view, the surveillance technologies are becoming rhizomatically connected in assemblages, rather than hierarchical in the centralized surveillance systems. The elements in the surveillance system that were seen as discrete are now seen as inter-connected in networks. This tendency suggests increasingly inclusionary strategies in social surveillance. Nothing can easily escape from being monitored. When the object is picked up by one of the nodes in the assemblage, its data are also available for sharing because of the interconnectedness in the assemblages. "From now on, such matters [the invisible armada and elusive activist] will be readily captured by a surveillant assemblage devoted to the disappearance of disappearance" (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p. 620).



Bogard (2006) attempted to correct the pessimistic view of the totalizing surveillance assemblage. On the one hand, he admits that the increasingly inclusionary assemblages transform the hierarchies in traditional observations and put both formerly powerful and formerly marginalized subjects under surveillance. The democratized surveillance “means more ways to observe the observers, bypass their firewalls [that protect secrets], access their databases and decode their communications” (p. 102) . On the other hand, he utilized Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “lines of flight” and Foucault’s dialectic view on power and resistance to argue that the assemblage is constantly transformed by the lines of flight which it tries to capture.

To theorize these dual dimensions of the assemblages, Deleuze and Guattari defined a horizontal axis and vertical axis. The horizontal axis contains two segments, content and expression. “On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies” (1987, p. 504). Under this view, panopticon and synopticon are machinic assemblages that work by “enclosing and partitioning space, segregating bodies, or again, by connecting them together into larger functional ensembles, coordinating their collective flows, and so on” (Bogard, 2006, p. 104). Meanwhile, they are also enunciative because they attribute properties to bodies, and they announce “truth” or “norm,” which exerts the sorting function. Thus, to examine surveillance assemblages, both what they do and what they say, are important.

The vertical axis of an assemblage consists of “territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 504). In terms of surveillance assemblages, their territorializing work is “to trap or capture lines of flight, arrest flows and convert them into reproducible events;” in other words, they determine the connections or disconnections between flows (Bogard, 2006, p. 107). At the same time, on the vertical axis, assemblages also have edges of de-territorialization. The lines of flights running in the assemblages both resist the surveillance assemblage and are parts of it. The “indocile bodies that won’t behave, or ungovernable words whose meanings are hidden or will not stay fixed” are “lines of flight immanent to rhizomatic surveillance that take advantage of the decentralized, non-hierarchical nature of information network.” (p. 108) The flights refer to the transformation of assemblages as the effect of their own organization. In other words, the assemblage flees itself.

The radically expanded horizon of surveillance, as assemblages, is both more totalitarian and more democratic. On the one hand, now, this view cautions us against viewing Foucault’s panopticon as a one-way power relationship. “[T]he panopticon’s power derives precisely, as Foucault says, from its unverifiability...it eludes being seen and recorded by its own tools. It resists being converted into a verifiable event, even while its façade remains visible,” (Bogard, 2006, p. 109). But now it is hard for any subject to escape from an omnipresent and inter-connected surveillance system, including the guards on the tower of the panopticon. On the other hand, because of the rhizomatic leveling of the formerly hierarchical surveillance structure, such as a single

panopticon, lines of flight can take advantage of the decentralized and non-hierarchical nature of the media/surveillance system. The decentralized surveillance system is more likely to capture those formerly marginalized voice which actually compete for visibility. While capturing these voices and trying to territorialize them, the surveillance assemblages themselves are transformed.

In this highly mediated world, assemblages could be all kinds of media and their convergence (e.g. Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006). The separated synopticons in different media might converge as well.

With the plethora of television channels, decentralization has also taken place, so that there are many synopticons. The decentralized, narrowly oriented panopticons may quickly be combined into large broad-ranging systems by simple technological devices, covering large categories of people in full detail. So may, on given important occasions, the various decentralized synopticons. (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 221)

The concept of assemblage sheds light on Shanzhai practices because, first, the interconnectedness of the media, serving as panoptic assemblages, gives formerly marginalized people more opportunity to be captured. Of course there are struggles and strategies, or actions upon actions, regarding accesses to media. Second, the synoptic side of the assemblages make stories about the Shanzhai producers and production circulate in different media. This could help Shanzhai producers gain symbolic status and more freedom of expression, albeit reinforcing the mentality of self-made achievement. Meanwhile, the trans-media exposure and popularity could also invite government agencies' vigilance, even censorship. When the two scenarios happen simultaneously, it is because of the inconsistent sorting standards in the Chinese media. The inconsistency in the Chinese media assemblage attributes different "truths" to

Shanzhai and invites discursive contestation which has an impact on the power dynamics in China.

### **Hegemony and counter-hegemony**

In addition to drawing upon a Foucauldian theory of power to explicate governance and resistance through the media system, I also utilize Gramsci's hegemony and counter-hegemony. These concepts particularly shed light on the complexity of the formation of "common sense," or "a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 362), the process of power negotiation, the identities of different parties employed in Shanzhai practices, and the discursive construction of Shanzhai.

Gramsci's (1971) hegemony refers to a process of moral and intellectual leadership which is:

characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion -- newspapers and associations -- which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied.(p. 80)

Scholars usually interpret Gramsci's reflection on hegemony as a response to the economism and reductionism tendencies in orthodox Marxism (Bates, 1975; S. Hall, 1986). Reductionism tends to "read off" developments in superstructure from their economic determinations. Gramsci attempts to overcome this one-way determination by focusing on the "various moments or levels" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 181) in the development of a historical conjuncture. Thus, Gramsci's analyses of social forces have the following characteristics.

First, Gramsci concentrated on the relations of social force “which constitute the actual terrain of political and social struggles and development” (S. Hall, 1986, p. 14). He believed that the “common sense” rose from the push-and-pull among different forces, rather than from a coherent ideology that “depends on its specific philosophical elaboration” and that “cannot guarantee its organic historical effectivity” (p.20). Hegemony is neither achieved in coercion nor in uncontested consensus and alliances, but in the negotiation between attempts to assume an intellectual and moral leadership and the counter-hegemonic struggle which openly challenges institutionalized apparatuses as instruments of education to construct and maintain material and non-material structures (Chin & Mittelman, 1997).

Second, Gramsci’s analysis never assumed a so-called “class unity,” *a priori*. He accepted the shared social, economic, and historical conditions of various classes, while he also recognized their inevitable conflicting interests and fragmented cultural identities. Thus, Gramsci distinguished three different stages in which class consciousness and unity develop. In the “economic corporate” stage, “professional and occupational groups recognize their basic common interests but are conscious of no wider class solidarities” (S. Hall, 1986, p. 14). In the “class corporate” stage, class solidarity develops, but only in terms of the economic interest. In the stage, or moment, of “hegemony”, the interests of various subordinate groups that are beyond the economic field are encompassed. The various subordinate groups are allied and, then, hegemony begins to

‘propagate itself throughout society,’ bringing about intellectual and moral as well as economic and political unity, and ‘posing also the questions around

which the struggle rages...thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate group.' It is this process of the coordination of the interests of a dominant group with the general interests of other groups and the life of the state as a whole, that constitutes the 'hegemony of a particular historical bloc (*PN [Prison Notebooks]*, p.182) (cited in S. Hall, 1986, p. 15)

Gramsci's formulation of "hegemony," premised on the above assumptions, has special purchase to this study. As Hall (1986) and Bates (1975) summarized, hegemony is historically specific in the life of a society. It is not an evolutionary law that repeats itself across different social or historical conditions. Meanwhile, hegemony is constructed on multiple fronts of struggle simultaneously. In this way, economic determinism is avoided and a social and moral leadership can be exercised on a range of different sites to propagate "an intellectual, moral, political and economic collective will throughout society" (S. Hall, 1986, p. 15). In addition, the leadership in a period of hegemony is not assumed by one coherent "ruling class," but a historic bloc that might be only one fraction of the dominant economic class, and might be affiliated by various strata of the subaltern and dominated classes. In a word, each hegemonic formation has its own, specific social composition and configuration and only exists in the negotiation with counter-hegemonic forces.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony will help me theorize the process and complexity of the power relationships among different social groups in China. Examined through this lens, the strategies that various parties employed in Shanzhai production, circulation and regulation not only signal the relations among social forces, but also manifest the complex identities of and alliances among various social groups that shifted in different stages of Shanzhai practices. The discourses of Shanzhai in the popular and official

press, under this framework, illustrate “the multi-accentual, inter-discursive character of the field of ideology”(S. Hall, 1986, p. 23). They are actually the attempts of different social groups to promote consensus and establish leadership in a hegemonic manner, though still in contestation. Thus, the combination of this Gramscian hegemony and the Foucauldian theory of power can better explain the exercise of both disciplinary power and the power of governmentality in contemporary Chinese society.

### **Chapter Organization**

As I argued previously, Shanzhai, as a grassroots cultural phenomenon, really epitomizes the governance and resistance in Chinese society, under contemporary social, cultural, economic, as well as technological conditions. In the following chapters, I will focus on various elements in the governance and resistance, ranging from the context of contemporary Chinese society, to the cultural significance of Shanzhai from the perspective of media ritual, the strategies employed by different parties involved in Shanzhai production, circulation and regulation, and the discursive construction of Shanzhai.

Chapter II serves to contextualize Shanzhai phenomenon and my arguments regarding it. I will cover the reforms in China’s media sector, the development of China’s ICTs, especially the Internet, and the popular uses of ICTs, including both the consumerist and the activist aspects. It is important to present the background because Shanzhai, itself a complicated phenomenon, cannot be essentialized as either popular entertainment or resistance. It is rooted in both social zeitgeists, and the discourse and

practices of Shanzhai are unique to the conditions of media structure, social structure, historical and technological conditions.

Chapter III will examine the Shanzhai productions from a ritual perspective. Seeing Shanzhai as an integral part of the entire media environment, and more broadly, the social experience, I am cautious against reducing Shanzhai to a phenomenon of new media. In fact, it is, in all kinds of ways, connected to the factors outside the Internet, from the original television shows Shanzhai producers imitated to the news coverage in traditional mass media such as metropolitan newspapers. The media system as the combination of panopticons and synopticons, indeed the surveillance assemblages, form a totality which produces the shared beliefs and life experience, or the supposed-to-be ways of life. The ritual perspective allows me to capture the relationship between Shanzhai producers' media uses, both consumption and creation, and this shared experience of life. In this way, it answers why people are doing or watching Shanzhai on a macro level, rather than the personal psychological level. In this chapter, I will argue that the Shanzhai producers saw the television show they imitated as a prescribed way to achieve certain goals in their lives, such as *the* way to celebrate Spring Festival, *the* way of popularizing intellectual opinions, or *the* way for ordinary people to participate in media production. More broadly, these ritualistic uses of media are informed and, when the Shanzhai producers themselves got famous, also inform the general public about a self-reliant self-improvement, and self-achieving mentality, which becomes the governmentality in the Chinese society.



In Chapter IV, I will concentrate on the strategies that different parties employed in the process of Shanzhai production, circulation, and regulation. If the previous chapter concentrates on a broader, overarching cultural meaning of Shanzhai producing a governing technology, this chapter will examine the actual actions taken by all the parties in order to understand the complexity in the governing process. I will try to understand the political, economic, as well as cultural struggles, manifested in the strategies people employed in reaction to each other. This chapter will use Bourdieu's analytics of the exchanges among various types of capital in order to understand the strategies, some of which De Certeau (2002) would call "tactics." Nevertheless, the exchanges are also attempts to gain or evade gazes in panopticons, or to enter or avoid synoptic displays. This chapter will help illustrate what happened to people in this whole process. The constraints, the advantages and the leverages all will illustrate the power relationship among different parties in contemporary Chinese society. In this way, I intend to understand how power is exercised, through media, on different social constituents.

Chapter V will move away from the interview data and concentrate on the popular discourses that reflect as well as contribute to the landscape of Shanzhai phenomenon. I will examine how Shanzhai is reported and commented upon in metropolitan newspapers and the official mouthpiece newspapers. These discourses not only reflect different stances on the Shanzhai culture, we can also see the struggle of discourse-shaping power as an integral part of the cultural politics in Chinese society. This chapter, under the Foucauldian framework, explicates the discursive sorting

standards in the surveillance system, or really the exercise of power through claiming “truth” about Shanzhai. It works together with Chapter Four to describe the power relationships both through actions and through discourse. More importantly, it will illustrate that there are different “truths” about Shanzhai in the surveillance assemblages. This corrects the rather pessimistic and functionalist view of surveillance assemblages theorized by Haggerty and Ericson (2000).

The conclusion chapter will provide a summary and discussion of the arguments. I will first summarize the major arguments in this study and then concentrate on the implications of the findings. The implications will cover issues like the situated applicability of Foucauldian framework of governance and resistance in the contemporary Chinese society and the totalitarian as well as democratic potential of Chinese media structure and participatory media uses. Last, some limitations of this study and potential topics of further explorations will be provided.

A reflection on methodology will be provided in the appendix. In this section, I will describe the rationale and procedures of my sampling and data collection. Also, I will specifically address the disjuncture I experienced between Western-based research methods and protocol and the Chinese social and cultural conditions. In addition, I will provide descriptive accounts of my interviewees and the questions they were asked.

### **Methodology Brief**

This study is based on the 15 in-depth interviews I conducted during the summer of 2010 in Beijing. The interviewees include Shanzhai producers and performers, commercial sponsors of Shanzhai production, the media that cooperated with these

Shanzhai producers, journalists who followed the development of the Shanzhai production, the government officials whose agencies are directly involved in the regulation of Shanzhai, and the staff members of the television shows that Shanzhai producers imitated.

A detailed reflection on the fieldwork and interviews is provided in Appendix A. The list of interviewees and brief introductions of each of them are provided in Appendix B. Appendix C includes the interview questions I prepared for different categories of interviewees.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND

In the first chapter, I introduced the basic concepts of Shanzhai and the development of its connotations. I also laid out the theoretical framework to understand Shanzhai as a microcosm of governance and resistance through media in contemporary China. In this chapter, I will present the background information about the contemporary Chinese society to further contextualize my arguments.

There will be three parts in this chapter. First, I will briefly summarize the media environment in the post-reform era in China. The Shanzhai phenomenon exists in the media system that is both designed to propagate the Party's ideology and is expected to be a vigorous economic drive. These are the dual, and at some moments schizophrenic, roles that condition the appearance, strategies, and discourses of Shanzhai. Second, I will provide a background of the Internet in China. Again, I will start with the development of ICTs, and the official pragmatist philosophy of fostering telecommunication technologies in China. However, users are always "making do" (De Certeau, 2002) with technologies for their own ends and creating social influences unexpected to the technology providers. So thirdly, I will also review existing theorizations on the uses of the Internet in China, especially highlighting various forms of online resistance.

#### **Media Environment in the Post-Reform Era in China**

I start the background chapter with reviewing the media structure in China because, first, the discursive constructions of Shanzhai in the commercial and official media are both powerful interpretations of Shanzhai for the mass audience and

reflections of the media's own positions in the power dynamics in the society. Media have the power to make claims about and frame issues like Shanzhai, and they are, in turn, transformed to some extent by involvement in Shanzhai production and circulation. The involvement of various media is a very important part of the development of and dynamic in Shanzhai production, distribution and regulation. Second, the nature of different media directly influences the strategies available to Shanzhai producers. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four that Shanzhai producers actually took advantage of various media outlets, such as commercial metropolitan newspapers and the Macau-based television station seen and regulated as an overseas medium, for their own ends. Third, Shanzhai producers, sponsors, and regulators themselves are also media audiences. They are subject to the totality of the mediated world which partly shapes the meanings and the ways of using certain media.

Before its opening up and reform in 1978, China's media system had been following a Leninist guideline that exclusively emphasized the propagandist role. The Party principle (*dangxing yuanze*) was established that "news media must accept the Party's guiding ideology as its own, that they must propagate the Party's programs, policies, and directives, and that they must accept the Party's leadership and stick to the Party's organizational principles and press policies" (Y. Zhao, 1998, p. 19). Thus the media serve as the mouthpiece of the Party. According to this view, because the Party is the revolutionary vanguard of the mass, the media are the mouthpiece of the people, too.

The reform of China's media sector, long seen as the powerful education tool and ideological frontline, started as early as the overall economic reform in the late 1970s.

With the appearance of advertisements on Shanghai local television shows and the introduction of business management to a few newspapers, media outlets started to commercialize themselves and diversify their incomes outside of government subsidies (Y. Zhao, 1998). The government tended to cut subsidies to the media sector, gradually forcing the media to become self-sufficient financially. However, they still had to firmly adhere to the Party line.

Throughout the 1980s, China's media reform had been fermenting under the supervision of relatively liberal leaders such as Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang. Multiple opinions were tolerated and even encouraged in the media. The Thirteenth National Party Congress in 1987 even put political reform, which included journalism reform, onto the national agenda (Y. Zhao, 1998). There were extensive debates on the freedom of the press and the freedom of speech. Liberal Party leaders such as Zhao Ziyang proposed "letting the people have more information and more participation" though in a paternalist tone as Zhao argued (1998, p. 36). The "people principle," which had been criticized as "bourgeois liberalization" in the early 1980s, gained momentum since the Party's Thirteenth National Congress in 1987. Until the 1989 student movement, the Party's control over media under the Party Principle had been challenged in theory in outspoken debate. However, the overall political environment was still conservative and media, despite the vigorous debates, were still dominantly seen and run as the Party mouthpiece (Y. Zhao, 1998).

The crackdown on the democracy movement in 1989 was a major setback in China's political reform, including reform in the media sector. After 1989, the Party

authority was reinstated and liberal leaders were mostly purged outside the central political body. Journalism also suffered from the conservative backlash. Many journalists were imprisoned, investigated, suspended from work or reassigned to other positions. Some had to hide their bylines even they were allowed to write (Chan, 1993). The new leadership in the Party effectively reimposed the Party's principles and closed major theoretical debates over media reform (Y. Zhao, 1998).

In face of the tightened ideological control after 1989 and the slowed economic reform, Deng Xiaoping paid a visit to southern China. In order to brush aside "the conservatives' urge for taking anti-peaceful evolution as the central task" (Chan, 1993, p. 25), during this trip, he reiterated the central importance of economic construction as the "one centrality" of the Party. "Deng called for faster economic growth and boldness in experimenting with reforms. At the same time, he directed that practice should take precedence over theoretical debates and that controversies over the nature of Chinese reforms and other historical-political issues should be shelved" (p. 25). Throughout the 1990s, China's media sector had undergone slow but continuous changes, even though the basic tones of media still strictly followed the Party line.

Since the inception of media commercialization in China, media are increasingly dependent on advertisement and sponsorship revenues. The advertisement-supported model resulted in a great proliferation of media outlets in the early 1990s. The number of registered newspapers in China increased from 1,543 at the end of 1991 to 2,039 by the end of 1993. Most newspapers started to increase pages. The numbers of radio and television stations increased from 724 and 543 in 1991 to 1,202 and 837 over the same

time period. Television shows had so many commercials and such long commercial breaks that they became the audience's common complaints during that time (Y. Zhao, 1998, p. 57). Though none of them were privately owned, many people actually rushed into the gold mine with the nods of their local government or institutional agencies such as industrial associations. This greatly altered the nature of news media operations in China which is more and more seen as a money-making business.

Other than the changes in management and financing structure, the forms of newspapers have also been transformed to cater to a wealthier market, mostly urban readers. In the early 1990s, evening newspapers started to change their orientation to more "soft" content to distinguish themselves from the hardcore mouthpiece dailies. In addition to turning to popular taste, these papers also encouraged readers' participation as amateur journalists by providing tips and writing stories. Activities of "reporter for a day" were organized to assign stories to readers to write up (Y. Zhao, 1998, p. 131). These news media gradually transformed themselves into mass-appealing journalism. Other commercial attempts were tabloid papers which included crime and scandal stories and weekend editions which were published for readers rather than for leaders.

Successful newspapers were those that could combine the propagandist role with the commercial model well. Starting with newspapers such as *Beijing Youth News*, metropolitan newspapers started to prevail among elite urban readers. Because the elite urban young readers are among the people who directly benefited from the overall economic development and are relatively wealthier, newspapers catering to them were more appealing to advertisers and hence profitable (Yuezhi Zhao, 2000a). However, at



the same time, a decline of peasants' newspapers was observed by media scholars as one of the negative impacts of media commercialization since the 1990s (Y. Zhao, 1998).

Approaching the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the entry into the WTO, Chinese authorities apparently recognized the weakness of domestic media in face of the immanent international competition. Conglomeration has been arranged by different levels of governments. At first, state policy was issued to endorse merging among the same form of media, not crossover, and only Party newspapers that meet certain operational criteria and under the approval of the central government can take over other papers. Zhao (2000a) argued that this was under the mesmerization of the large size of Western media conglomerates and their influence. Party authorities wanted to strengthen the party organs so that they could compete with transnational media moguls after the country's entry into the WTO and they could also cross-subsidize unprofitable, but politically important, media outlets, but managers who actually ran the media only eyed economies of scale (C.-c. Lee, He, & Huang, 2006; Yuezhi Zhao, 2000a). This inherent struggle between the growth of media conglomerates and the existing administrative structure of party organs rendered many of the attempts unsuccessful (Yuezhi Zhao, 2008).

Accompanying this commercialization process, ranging from cutting subsidies to conglomerations, were various other transformations such as journalistic value and measures of media control. Various scholars have studied the changes and struggle of journalistic values in the contemporary media system since the opening up and reform policy (Chan, Pan, & Lee, 2004; Pan & Chan, 2003; Y. Zhao, 1998; Yuezhi Zhao, 2000b). It has been found that journalists are increasingly conscious of Western

journalistic ideals such as objectivity and timeliness. However, they still have to negotiate these values in their daily practice vis-à-vis the Party principles. Generally, compared with Party mouthpiece media, commercial media such as metropolitan newspapers are more likely to assume Western journalistic values and Western values in general.

In response to the changing media structure, Chinese government's regulations also keep changing. In the early age of commercialization, though the government cut subsidies and pushed media into the advertisement market, the government still holds personnel control over media. The government single-handedly appoints the managerial body of media so as to maintain its control even though the media are partly commercialized (Y. Zhao, 1998). It has been a quite effective control counterbalancing the influences of commercial interest in the media sector. Meanwhile, the Party also assumes "commanding heights" (Yuezhi Zhao, 2008) over various government departments such as the General Administration of Publication and Press (GAPP), the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT), the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) and the Ministry of Culture (MOC). This ideological control is synthesized by the Party's Department of Propaganda over radio, film, television, press, Internet, theaters, etc., through various government agencies. These government agencies rely on both legal frameworks and ad-hoc and impromptu rules. Legal frameworks materialized in stipulations, management measures, censure notices, etc. are proactive and also serve as guidelines for media's self-discipline. Impromptu rules are made on special cases to control public opinions. There is an increasing tendency of

decentralizing the control responsibilities (Tsui, 2003; Weber & Lu, 2007). These measures are not only exerted on traditional media, but are increasingly adjusted to strengthen control over the Internet.

## **Internet in China: A Microcosm of the Power Dynamics**

### **The Construction of the Internet infrastructure in China**

Telecommunication was not an emphasis in the early years of Communist China. This is a direct result of the government's concentration on industrialization and its lack of recognition on the importance of information technologies. Paul Lee (1997) documented the changes of the Chinese government's budget on telecommunications from 1949 to the 1990s. Telecommunication was one of the most under-funded economic sectors in the early Five-Year Plans. It didn't change until the opening up and reform when the government switched to a "catch-up theme" which sees telecommunication technologies as important economic facilitators. Large budgets and flexible regulations on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) were granted to this sector. However, a direct consequence of this is the extreme disparity of telecommunication development between rural and urban areas (H. Yu, 2006; Yuezhi Zhao, 2008).

With the same economic orientation under the banner of informatization (*xinxihua*), the Internet in China started in research and higher educational institutions, unlike the US where it began as a military project. Qi Yanli (2000) divided the development of China's Internet into three phases based on the infrastructure development and commercialization process. First, between 1987 and 1994, China had been connected to foreign networks in Europe and North America, mainly through email

systems. The application was largely confined to a few research institutions as experimental projects.

Second, in the mid-1990s, domestic network infrastructures were expanded to connect more research institutions. The Internet went through its first expansion burgeoning in China, however, primarily among intellectual elite. During that time, the China Science and Technology Network (CSTNET) connected hundreds of research institutes, while the China Education and Research Network (CERNET) constructed by the Ministry of Education, connected many universities. Qi (2000) singled out this short period in the development of China's Internet as distinctive because, first, the networks were popular only among a limited elite population, and second, it was still non-profit-based. It is during this period when China formally joined the global Internet through 64 kpb international lines.

Third, since 1995, ChinaNet, built by the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, was put into use for the public. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Electronic Industry built the China Golden Bridge Network (ChinaGBN) together with the Golden Cards Project and the Golden Custom Project, as a push on China's informatization. ChinaGBN was put into commercial use in September 1996. In June 1998, ChinaNet provided access to three other networks, the ChinaGBN, CERNET, and the CSTNET, making the domestic Internet infrastructures interconnected.

Qi's periodization (2000) focused on the development of infrastructure and connections. However, the hardware development was in part driven by general policy orientation and changes of administrative structures. The regulation on the Internet

which evolves with the development in hardware infrastructure is also an important aspect of China's Internet.

### **Control over China's Internet**

Because of the monopoly of Internet backbones by a few government departments or institutes, early control over the Internet was mainly exerted over physical connections (Harwit & Clark, 2001). Also, because there was no single ministry that had been designated as the official administration to manage the emerging Internet, regulations of the Internet industry, as well as departmental interest, were spread in different ministries and institutes. The inconsistency of administration was especially manifested in the tensions between the Ministry of Post and Telegraph (MPT) and the Ministry of Electronic Industry (MEI). Historically, MPT had a monopoly over telecommunication infrastructures. With the establishment of the ChinaGBN under MEI, business operation became a battle field between the two departments. In 1998, the government finally decided to replace the two ministries with the new Ministry of Information Industry (MII) which took over governmental functions such as satellite communication and air traffic control (Tai, 2006). The administrative restructuring helped China to have a body of policy making, licensing, and more importantly negotiating the WTO entry. Also, because of the monopoly of physical infrastructure, the control over the Internet was exerted mostly on physical connections through ISPs which leased lines from MII's backbone network.

With the proliferation of Internet application in China, regulators started to shift concentration to content controls. The content control in the telecommunication network

dates back to as early as the mid-1990s. Right after China's Internet went commercial, the then-minister of the MPT claimed that "as a sovereign state, China will exercise control on the information" (Tai, 2006, p. 132) flowing to China on the Internet. Following the "Regulations of Safety Protection for Computer Information System" issued in 1994, which mainly targeted computerized information, in 1996, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council jointly issued a statement warning against pornography, political dissent, and other forms of "harmful materials" in cyberspace. It is also in this statement that utilizing the information technologies to "increase global information exchanges, promote economic construction and develop science" (p. 133) is established as the official orientation.

In more recent years, while the Internet industry is further commercialized, especially in terms of foreign ownership, the regulators are still struggling for content control. On the one hand, government agencies arduously block "harmful" foreign IPs and record visiting activities through ISPs. On the other hand, MII has allowed ICPs' financial cooperation with foreign media sources. However, news portals of commercial websites are still not allowed to collect news by themselves. They have to rely on traditional domestic news outlets ranging from official news agencies, newspapers, radio and television stations, as well as commercial metropolitan newspapers. It is found that some websites had partnered with some commercial newspapers and conducted interviews themselves. Those reports are published in the name of the partnered traditional media outlets (Tai, 2006). As Harwit and Clark (2006) observed, the government controls of the Internet "remain schizophrenic as the goal of exploiting the

international network's education and commercial advantage conflicts with the desire for information monitoring" (p. 27).

Nevertheless, the government still mobilized various types of content control both to contain the Internet and to increase the regime's legitimacy. First, the government increasingly resorts to legislative measures to control the content on the Internet. In early Oct, 2000, the State Council Decree 292 required ICPs to keep the content and records of users up to 60 days and provide them to the authorities upon request (Harwit & Clark, 2006). ICPs' responsibility of policing their own sites for subversive materials was officially established. By 2005, there had been as many as 43 relevant laws and regulations related to various aspects of Internet management (Yuezhi Zhao, 2008). Second, the Chinese government intentionally mixes up the Internet governance with political censorship. As Wu (2009) argued, the discourse to legitimize such control in the name of Internet governance includes both utilizing e-government to better serve the people and curbing harmful information like pornography. Thus, anti-pornography campaigns are mobilized online to crack down on harmful content, not only pornographic, but also those subversive or critical in nature. Other legal frameworks are also used in Internet governance. For example, political dissidents have been arrested under the label of "disclosing state secrets" (Yuezhi Zhao, 2008, p. 42). Copyright laws are used as a means to maintain centralized cultural resources and control information flow in the case of "*egao*" (Meng, 2009), "a multimedia expression that spoofs or pokes fun at an original work" (Wallis, 2011, p. 423). Meanwhile, the legislative control over

the Internet content is also “privatized” by government agencies to pursue their own regulatory power such as SARFT’s intervention in the case of “*egao*” (Meng, 2009).

Other than centralized crackdown, censorship, or interventions, the control over the Internet content has also been gradually decentralized. First, the government carefully orchestrates nationalist sentiment online and integrates it into contemporary Chinese cultural identity (Lagerkvist, 2006; MacKinnon, 2008; Qiu, 2004; Yuezhi Zhao, 2008). Second, the Propaganda Department regularly sends out lists to commercial websites to instruct on the censored phrases and relies on the websites’ self-discipline to censor their content. For example, Yue Xu (2011) systematically analyzed the censored phrases in Baidu’s BBS service, *Tieba*. He grouped the censored words into four categories, and 19 sub-categories ranging from political incidents to natural disasters. A manager of *Tieba* admitted that they deleted as many as one million posts a day, though most of which, he said, were unsolicited advertisements. The self-regulation promoted by the Internet entrepreneurs and endorsed by the government is a step toward a more responsive and productive bottom-up business model for the media (cultural) management (Weber & Lu, 2007). It also projects the image of a transparent and conscientious government that embraces the WTO rules.

Since 2000, in addition to increasingly resorting to legislative administration, the government has also strengthened the technological dimension of network censorship (MacKinnon, 2008, 2010; Qiu, 2004). Other than blocking “harmful” websites, the government has established a sophisticated system of information monitoring and surveillance under the project of Golden Shield (the Great Firewall). A few Western



based companies have also been accused of collaborating with the Chinese government's censoring efforts by providing, even customizing equipment, for the state firewall (Hughes & Wacker, 2003).

### **Chinese uses of the Internet**

Despite the tightening control over Internet content, the proliferation of the Internet has been keeping up the momentum. According to the latest report from CNNIC, by the end of 2010 (CNNIC, 2010a), China had 457 million Internet users, or 34.3% of the total population. On average, people spent 18.3 hours weekly on the Internet. Though the education level of the online population is moving downward, the majority are still those with high school or above. The population is relatively young with people between 10 and 40 accounting for more than 80% of users. The majority of the online population are students (30.6%) followed by enterprise employees (16.2%), and individual business owners/freelancers (14.9%). Among various other occupations, migrant workers are still on the other end of the digital access gap, accounting for 3.5% of Chinese netizens. Most netizens earn less than 3000 RMB (about \$460) a month, with almost one fifth earning less than 500 RMB (about \$76), many of whom are students.

The applications on China's Internet are obviously entertainment-oriented. Online music ranks as the second popular application, penetrating 79.2% online population following the top-ranked search engine (81.9%). Online news (77.2%) and Instant Messengers (77.1%) are followed by Online Games (66.5%). Blogging ranks the sixth (64.4%) followed by Online Videos (62.1%). In contrast to the western use of the Internet, email ranks the 8<sup>th</sup> with only 54.6% online population using it. E-commerce

such as online shopping, online banking, the online stock exchange, travel reservations, and group shopping are still relatively limited. Although this report showed that the digital divide between urban and rural areas, the distance between age groups and income groups, is generally shrinking compared with previous years, there is still a quite evident disparity in existence.

According to another CNNIC report (CNNIC, 2010c), almost 70% of online respondents reported decreased time watching television. It is estimated that 40 million people solely rely on Internet videos. TV drama and movies are popular genres among online video consumers. These people are informed of specific video clips mostly by search engines, personal communication, and social network websites.

Other than the official report on Internet uses, which concentrated on informational and consumerist themes, Chinese netizens also arduously practice activism, communicate on contentious issues online, and form a multiplicity of public spheres full of contestations (C.-c. Lee, 2003; G. Yang, 2009a, 2009b; Yuezhi Zhao, 2008). Damm (2007) summarized two popular discourses, both of which, he said, were wrong in their assessment of the impact of the Internet on Chinese society. The first is the liberation discourse that frames the Internet as the technology of freedom. This discourse emphasizes the impact of the Western social structure, especially the civil society, on the Chinese society enabled by the Internet. Thus it argued for a utopian view of the Internet. The second discourse is the control discourse which concentrates on the government's role so much so that "every single action taken by the Chinese authorities is immediately interpreted as a 'crackdown' and as censorship" (p. 278).

To examine the relationship between civil society, an inherently Western concept, and China's cyberspace, Tai Zixue (2006) concentrated on the way the Internet changes China. He argued that the concepts of civil society and public sphere were alien to Chinese culture. Historically, there was a lack of associational social organization as an intermediate space between kinship and the state, which were the traditional governance structures in China. The Internet, commercial in its nature, brought the opportunity to develop associational relationships. Though Tai mentioned the influence of the omnipresent state power on business, he still believes that market is not a foe, but a friend to China's civil society. "The new socio-economic situation creates a functionally equivalent to the western civil society in China" (p. 80). However, this theorization seems to fall into the liberation discourse. By seeing the Internet as an equivalent to the Western civil society, Tai risks reducing the agents to two, the state and the users, and framing the Internet as the technology of freedom. The important influence of big Chinese, as well as transnational, corporations and their relationships with the state, is largely ignored.

More recently, Yang's study of online contentions (G. Yang, 2009a, 2009b) provided a framework of multidimensional interactions which involves the state, market, civil society, transnationalization, cultures of contention, and online activism. He identified four types, for analytical purposes, of online activism in China. Cultural activism concentrates on cultural values, morality, lifestyle, and identity. Social activism concentrates on corruption, environmental issues, and underprivileged groups. The category of political activism, though all activism is political to some extent, stresses its

oppositional nature on sensitive issues such as human rights, political reform, etc. The category of online activism stands out because of its scale and frequency, as Yang points out. It is also often exploited by the government for its legitimacy and by the Internet businesses for profit. Yang (2009a) also summarized three conditions for activism to flourish on China's Internet. The first is "the existence of a fledgling civil society of grassroots civic groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and—most important of all—online communities" (p. 34). The proliferation of the Internet greatly facilitated the formation of various online communities. Though not necessarily politically oriented, they provide important social space to discuss various issues. The second condition, as Yang sees, is the commercial nature of many websites. Websites sometimes deliberately fuel or maintain controversies to attract traffic for business purposes. Thirdly, in response to the more sophisticated control, Chinese netizens' creativity is an important factor in forming the online civil society.

Yang sees contemporary online contentions as a generalized response to the consequences of Chinese modernity. "It is a countermovement rooted in material grievances and an identity movement born out of the identity crisis associated with dramatic change" (G. Yang, 2009b, p. 209). He also admitted that online contention since 1990 had more modest goals than its offline counterpart in the 1980s. Recent contentions in the cyberspace are less disruptive, less epic in style, while more playful and prosaic. The more recent contentions are mostly fostered by urban youths, revealing a divide in the digital civil society (Also see H. Yu, 2006; Yuezhi Zhao, 2008). This digital divide has undoubtedly undermined efforts and hopes of digital democratization

(H. Yu, 2006). Nevertheless, in general, scholars are still optimistic about the expansion of unofficial democracy brought by the Internet.

These literatures are mostly concerned with online contentions and activism with an explicit political agenda. Although Guobin Yang (2009b) identified cultural contentions such as Mu Zimei's blog about her sex life, he didn't explore this category as heavily as social, economic, and political contentions. However, this kind of cultural consumption, which inevitably contains cultural politics even in the most consumerist forms, is the dominant application on China's Internet, as reviewed previously. Shanzhai falls into this type of activism which is not explicitly political, but nonetheless manifests cultural politics and power relationships.

## CHAPTER III

### SHANZHAI: A TRANS-MEDIA, TRANS-GENRE RITUAL

#### **Introduction**

In the first chapter, I sensitized readers to the concept of Shanzhai and described what Shanzhai productions are like with the three cases in my study. Against the backdrop of China's social structure and media landscape, Shanzhai online video production has emerged and grown into a society-wide cultural phenomenon. I call it a society-wide cultural phenomenon not in the sense that everybody is making Shanzhai videos, but that the news about it is carried in influential media of all types; the videos of Shanzhai productions are shared and commented upon widely online, in addition to many grassroots Shanzhai productions. Though only a very small number of people are making Shanzhai cultural products among the 446 million Internet population in China (CNNIC, 2010b), many more people, online or offline, know something about it even if they don't follow it attentively like I do as a researcher. More importantly, what made Shanzhai a societal phenomenon is that Shanzhai producers have become celebrities and are invited to comment on broader social topics. News media also extensively cite netizens' comments in their coverage of Shanzhai. Online discussions even vigorously argue about the implications of official newspaper and news shows' editorials on Shanzhai.

In this chapter, I intend to answer the question about why people make Shanzhai productions and why so many people and media are talking about it. Or to put it simply,

why is Shanzhai such a big deal? I argue that Shanzhai has become a trans-media, trans-genre ritual (Jenkins, 2006) that constitutes part of the life experience of many Chinese people. Meanwhile, this life experience directs the ways people live their daily lives as an exercise of power, a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988).

Seeing Shanzhai as a cultural phenomenon, I will not try to answer the questions from a socio-psychological perspective. Carey argued that tracing a conception of persons to “psychological and sociological conditions or, indeed, to exclusively political or economic conditions” doesn’t help pull off an effective theory of popular culture (2009, p. 49). In my interview, Shanzhai producers, sponsors of Shanzhai productions, journalists, and some netizens revealed various personal motivations for involvement in Shanzhai, ranging from “for fun,” “for expression,” to “for money” and “for fame.” I am interested in why different people “happened” to pursue whatever their personal motivations with Shanzhai. Thus, following Carey’s view of communication as culture, I will assume a socio-cultural perspective under which Shanzhai is a “manifestation of a basic cultural disposition to cast up experience in symbolic form” (p. 49).

More specifically, I will argue that the Shanzhai phenomenon is an example of media rituals in the age of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins, with his research on various fan communities, illustrated the simultaneously symbiotic and contentious relationship between corporate producers and fans, and the cross-media circulation of the original and derivative media narratives. He argued that we are living in the convergence culture that is a cultural process full of negotiations rather than a technological end-point.

Following Nick Couldry's (2003b) arguments on media rituals, I use a ritual perspective to look at this convergence as manifested in the Shanzhai phenomenon. From the imitated television shows to the Shanzhai productions, and then to the media coverage and online interactions, I argue that Shanzhai is a trans-media, trans-genre media ritual which pronounces a social order. This phenomenon cannot be isolated from a saturated media environment in contemporary Chinese society. It is both a reflection and a reproduction of the symbolic power of various media as a whole to define social reality and to assume the central position of our society.

In the following, I will first review the ritual perspective on our mediated culture. Theorizations on news, reality shows, and online participations as media rituals will be summarized respectively. They will serve as the theoretical framework for my analysis on Shanzhai in this chapter. Because most of the reviewed works below are Western scholarship, I will be very careful about their applicability in a contemporary Chinese context. However, since the ritual perspective attends to the relationship between the general life experience and media, it should be the cultural meanings and patterned media uses that are China-specific, rather than the ritual perspective.

After the review section, I will use Shanzhai as an example to illustrate how stories about the imitations of some popular televisions shows became a trans-media, trans-genre social "reality show" and how Shanzhai producers' imitation is actually a ritualistic use of the Internet in an attempt of ordinary people to enter the "media world" (Couldry, 2003b). Following that, I will show how the stories of Shanzhai producers who became "media persons" (Couldry, 2003b) also constitute the broad trans-media



ritual and reinforce the symbolic social order and the power of media. Taking a critical stance, the power relationship or hierarchy between the media world and the ordinary world will be critiqued. The cultural implications of the trans-media rituals will be discussed in relation to democracy and governance in our highly mediated contemporary society.

### **Media Rituals: Connecting the Media World to the Ordinary World**

Ritual studies began with anthropologists' works. Durkheim, who studied religions of Australian tribes, sketched out his understanding of how religions worked in human societies. In his *The Elementary Forms of Religions* (Durkheim, 1995), he documented how people attributed sacredness to a certain object and identified with it as the tribal totem. Durkheim distinguished the sacred and the profane and explained the social function of ritual as binding people together with a commonly accepted sacred totem. Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1995) studied the transformation, in addition to the maintenance, of societies in rites. Sociologists such as Goffman also studied people's ritualistic behaviors in modern societies, for example face work (1955), that maintain certain socially upheld beliefs. These patterned and formalized actions in various societies are essentially communicative and culturally significant.

To understand these communicative behaviors, cultural studies prefers the word "culture." Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall both argue that the word "communication" used by mass communication research isolates this discipline from that of literature and art or "the expressive and ritual forms of everyday life—religion, conversation, sports" from "an entire body of critical, interpretive, and comparative methodology" (Carey,

2009, p. 32). The cultural studies perspective prefers the word “culture” in its anthropological sense that encompasses “the entire way of life.”

Building on Dewey’s comparing societies existing “by transmission” and “in transmission,” Carey (2009) called the traditional American mass communication studies “the transmission view” and the perspective of seeing communication as culture as “the ritual view.” The transmission view concerns itself with “a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control” while the ritual view conceives communication as “a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed” (p. 33). If “communication by transmission” is oriented to the extension of messages in space, then “communication in transmission” as a cultural process concentrates on the maintenance of society in time. Rothenbuhler (Rothenbuhler, 1998) provided a clear definition of ritual that especially sheds light on communication studies. For him, a ritual is a “voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically affect or participate in the serious life” (p. ix). Assuming this ritual perspective, this chapter, examining Shanzhai as a cultural phenomenon, attempts to explicate the meanings of the serious life that people participate in through Shanzhai production, circulation, and regulation.

Narrowed down from ritual communication in general, media studies under the ritual view also analogize media presentations and uses to social rituals. Thus, under this view, media do not extend messages in space but serve to maintain the society in time, through “the representation of shared beliefs” (Carey, 2009, p. 15). In this process, media do not simply exert their power through individual viewers’ psychology as in the

transmission view of communication, but assumes the authority of announcing social values and orienting the whole society to them, which Rothenbuhler calls the “serious life.”

One of the seminal works of media ritual is Dayan and Katz’s *Media Events* (1992). It studied live television broadcasts of important events and theorized its socio-cultural implications through the ritual lens. The authors distinguished three “scripts” of media events: conquest, contest, and coronation. However, regardless of these various scripts, all media events share similar syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features that qualify them as media rituals. They all interrupt normal broadcast routines, are preplanned, and are presented live. They are all presented with reverence and ceremony, and are declared historic. As mediated rituals, they all excite the audience, propose norms of viewing, integrate society, and renew loyalty (Rothenbuhler, 1998). Millions people watching an important live broadcast is similar to Durkheim’s observation of tribal people gathering around their sacred totem. In media events serving as modern rituals, a society is bound by television.

However, scholars are not fully satisfied with Dayan and Katz’s neo-Durkheimian explanation of modern media. First, it heavily emphasizes the function of modern media as the social glue. Baumann (1992), with his study of an Anglican observance in a multi-ethnic suburb of London, argued that rituals could also be performed by competing constituencies rather than solely by in-group members, and could speak to aspirations of cultural changes as much as perpetuate social value and self-knowledge. Second, the arguments concerning the media events as rituals only

concentrated on the exceptional cases “whose rhetorical form is always, perhaps, resisted by some of the population” (p. 7). Following Silverstone’s argument, Couldry (2003b) argued for using the ritual perspective to understand the organization of social life as a whole. Third, studying separate media events doesn’t help explicate the power of media on people’s total social experience. Seeing media as the social center that constructs meanings, values, and ritualistic behavioral patterns helps scholars critically examine the power relationship between the media world and the ordinary world. Couldry (2003b) calls it post-Durkheimian in contrast to seeing media ritual as simply presenting naturally existing binding elements of social life.

In this chapter, I will take the “post-Durkheimian” perspective on media ritual to examine the Shanzhai phenomenon. Under this perspective, media, and their convergence, serve as a powerful social center that organizes the way ordinary people live their everyday lives. It is granted that the meanings people make out of their everyday lives are not necessarily monolithic for various social groups residing in different positions in the Chinese society. However, the different meanings are all significant, and people’s attitudes to them are earnest and serious. Shanzhai, under this perspective, is people’s participation in the everyday life which features patterned media uses. Although the participation in Shanzhai is often playful and entertaining, the participants’ attitude toward it is nevertheless serious. For the Shanzhai participants, it is *the* way to live their ordinary lives, therefore ritualistic. In this way, the media not only model different people’s participation in their daily lives, but also reproduce this molding power, as well as the modulating power (Deleuze, 1992) of media. I will

critically examine three cases of Shanzhai to explicate the power relationship between the ordinary world and the media world.

### **News as a ritual**

As I discussed above, Shanzhai is a cultural phenomenon that emerged from and sustains itself through an atmosphere of extensive media attention, especially news. I will argue later that the news coverage of the original television shows and their casts oriented Shanzhai producers to certain serious beliefs of everyday life, and therefore greatly contributing to their decisions of making Shanzhai videos to participate in that “everyday life.” In addition, the news coverage of Shanzhai producers also makes them the model of a patterned, ritualistic media uses for further imitators. Thus, news is a powerful component of the media environment that occupies the symbolic center of our society. To make this argument, it is important to review the social influences of news and audiences’ beliefs toward this media genre.

First, news is trusted because it is believed to be true. News, as defined by Corner (1995), is “regularly updated information about, and depiction of, significant recent events within a particular geographical area or sphere of activity” (Hill, 2007, p. 55). Objectivity is the cornerstone of news. Westerståhl explicated two layers of meaning of objectivity: impartiality and factuality (Westerståhl, 1983). Objectivity has been internalized by journalists as a professional myth/ritual (Berkowitz, 1997; Schudson, 1995). It is rooted and guaranteed by the long-standing journalistic traditions and technological advancement. The sense of truism in news is also presented to mass audience with specific news writing structures, direct quotes, audio and visual footage,

and so on. In general, news is a factual genre, as Annette Hill (2007) categorized, along with current affairs and investigations, documentary, popular factual programs, etc.

News is also usually presented live. On the one hand, being presented live means being factual. This sense of factuality contributes to people's trust in the ability of news to represent social reality and deflects the suspicion of manipulation. The trust, in turn, gives privilege to news media over our everyday life experience. On the other hand, being presented live gives people the sense of togetherness. Dayan and Katz (1992) singled out "presented live" as a necessary characteristic of media events. In order for media events to exert the bonding power on an audience, people have to watch them simultaneously. Just like Scannell (1989) argued, through the ritual perspective, "liveness" is part of a wider coordination of society in time.

However, people's trust in news is increasingly undermined by the exposure of various manipulations. Media scholars have theorized the unnatural factors in news production such as agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), gate-keeping (White & Dexter, 1964), and framing (Gitlin, 1980). Audiences have also have cast doubts on the natural authority of news media to announce reality (Couldry, 2000; Hill, 2007). In addition, the social environment also threatens the ritual function of news on people. Katz and Liebes (2007) argued that cynicism, disenchantment, and segmentation undermined attention to ceremonial media events. Meanwhile, the ubiquity of television technology, and the readiness for disruption in television schedules could render the ritual aspect of media events ineffective.

However, the above concerns are mostly based on seeing news as a production (e.g., agenda-setting), specific news stories (Hill, 2007) or specific sub-genres (e.g. disastrous marathon) (Blondheim & Liebes, 2002). News, as a whole, as a genre should be “best understood as a process of categorization that is not found within media texts, but operates across the cultural realm of media industries, audiences, policy, critics and historical contexts” (Mittell, 2004, p. xii cited in Hill, 2007, p.59). News as a factual genre is not rooted in the factuality of a camera shot or a piece of quote, but in people’s ritualistic orientation toward news as the sacred world that organizes our ordinary life. Rothenbuhler argues that all communication has a ritual element, some aspect that “enables participation in the serious life” (1998, 2009). Routine news, as a genre of ritual communication, reproduces the sense of a stable reality. Disruptive news, as another genre of ritual communication, repairs the disrupted order and restores the social meanings. Thus, news, as a whole, “does not offer certainty, but the means by which viewers can work through the confusion of modern life” (Hill, 2005, p. 67) on the level of the overall life experience.

Here I am not suggesting that the Western conceptualization of news is perfectly comparable to the Chinese media. I will be very cautious to draw conclusions in my argument. However, there are indeed continuities between the Western and Chinese news media in the contemporary Chinese media environment. As I reviewed in the background chapter and I will do in chapter five when discussing media discourse on Shanzhai, readers will see the penetration of Western journalistic ideals into China’s

news media, especially urban oriented, commercial media such as metropolitan newspapers and the Internet.

### **Reality shows as a ritual**

It is hard to clearly define a reality show since it has become a “catch-all phrase” (Kilborn, 1994). While most reality shows are characterized with minimal script writing and extensive use of non-actors, scholars are more concerned with the cultural and the “branding discourses” that have coalesced to differentiate a particular moment in television culture (Murray & Ouellette, 2004). Murray and Ouellette described reality TV as “an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real” (p. 2). Biressi and Nunn (2005) see this genre as a dialogue “with reality as it is commonly understood and in doing so they help produce current knowledge about what that reality might consist of” (p. 4).

Since their proliferation in the 1990s, reality shows as a general category quickly developed into various sub-genres and spread into global television markets (Hill, 2005; Huff, 2006). Some trace the beginning of the reality show to as early as *An American Family*, a PBS production in the early 1970s. Reality TV as a more established genre first appeared as crime and emergency services reality shows, or infotainment. After that, the second wave of reality program featured popular observational documentaries, or “docu-soaps” and lifestyle programs. Docu-soaps are also called “fly-on-the-wall” documentaries, “soap-docs,” or “reality-soaps” which complement infotainment with character-driven narratives (Hill, 2005). At the decline of the docu-soap’s viewership,



lifestyle programs alongside docu-soaps quickly gained popularity. The essence of this sub-genre is the involvement of ordinary people and their ordinary leisure interests such as gardening and home improvement. A twist in these programs is the experts who give advice on the lifestyle task, such as cooking, fashion, home renovation, etc. “They transform the ordinary into the extraordinary” (Hill, 2005, p. 29). The third wave of reality programming are reality game shows which Hill (2005) called “social experiments that placed ordinary people in a controlled environment over an extended period of time” (p. 24). Of course, *Big Brother* and *Survivor* are classics among them. This sub-genre is also famous for its international success. Hartley said “the novelty of reality-format shows from the business point of view is that a single (global) concept or format can be reproduced in different (local) markets,” which “allows viewers greater levels of personal interactivity with the show, including attending live events” (Hartley, 2008, p. 70).

Though, same as news, reality shows feature real happenings, but audiences do not culturally process them as news. On the one hand, the audience perceives news as public service and informative (Hill, 2007), which of course confirms its disinterestedness and factuality, while reality shows are perceived as entertainment. Compared with news, the audience across different gender, age, country, and education groups sees more public value in news than in various sub-genres of reality shows (Hill, 2007). However, on the other hand, reality shows provide the sense of real ordinary people getting into the media world, at least with more possibility of entering it. Thus,

what is happening, in an unscripted manner, is television looks more likely to happen to ordinary people in their everyday lives.

This sense of participation and democracy is pivotal for reality shows to consolidate media's authority as the society's center. Hartley (2008) sketched out different types of "philosophy, epistemology, educational reach," "interpretive and creative form," "literacy," and "modes of address" for each one of the pre-modern (medieval), modern, and contemporary (postmodern) ages. He argues that meanings in contemporary postmodern society happen in private life, known by Do It Yourself (DIY) citizens with self-experiences, under the power of Foucauldian governance of life, in the creative form of reality, and whose mode of address is conversation. Thus, the reality show is a media format that resonates with the cultural and historical conditions of meaning-production in contemporary society. It provides ordinary people with "reality," as presented by "ordinary people" in the media, to make sense of their own life experience, to produce meanings, and also to govern themselves. Reality shows in contemporary media also provide the epistemology of the plebiscite in contrast to the epistemology of empiricism in the modern age, or theology in Medieval age. From the Foucauldian perspective, Ouellette and Hay (2008) argued that the sense of self-choice and democracy, which is increasingly ruled by the market, makes reality shows a popular television genre. They critiqued the reality show as a symbolic epitome of neoliberal mentality that exercises power over people, and helps govern the society from a distance.

Many scholars point out that the fact that reality shows are unscripted does not mean what happens in the shows are not performance. Audiences tend to discuss reality shows in terms of the improvised performances of the participants who are “ordinary people” (Hill, 2005). But even if there is not a written script to direct participants in front of the cameras, cultures, social norms, identities, and certain rationalities also prescribe the behaviors for performers. For example Dayan and Katz documented that Chicago people in the parade welcoming General McArthur showed their excitement in front of the camera which in turn excited hundreds of thousands of television viewers, while only people in the streets knew that the excitement faded out right after McArthur’s car and the camera moved on. Similarly John Corner studied the British reality show *Big Brother*, and concluded that:

One might use the term “selving” to describe the central process whereby ‘true selves’ are seen to emerge (and develop) from underneath and, indeed, through the ‘performed selves’ projected for us, as a consequence of the applied pressures of objective circumstance and group dynamics. A certain amount of the humdrum and the routine may be a necessary element in giving this selving process, this unwitting disclosure of personal core, a measure of plausibility, aligning it with the mundane rhythms and naturalistic portrayals of docu-soap, soap opera itself, and at times the registers of game-show participation. (Corner 2002, p.263-4)

For viewers, what is natural is factual (Hill, 2007). Thus, these natural “selvings” “move back to reality away from the spectacle of reality entertainment” (p. 17). They not only suggest the naturalness of these performing behaviors, more importantly, they validate reality shows of their authority to present natural (factual) reality, or what things are supposed to be. In this sense, performances in the reality shows are not only articulations of a socially upheld value in the Durkheimian sense, but they are also

patterned behaviors with meanings or a mentality of the daily life. They lead to the audience voluntarily aligning their life to media presentations.

The connecting point between this review of reality shows and the Shanzhai cases I study is that the imitated original television shows and the chronic news coverage of these television shows and their cast members in different media converge into a mediated real life or, in other words, a real-life reality show. The mediated, also converging as I will elaborate later, environment built a social drama about these shows and their cast members which is actually what the Shanzhai producers intended to imitate and re-live themselves. It is this cross-genre, cross-media social drama that exerts a socio-cultural influence on the audience including Shanzhai producers, just like a reality show does (Jenkins, 2006). I will provide further evidence later to argue for this point. But before making the case, it is necessary to review Internet participation also as a ritualistic media use and the convergence of all the mediated reality in different channels.

### **Internet participation as a ritual**

Internet participation as a media ritual has not been fully developed by scholars; however, some have mentioned the connections between the World Wide Web and ritualistic use of media (Couldry, 2003b; Hartley, 2008). As a part of the media landscape in contemporary society, the Internet has its private side (Chandler & Roberts-Young, 1998) and its “public status” (Couldry, 2003b, p. 130). Despite the ambiguity of this new medium, it is so important that we cannot ignore its potential of influencing the totality of people’s life experience. As Couldry argued, it is “‘*the Internet*’, the reified,

naturalized space of social coordination... that is more likely to generate ritual forms, although it will be some time, I suspect, before these forms became stable” (pp. 129-130). Couldry actually called for empirical work to explore “the consequences for media’s authority and attitudes to the media process” when “media shift to being a broader stream of information and leisure flows accessible at the consumer’s option” (Couldry, 2000, p. 188). This part will discuss the ritual features of the audience’s participation, especially on the Internet.

There are three points in which participatory media uses in the Internet are similar to those well-examined media formats from a ritual perspective: participation, liveness, and the sense of pilgrimage. In the first place, participatory media extend the sense of opportunity for ordinary people to enter the media world through factual genres to “equal” opportunity to enter the media world. First, the simplest form of participating in the traditionally well-guarded media space, such as reality shows, is through online voting. Many reality shows allow people to vote for the participants (Hill, 2005; Huff, 2006). By clicking in web browsers or sending out short messages via cell phones, audiences are given the sense of empowerment to decide “what really happens” in the media world, which naturalizes the media authority.

Second, the Internet helps ordinary people to get into television on reality shows and possibly get famous. This television genre has already liberalized the television screens in the sense that ordinary non-actors are featured in prime time programs. The Internet further provides the opportunity for people to apply for it or to submit audition audio/videos. This reinforces the feeling of “lottery celebrity” (Andrejevic, 2004), the

promise that anybody can become an instant celebrity through reality shows. But at the same time, it further disguises and naturalizes the boundary between the media world and the ordinary world that is still strictly gated and legitimizes reality shows' power to define reality.

Third, and more broadly, the Internet itself promises equal opportunity for its users to become lottery celebrities online, while the issue of the digital divide is quite often ignored. If the Internet access to reality shows serves to disguise the boundary between the media world and the ordinary world, then conventional Internet uses such as blogging, video uploading, and tweeting, and so on themselves can be considered as “naturally” happening *in* the media world. Thus, ordinary people's access to the media world is not only a possibility, but a guarantee. The boundary between the media world and ordinary world seems to blur and even diminish in this case.

Critiques of the above forms of participation are concerned with the representativeness of the reality presented by media. The voted participants and finalists in reality shows, often through online participation, and the viral online content/celebrities are not as much democratic representation as a ritualistic performance in the media. The ritual performance confirms the “otherwise merely assumed connection between medium and representative social group” (Couldry, 2003b, p. 109) and is in fact a “plebiscitary industry” (Hartley, 2008). Hartley uses this concept to illustrate the yoking together of politics and entertainment in the contemporary society where democratic processes are substituted for “a new paradigm based not on representation but on direct participation, a shift from consumer rather than from

political culture” (p. 126). Hartley focused mainly on reality television while various forms of participation on the Internet further reinforced this paradigm. Couldry (2008) expressed similar concern but toward a broader scope of media. He calls this media-presented representativeness “crisis of voice.” He argued that the participation-based media democracy weakens the government’s ability to deliver different voices and subjects the reality construction to commercial media under the logic of neo-liberalism.

The second analogous point, from the perspective of ritual communication, between participatory media and factual media genres is the liveness. Audiences’ voting and the live broadcast of it is similar to the live broadcast of a media event, which not only presents a reality, but also more importantly gives this reality a social dimension. Neumann expressed that “today the issue of shared, non-interfering, two-way communications again arises as a practical possibility” (1991, p. 168). More broadly, the interactivity provided by the Internet gives rise to viral popularity with seemingly democratic “clicks” and subsequent publicity all over the world. The whole social process of going viral is experienced as live and natural, what Couldry (2004) called “celebrification.” Celebrification implies the power of media to define reality as well as the social construction of interactivity in the process of transforming ordinary people into celebrities. With the facilitation of the Internet, people can not only vote for their stars, but also witness the rise of stars day by day together.

The third analogy between Internet participation and the reality genre under a ritual perspective is pilgrimage. If the analogy of participation concentrates on the sense of equal access to the media world, and the analogy of liveness concentrates on the sense

of being together, then pilgrimage concentrates on people's serious attitudes toward the media world. As Couldry (2000) argued, the boundary between the media world and the ordinary world is usually carefully guarded in order to keep the media power scarce and preserve it exclusively for the media. Using the Internet doesn't necessarily mean attempts to shatter media power. On the contrary, people share stories and pictures of pilgrimages to the media sites online, and these "infinite and at least partly unregulated space[s]" (p. 91) in turn become a pilgrimage destination. This ritualistic use of the Internet to pay homage to the media world actually reinforces the media's higher position in the hierarchy over the ordinary world.

### **Media ritual in the convergence culture**

In the above, I reviewed the take of media ritual scholarship on Internet uses and its connection with reality television. Now, I will expand to incorporate media convergence in a broader sense under the perspective of media rituals. The trans-media circulation of media narratives, or the "serious" social reality under a ritual perspective, is not limited to the Internet and television. Fans create their own media space to communicate and socialize with each other based on the reality given by other media texts, although for their own ends (Jenkins, 1992). Jenkins (2006) specifically identified the trans-media narrative and struggle over it as "convergence culture". For example, television networks have mixed feelings toward spoiler websites. Sometimes they use them to promote their version of reality, as in *Survivor*, and other times they guard their monopoly of defining and presenting it. Editors, reporters, and columnists and publishers admitted that they constantly quote from popular blogs (Drezner & Farrell, 2004).



Reality shows get extensive coverage, from “news magazine ruminations on the public fascination with instant celebrity” to endless tabloid stories (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 4). In this way, ordinary people in the television reality shows are naturally transformed into media celebrities with coverage from other media outside the television show itself. Some shows only present the same content in television, radio, and the Internet. Fan-based media convergence goes beyond the strict texts and expands to the whole narrative, including derivative texts for meaning poaching (Jenkins, 1992). More broadly, the cross media promotion of ordinary people beyond their initial stage, especially with the involvement of news media—a powerful factual genre—serves as a collaboration of media’s power to present a seemingly natural, but actually constructed, reality. From a ritual perspective, the concentration of so many communication streams in one “super-medium” may only *enhance* that supermedium’s framing potential (Couldry, 2000, p. 189 original emphasis).

However, scholars have also provided cautions against the seemingly equal access to and the representativeness of the media world. Similar to Couldry’s concern over the “crisis of voice” (2008), Ouellette and Hay (2008) extended their critique on neo-liberalism to the convergence of media as a “technology of contemporary citizenship” to promote the governmentality of constant self-improvement. They said:

The web has become a resource through which enterprising individuals can help themselves, and many TV programs since the late 1990s have mobilized it as a way to personalize and customize televisual instruction. In some respects, TV’s convergence with other forms of media has revitalized the ideal of home-based education as citizenship training. (p. 31)

The web's enterprising people indicate a ritual perspective on the convergence of media. It is a cultivating process that prescribes people's behavior by orienting them to the serious meanings of life defined by the converging media environment. Not limited to the convergence between television and the web, when all the media formats, including news, coordinate as one media world, it is not only more powerful in "enterprising individuals," but at the same time, more naturalized since the boundary between media and the ordinary world is not straightforward any more.

Further, the media convergence which combines consumption and participation, consumer and producers, together could further be capitalized by commercial media. Ouellette and Hay (Ouellette & Hay, 2008) pointed out that "Web participation turns the game of voyeurism into an economy of surveilling consumers and of active, productive consumers by audience actively provide/produce information about themselves" (p. 210). More broadly, as Andrejevic (Andrejevic, 2004) observed, "The convergence of different forms of media (print, radio, TV) anticipated by the Internet parallels the convergence of functions (advertising, entertainment, production), as well as the dedifferentiation of spheres of labor, leisure, and consumption envisioned by the proponents of mass customization" (p. 53). However capitalized, the market-driven neo-liberalist media-convergence does serve to naturalize media power and enhance the ritual power of the media world to provide the "supposed-to-be" way, a specific rationality on which we carry out our ordinary life.

### **The power of the converging and mediated reality**

Having talked about the ordinary people's "equal" access to the media world in different ways, we need to critically examine the boundary between the media world and the ordinary world underneath the "natural" reality constructed by converging media channels and narratives. Couldry (2003b) summarized that neo-Durkheimian readings of media and, more broadly, of communication as rituals tend to see them as an expression of society's center (Real, 1989) and concentrate on the social-bonding function (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Turner & Turner, 1995). Couldry's (Couldry, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) own critical examinations emphasize the power relationship between the media world and the ordinary world, and also that between the media personalities and ordinary people. As Couldry pointed out, "rituals do not so much express order, as *naturalise* it" (Couldry, 2003b, p. 27 original emphasis). It serves to disguise the social construction of power relationships in ordinary life with its natural performances.

Couldry summarized five ways for media to maintain as well as to naturalize its power over ordinary life: framing, ordering, naming, spacing, and imagining. First, framing refers to media's ability to frame a shared social experience that is qualitatively different from the quotidian everyday, private life. With the concepts of "liveness" and "prime time," Couldry argues that the shared experience in live mediation and prime time broadcasts is "marked off" from what is "private and particular" (Couldry, 2000, p. 178). Second, the distinction between a shared social experience and the private particular life then indicates a hierarchical "order" with the media world apparently prioritized. This "ordering" process is reflected and reinforced in people's daily talk

about the loftiness of the media world. Third, the dimension of “naming” confirms media’s authority to “announce” social facts, or as Couldry put it “in a broad sense to include the sense of “actuality.” Factual television, ranging from news to reality game shows, culturally as a broad but consistent genre (Hill, 2007) depends on this naming mechanism. Fourth, spacing serves to reinforce the hierarchy constituted by framing, ordering and naming. Spacing refers to the segregation of media’s institutional sphere from the rest of social practices, such as the secrecy of shooting locations and symbolic capital of those who have access to media production skills. Couldry (2000) argues that “the boundaries around the media sphere reduce the chances of the media’s authority being ever de-naturalized” (p. 178) which is “what legitimates the enormous concentration of symbolic power in media institutions” (p. 83). However, in reality shows and Internet participations, as well as other converging media participations, the spacing of media territory is “breached” with ordinary people enter it. It reinforced the naming dimension which confirms reality shows’ factuality, and at the same time symbolically naturalized the space distinction between the media world and ordinary world. However, as considerable evidence suggests, the boundary is still intact between the two worlds; only it is naturalized to help construct the “reality.” Many reality show participants are selected based on their performance skills and playfulness; participants are required to sign contracts preventing leaking any details before the “reality” is aired (Huff, 2006). The fifth dimension is imagining, which refers to viewers’ “imaginative and emotional investments in the symbolic hierarchy of media frame” (p.178). In reality shows, this imagined hierarchy still exists while, more importantly, the “ordinary

people” featured in this superior media world further confirmed its factuality and representativeness. Both hierarchy and factuality are constructed and reinforced with the coordination of these dimensions. The “real” media world of converging channels and narratives is both different from (in terms of authority of announcing factuality) and the same (in terms of the appearance and sense of opportunities to participate) as the viewers’ ordinary world. From this point, the converging but highly mediated life experience becomes the ordinary people’s life experience in a ritualistic manner. I will demonstrate how these same mechanisms are manifested in Shanzhai production as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

Now, I have reviewed different factual genres and media formats as well as their convergence under the perspective of media rituals. This will be the analytics for my further interpretation of the Shanzhai phenomenon in this chapter. In the next two sections, I will first argue that three prominent Shanzhai shows are actually ritualistic uses of the Internet under the influence of media convergence. Then, when these prominent Shanzhai cases become part of the media world, they exert ritualistic forces on the subsequent audience and Shanzhai producers. All in all, the Shanzhai phenomenon is an example of the governance of society from a distance through the convergence of media.

### **Shanzhai: A Journey to the Sacred**

Above, I reviewed some theorizations suggesting that multiple media formats and narratives can converge to orient people to the belief of a constructed social reality and subsequently prescribe people’s behaviors in patterns, in this case Shanzhai media

production, in accordance to a certain mentality. But most of the reviewed arguments are made regarding the combination of fictional drama and fan-based media, reality shows and the Internet, or reality shows and news reports. Here I will develop a similar argument encompassing multiple media and genres all at once. As noted above, I will illustrate this idea with three Shanzhai cases: Shanzhai *Baijia Jiangtan* (*Lectern for A Hundred Schools of Thought*, hereafter *Lecture Show*), Shanzhai *Chunwan* (*Spring Festival Gala*), Shanzhai *Honglou Meng* (*The Dream of Red Mansions*, hereafter *Red Mansions*).

### **The Shanzhai Lecture Show**

As I introduced in the first chapter, the CCTV *Lecture Show* features intellectuals giving lectures on a broad range of topics, but recently concentrated more on Chinese literature, history, culture, etc. This show started on July 9, 2001 when the Science & Education Channel of CCTV was launched. The show is aired at noon every day, and each episode lasts half an hour. The objective at the beginning of this show's run was worded "Construct common sense of the times, enjoy life with wisdom" (Wan, 2007). It targeted a well-educated audience. At first, this show usually invited scholars well-known to the public to give lectures on a wide range of topics. It featured Nobel laureates of physics Chen-Ning Franklin Yang, Tsung-dao Lee, Chao-chung Ting, and Stephen Hawking, classic literature scholar Ye Jiaying, and famous Redologist, Zhou Ruchang. Most of these early lectures were stand-alone speeches rather than multi-episode series that have continuous narratives. The viewership of this show struggled in the early years mainly because of its high-brow stance.

In 2004, the *Lecture Show* started a new series on the Qing Dynasty called *Unsolved Cases of the Twelve Emperors of Qing Dynasty*. The speaker, Yan Chongnian, is a scholar at the Beijing Social Science Academy and an expert on Manchu history, Qing history, and Beijing history. Since then, the *Lecture Show* adjusted its target audience to those with as low as a middle school education and narrowed its concentration from a wide spectrum of topics to Chinese traditional culture and history. Meanwhile, most speakers are experts on specific topics with good presentation skills, but less-well-known to the general public. In 2005, a new series on *The Dream of Red Mansions* was started by Liu Xinwu, the former chief editor of *The People's Literature*, and a well-known writer. The lectures he gave in the show featured his expert interpretation of *The Dream of Red Mansions* (S. Zhou, 2008). This series, similarly to Yan Chongnian's on the Qing Dynasty, generated audience enthusiasm for these topics. After that, Yi Zhongtian's series on the classic novel of *Sanguo*, Yu Dan's series on Confucius's *Lun Yu*, Ji Lianhai's series on two famous officials of the Qing Dynasty, all drew large viewership and turned these speakers into celebrities.

Since then, this show has not only been popular, but has become a stage to launch scholars as stars. Most of the speakers are intellectuals ranging from university professors to museum curators, and one of them is actually a high school history teacher. This show not only gives a stage to these speakers, but also names their series after their names, such as *Yi Zhongtian tastes Sanguo*, *Ma Weidu's talks on furniture collection*, *Yu Dan's impressions of Lun Yu*, *Liu Xinwu reveals secrets of The Dream of Red Mansions*, etc. Through this show, these ordinary scholars not only got their academic arguments

out to the public, but also turned themselves into media persons who, under the ritual perspective, are privileged to take part in the reality construction.

However, the media zeal for the *Lecture Show* is far from this simple. The celebrity of these speakers is more of the result of a media collaboration than merely exposure to a lecture show series on CCTV. On August 7, one of the most important official mouthpieces, *People's Daily*, published an editorial *How to look at the fashionable history study ("Ruhe," 2006)*, commenting on the popular enthusiasm for Chinese history invoked by the *Lecture Show*. These celebrity scholars were interviewed and reported on in many news, as well as entertainment, media. Prestigious publications like the *Guangming Daily*, the *Sanlian Life Weekly*, and the *China News Weekly* carried lengthy coverage on this cultural phenomenon.

These scholars also published books related to the topics of their lectures, and the books were usually among the best-sellers (Peng, 2009). In October 2004, Yan Chongnian's *Zhengshuo Qingchao Shier Di [Serious Talks on Twelve Emperors of the Qing Dynasty]* (Yan, 2004) sold 300,000 copies. In 2006, 550,000 copies of *Yi Zhongtian Pin Sanguo [Yi Zhongtian Tastes Sanguo]* (Yi, 2006) were ordered within nine days, and an additional 100,000 copies were immediately printed. *Yu Dan Lun Yu Xinde [Yu Dan's Impressions of Lun Yu]* (D. Yu, 2006) sold one million copies in a month. Other derivative books from other speakers of the *Lecture Show* were also successful.

Not only books by the speakers, but also those commenting on and critiquing the speakers' arguments are successful. There are *Qieman, Yi Zhongtian [Wait, Yi*



*Zhongtian*] (Honghai, 2006), and *Qingsuan Pin Sanguo [Reckoning the Taste of Sanguo]* (Tianxingjian, 2007) that argued against some of Yi's opinions expressed in the *Lecture Show*, and *Yu Dan Weishenme Zheyang Hong [Why is Yu Dan So Popular]* (Min, 2007) , and *Jie Du Yu Dan [Detoxicate Yu Dan]* (J. Xu & Yang, 2007) that raised opposition to Yu's interpretation of Confucian works.

Sometimes, the debates developed into dramatic news stories that drew journalists' attention. Yan Chongnian's interpretation of the history of the Qing Dynasty had been criticized by netizens for his bias toward the Manchus who ruled China then. A pro-Han reader slapped Yan in the face at a book-signing event in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, on October 5, 2008 (C. Xu, 2008). This incident drew extensive news coverage, and also led to the Shanzhai version of the *Lecture Show* going viral, which I will elaborate on later.

Of course, the Internet is also indispensable in building the celebrity of these speakers. Statistics show that in July 2006, during the peak period of the *Lecture Show*'s viewership, its webpage drew about 200,000 visits a day, more than any other shows on CCTV (L. Yang, 2007). Some speakers' blogs are also very popular. The blog of Kong Qingdong, who gave a series of speeches on Chinese martial novels, has almost 49 million accumulated visits, Yi Zhongtian has 29 million visits, and Yuan Tengfei has more than 4 million visits. From the ritual perspective, these visits, on the one hand, can be seen as the viewers' pilgrimage (Couldry, 2003b) to the media world, a reflection of media power. On the other hand, they also confirm, reinforce, and constitute the media

power, especially when they are integrated into the broad media world to consolidate a too-natural-to-be-questionable reality.

Seen from the ritual perspective, the lecture show itself, the books, the online debates, and the news coverage all together converge into a reality show spectacle in real life that tells a story about ordinary people becoming celebrities over and over again. First, this trans-media reality show is ubiquitous in people's everyday lives. People's ordinary lives are immersed in the performed reality. All the evidence from different media outlets validate each other and make the whole story natural and tenable enough. Second, the trans-media reality show develops as people are kept updated with every bit of the development from various media. In other words, the trans-media reality show is presented live. Third, people's participation, from going to book-signing events to joining the debates online are similar to a pilgrimage where people convince themselves of the reality presented by media and meanwhile confirms the higher position of the media world over the everyday ordinary life.

However, the trans-media ritual, while presenting ever-convincing naturalness and smoothness of the narrative, conceals media power in many ways. There is much evidence in my interviews that the trans-media "reality show" about those ordinary-scholars-turned popular figures was rather a manipulated performance. First, the ordinary scholars are far from ordinary. One of the decision makers of the lecture show (Informant No. 10) admitted that they received hundreds of applications from all kinds of channels to ask for chances to audition. However, the show's criteria are that the speaker must be affiliated with an official institution and must have an officially

recognized title, either academic or administrative. When I asked about some people in the private consultant business, he said, “Not a single one. Those famous mouths outside [state institutions], not a single one.” Before speakers are given the opportunity to audition, the show usually conducts extensive background checks with people ranging from the candidates’ employers to their academic peers to ensure they are free of any scandal. Though this isn’t unique to this show and is quite common in Chinese media, this approach nevertheless excludes many people from accessing the media channels while the access that the rest of the “ordinary people” have does look natural and equal to the audience. Second, the arguments the speakers make, though in a very accessible style, are subject to the scrutiny of an expert panel in the related area. There cannot be any argument that is “at odds with official interpretations or potentially harmful to social stability” (Informant No. 10). Third, speakers must audition in order to show their presentation skills. This informant who worked for the CCTV *Lecture Show* admitted that many very knowledgeable and well-respected scholars were excluded because they lack appealing presentation styles. Even those who passed the audition are usually provided with extensive suggestions and instructions, as well as chances to practice presenting in front of a camera. After all, these unnatural selections or survivors finally appear on television as an “ordinary person” ready to be transformed into a celebrity.

Not only the selection of speakers, but also their public images are carefully controlled. Even though there is no traditional working contract, the informant from this show said they usually required the speakers to let the show know about important public events speakers would be involved in ahead of time. These public events range

from publishing books, accepting interviews in other media, to receiving awards. The informant, who had left this show by the time of my interview, attributed an incident to the lack of control of the speakers outside the show. In spring 2010, a speaker publicly disputed with her publisher over royalty issues which damaged the speaker's, as well as the show's public image. In fact, when Informant No. 10 worked at the show, he personally coordinated several volumes of books derived from the scripts of the *Lecture Show*, published in the name of the speakers. He did this in order to avoid any discrepancy between the public images of speakers presented in their personal publications and the images desired by the show.

How is the trans-media “reality show” related to Shanzhai? Based on my interviews, I will argue that the Shanzhai *Lecture Show* is rather an attempt to copy the trans-media social drama, or a real-life reality show, about the CCTV *Lecture Show* than simply an imitation of the original show for fun. I will show that there are serious beliefs embedded in the Shanzhai producer's patterned behavior of media uses under the influence of the trans-mediated reality. Thus, the Shanzhai production is a way to access the sacred reality.

Han Jiangxue, the producer/speaker of the Shanzhai *Lecture Show*, resorted to making Shanzhai videos because he wanted to express his understanding of the history of the Song Dynasty as inspired by the fact that ordinary intellectuals achieved their expression via media. However, the specific path from self-recommendation to CCTV to putting his videos online is contingent on the specific media and social structures of China and his position in these structures. First, for a period, Han believed that the story

of ordinary scholars' turning into celebrities was real. With this belief, he self-recommended himself through a contact person to CCTV's *Lecture Show*. After being clearly told that he was not qualified because of the lack of a legitimate title, Han didn't give up, and called the show's office to recommend himself again. After being rejected again, he made the lecture video himself and mailed the DVD to the *Lecture Show* to recommend himself for the third time. As I mentioned above, the media world is strictly guarded with some China-specific criteria of qualified speakers, even though it appeared to the viewers as naturally disinterested and open to ordinary intellectuals.

Disillusioned by the hard boundary between the media world and the ordinary world, Han turned to the Internet which, for him, guaranteed an equal chance of expression. At this point, even if he had given up the ritualistic attempt to enter the television media world, he was still caught in the ritualistic use of the Internet to participate in the constructed equal opportunity of expressions online. What is more, the story of ordinary scholars getting expression, even celebrity, as the overarching serious life story constructed by the trans-media environment still prescribes the way he attempted to enter into the media world. He uploaded his video on Yue Fei, the patriotic general in the Song Dynasty, on September 18, 2008, the 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the start of the anti-Japanese war.

Han: Then I put it online. Internet is pretty good too [comparing with television], it's a spreading channel. I chose September 18. It was the Olympic Games before the date, and attention could be less if you put it on during the Games.

Me: You mean attention of media or netizen?

Han: Netizens, I didn't expect media would pay attention to me.

(Interview with Han Jiangxue, June 2, 2010)

By putting his video online, Han hoped that the timing and the patriotic sentiment in his video could draw netizens' attention in cyberspace, which promises ordinary people the opportunity of being heard. However, he admitted that viewership of his videos in the early days after uploading was very poor.

His efforts to get into the sacred media world under the guide of a constructed reality by the whole media environment stopped here. I will discuss later what happened to him and his video when I examine how some Shanzhai productions successfully entered the media world and became sacred with the joint help of various media. Here I will provide another example of Shanzhai producers using media in a ritualistic way, to pursue the serious life experience of the Spring Festival.

### ***The Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala***

The Spring Festival celebrates the new year of the lunar calendar. It is usually around early February. It is the most important holiday every year in Chinese communities worldwide. During Spring Festivals, people usually go back to their hometowns for a family reunion. The family reunion, the dinner on the Spring Festival Eve, as well as lion dancing or fireworks depending on areas, are almost compulsory and ritualistic.

Since 1983, a new ritual has been introduced with the popularization of television in Chinese families. On New Year's Eve of 1983, CCTV aired its first *Spring Festival Gala*. It has been presented ever since, and the viewership of this show always dominates on that evening. Zhao (1998) argued that it had become a national ritual to indoctrinate a national ideology and to unite the nation around it. Zhao's analysis, from

the ritual communication perspective, is Durkheimian which focuses on the integrative power of the symbolically presented values in the media. However, in recent years, there has been more and more criticism over the lack of creativity, the over-commercialization, and the bold ideological labels in the CCTV galas. In the criticism, it is hard to say that people are still taking the symbolic construction of national ideologies in these media events as natural. However, the way that people celebrate the Spring Festival with a gala featuring songs, dance, comedies, etc. are not questioned as much.

As Lao Meng said:

I watched the *Spring Festival Gala*, and I thought why not make one myself. I can set up my camera, and with a net cord, I can live broadcast it. I thought it could be fun. I would make it in the form of the *Spring Festival Gala*, but it's open, anybody can come, and anybody can watch it. Its nature is not much different from that of the *Spring Festival Gala*. Do you call it "folk," or mass? Neither is right, then only Shanzhai is the most appropriate. (Interview with Lao Meng, May 28, 2010)

Apparently, Lao Meng didn't take the Spring Festival gala as a holiday ritual in the Durkheimian sense that it promotes certain values, but he did see it as integrative with the help of the Internet. The television *Spring Festival Gala* as a patterned behavior is a ritual in the sense that it has become *the* way to celebrate the Spring Festival. Thus, Lao Meng's attempt of making a televised gala himself to celebrate the Spring Festival emerges from an unquestioned cultural experience of the television versions of the *Spring Festival Gala*, although constructed by media throughout the years.

The difference between the *Spring Festival Gala* and the *Lecture Show* is that the *Spring Festival Gala* is not and has never attempted to be a reality show in the sense that it opens access to ordinary people, even symbolically. The *Spring Festival Gala* is

always strictly guarded and well prepared as an important national event. Every year around October, the news about selecting the general director of the gala within CCTV comes out. Usually, only prestigious and nationally well-known artists qualify for an audition. There are increasingly more young professional performers featured in the galas in recent years; however, well-established artists are still the mainstay. Stories about round after round of auditions are tracked by media ranging from CCTV itself to metropolitan newspapers and entertainment websites. The famous charge against Zhao An, the director of four years' of the *Spring Festival Galas*, of his corruption vis-à-vis program selection for the galas a few years ago, further breached the boundary between the media world and the ordinary world (2003).

Lao Meng, from the beginning of his idea of a Shanzhai gala, didn't even try to enter the CCTV gala like Han Jiangxue did with the *CCTV Lecture Show*. But Lao Meng carried this ritualistic way of celebration to cyberspace, the same as Han, where, as Lao Meng said, "anybody can come and anybody can watch it." A performer in the second Shanzhai gala, Informant No. 7, said "I couldn't go home last Spring Festival and I don't like the CCTV's gala which is too far from the people in the street. I think joining the Shanzhai gala is a good way to celebrate it with the netizens and good for myself [in terms of career]."

Some performers that I interviewed also expressed their preference for the Internet as a medium for ordinary people to have fun, to express themselves, or even to get famous. Informant No. 8, a high school music teacher preparing for his graduate school exams in Beijing, attended the second Shanzhai gala. He said, "If you work in an



art circle, you always want some stage to show yourself. Is this kind of grassroots activity more suitable for me? I think so”.

Thus, the Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala is prescribed by a trans-media ritual because, first, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala ritualizes the way people celebrate the holiday eve and, second, the Internet provides a space for ordinary people to symbolically access the media world. Although the two galas are very different in terms of production quality, media channels, and participants, both of them reflect, and also reinforce, the way contemporary Chinese people celebrate the Spring Festival. This way is laden with rich cultural meanings of this holiday and constitutes the cultural experience of the people. In this sense, Shanzhai gala is not simply imitating a show, but participating in a cultural performance of the Spring Festival, or a ritual.

### ***Shanzhai Red Mansions***

*The Dream of Red Mansions*, also translated as *The Story of the Stone* or *The Dream of Red Chambers*, is one of the four great classic novels in China. It was written by Cao Xueqin in the mid-18th century in the Qing Dynasty. The plot is developed on the ebb and flow of two branches of the Jia clan which reside in two large, adjacent family compounds in the capital of the Qing Dynasty, now Beijing. This work has been adapted into multiple media formats and genres since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ranging from multiple versions of movies to television series and Shaosing opera, a local art form popular in the Zhejiang and Shanghai areas. Most of the early adaptations were created either before the founding of the People’s Republic of China in Shanghai or by movie studios and televisions stations based in Hong Kong or Taiwan. The version most well-

known to the mainland audience is the television series of the *Red Mansions* produced by a studio affiliated with CCTV in 1987. It was one of the most popular television dramas in the 1980s and created a collective memory for that generation of Chinese (Zeng & Hao, 1997).

In 2005, Beijing Television Station decided to remake the TV series of the *Red Mansions* and, not surprisingly in this media environment, they decided to select some important actors/actresses for this new show with a reality show contest. The reality show was called *Honglou Meng Zhong Ren (People in the Dream of Red Mansions)*. The crew members surveyed 250,000 students in artistic majors of 93 colleges and professional schools nationwide. In the end, together with these semi-professional participants, 400,000 people auditioned in ten regional contests starting from October 2006 through March 2007. The final contests of each area were broadcast between January and March 2007, and their 67 finalists entered the final contest held in Beijing in late March 2007. Since then, all the final contests had been regularly broadcast as a reality show featuring both expert judges and netizens' votes. The final episode of this reality show was broadcast on June 9, 2007, and 9 people were finally chosen for three roles in the new *Red Mansions*. After this reality show, there was never a lack of news on the progress of the actual shooting until the show's debut on September 2, 2010.

The story of ordinary people being selected as one of the lead actors in an important show, shown in intensive and extensive coverage in various media outlets, reinforced the naturalness and ordinariness of the media world while the boundary between the ordinary and the media worlds are well disguised by the "reality" show. The

connection seems so natural and real that it becomes a belief that leads to people's ritualized behavior in their everyday lives. The Shanzhai *Red Mansions* is one of these examples.

In 2008 during the Spring Festival, Chen Weishi, a college student spending his winter break with family members, decided to shoot a clip of the *Red Mansions* for fun because "the excessively hyped new *Red Mansions* didn't suit his taste at all" (Xiao, 2008). Chen's cousin playing Daiyu, a major role in the novel, said "all my families love the original work. We didn't like the new *Red Mansions*, it was too fashionable. My cousin knows video editing stuff. We figured if they [the reality show of *People in the Dream of Red Mansions*] can play the *Red Mansions*, why can't we?" (Interview with Chen Weishi's sister, June 15, 2010). This quote could be well interpreted as the grassroots make-do with the Internet to challenge authority. However, with the reference to ordinary people in that reality show and since they chose the Internet to present their own version of the *Red Mansions*, their Shanzhai production falls into the media rituals where ordinary people attempt to enter the media world and to get an opportunity of expression on the Internet (Q. Wu & Li, 2008).

The previous examples illustrated how ordinary people are influenced not by a single media text, but by a trans-media ritual that is repeatedly performed for them in news and reality shows as well as through Internet participation, which prescribe a way to use media based on certain cultural beliefs. Couldry's five dimensions of the naturalization of media power all manifest in the Shanzhai cases: framing, ordering, naming, spacing, and imagining (2000). First, the trans-media ritual consists of

“framing” specific media presentations into a socially shared, serious belief rooted in life experience, such as ordinary people becoming celebrities (or entering the media world) or celebrating the Spring Festival with a mediated gala. The trans-media ritual also consists of the Internet’s promise of equal access, a cyber reality show for ordinary people. Second, the lecture show and news reports “name” themselves as fact announcers. The announced factuality both naturalizes and consolidates media’s authority as the symbolic center of our society. Third, people also “order” the media reality as “higher” than their quotidian life, and thus arduously align theirs to the mediated, trans-media presentation. Fourth, the Shanzhai producers’ emotional and affective investment in their productions reflects the “imagining” dimension. They deeply believe in the factuality and the higher status of the trans-media presentations vis-à-vis their everyday life. Fifth, however, the success of their attempts still depends on the “spacing” mechanism which separates the media world and the ordinary world. If they could be incorporated into the media world, then they become the successful ordinary people, which, in turn, reinforce the social reality show and the Internet’s promise. Indeed, they succeeded.

### **Shanzhai Becomes Sacred**

By being covered in various media, the producers of the three cases, largely to their own surprise, became media persons. They, although portrayed as ordinary people, joined other media stories to reinforce the trans-media reality show and further suggest the route for other ordinary people to live their everyday lives. In this section, I will illustrate three types of evidence that attest to the Shanzhai cultural production’s power

to present itself as a socially shared, but mediated, reality. They appeared to be ordinary and natural, but are indeed a part of the larger trans-media, trans-genre ritual.

First, the stories of Shanzhai producers and their productions are picked up by powerful media, and Shanzhai producers are granted the celebrity status as well as the corresponding symbolic power to comment on, or construct, the social reality. Han Jiangxue's Shanzhai *Lecture Show* videos didn't go viral on their own. After being rejected by the CCTV *Lecture Show*, Han put his video in the video-log service at www.sina.com, a leading Chinese portal website, on September 18, 2008. However, it didn't draw much attention in the first few days. On October 5, Yan Chongnian, a famous speaker at the CCTV *Lecture Show*, was slapped by a reader at a book-signing event in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, allegedly for Yan's sympathy for Manchurian abuse of Han people during the Qing Dynasty. Sina.com put a link of Han Jiangxue's Shanzhai *Lecture Show* beside the news and gave the series video the title of "Grassroots challenges cultural domination."<sup>5</sup> Han admitted that since that day, the viewership of his videos spiked, and he got many interview requests from various news media nationwide. Han told me:

[The title] was "Grassroots challenges cultural domination." They [sina.com] named it. My father asked me how they were cultural domination. Media like to stir up something and engage the two sides in a big fight. Then the *Chengdu Trade News* entitled me "Shanzhai." At first Shanzhai meant bad quality and fake, and later it meant folk. Then I felt, whatever, whatever you media want to call it. (Interview with Han Jiangxue, May 31, 2010)

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<sup>5</sup> The Chinese title given by sina.com should be "Grassroots challenges cultural hegemony" if translated literally. However, hegemony connotes consensus on the ideology of the dominant group, rather than by force. The Chinese phrase "wenhua baquan" does not imply consensus, but rather infers the domination of mainstream culture in major media channels. I therefore translate *wenhua baquan* into cultural domination rather than cultural hegemony.

From this moment on, Han, being reported by many media and with his video going viral, entered a trans-media reality show that featured him as an ordinary person who challenges the established power, symbolically. Like the “immediate buzz” Sue Collins (2008) described, Han also received news interviews, and invitations for talk show appearances and online lecture shows. In addition to numerous visits from journalist every day, he was also invited to a few talk shows on television stations and websites where he met the other celebrities rising from the *CCTV Lecture Show* that he admired. He also met with other Shanzhai personalities there. He was asked to comment on broader topics beyond his own production, from Shanzhai culture to cultural innovation, to the structure of discourse power in contemporary Chinese society. These Shanzhai producers are celebrities in the sense that they are granted the authority to comment on broader social issues. However, they are presented as ordinary people to blur the boundary between the media world and the ordinary world. This blur, in turn, disguises the media power in a ritualistic way.

Lao Meng’s story was first reported by the *Jinghua Times*, a metropolitan newspaper in Beijing. A reader of the *Jinghua Times* spotted Lao Meng’s mini-van with the slogan “Challenge CCTV, wish the people a happy Spring Festival.” After being reported by the *Jinghua Times*, his story immediately spread online and drew the media’s attention nationwide. A symbolic picture first appearing in *Southern Weekend* was widely circulated online and carried in multiple newspapers. In this picture, Lao Meng stood beside his old-model van with the inflammatory slogan running across the van’s body. In the background was the newly built modern building of CCTV’s

headquarter as if looking down and weighing on Lao Meng and his van in the lower part of the picture. Lao Meng was portrayed as a grassroots challenger to the powerful CCTV. Since Lao Meng has made two galas on two consecutive Spring Festivals and the preparation of each lasts for two to three months, the news coverage on him and his shows was continuous and extensive. I will specifically examine the discursive construction of Shanzhai production in Chapter four. Here I simply present the fact that there were 79 news articles retrieved just on Lao Meng's two productions in 2009 and 2010 in 11 popular newspapers. All these news stories constitute a live social reality show about an ordinary person, though Lao Meng had already been a media personality at this point and had successfully challenged the dominant power to achieve his own goals or, in other words, he had been turned into the extraordinary.

The same as Han Jiangxue, Lao Meng was also invited as a celebrity to attend talk shows, to be asked to comment on larger issues beyond the Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*. In fact, he was so famous that he used his symbolic power to leverage with government officials and commercial sponsors which I will elaborate in the next chapter on Shanzhai producers' strategies. However, Lao Meng's capitalizing on his celebrity status is part of the power that a media person has to construct a favorable reality, not representative of the ordinary world, but appearing to be ordinary.

The family who cast themselves in their Shanzhai *Red Mansions* also became celebrities, though to a lesser extent than Han Jiangxue and Lao Meng, at least judging from the number of their news reports. Although, Chen's cousin, the actor who portrayed Daiyu, was also invited to an audition for a movie (S. Zhou, 2008).

Second, their sacred status as media people is not only constructed and confirmed by media reports, but also by their own deeds as “performances” in accordance with the way they are “supposed to be.” Han published a few blog posts after he was labeled as the grassroots challenging cultural domination. On October 10, 2008, he posted “What is cultural domination?” where he apparently fit himself into the media discourse and sided with the young man who slapped Yan Chongnian, not for his deeds, but for his rebellion against established cultural power. He said:

What is cultural domination? It is that only you can say something, while I can't...To exculpate for that reader, I don't think the one he slapped was Yan Chongnian, but the cultural domination, the power, in order to find a way to express opinions. (J. Han, 2008)

Even though Han admitted that he didn't think of “that layer of meaning” as challenging cultural domination before his video was linked to Sina.com's news homepage, he still made such a remark as if it were his own real and original opinion in the blog. This is written by Han himself, not scripted by the media; however, it is nonetheless a performance to fit Han's role as a grassroots hero.

Lao Meng's performance is even more interesting in the sense that he partly saw through the social construction of his celebrity but had to ride the tide and perform to the end. Because each of his two productions, especially the first one, stretched for a couple of months during which many unexpected obstacles occurred, ranging from a government ban to sponsorship withdrawal and disputes with actors, he had experienced enough of the unnaturalness of an ordinary person labeled as a grassroots hero. He told me:



I didn't expect it to become so big. You are pushed by a lot of things, step by step. You ended up with some position you've never thought of. I thought of giving up in the process, because there were moments when I really felt that I couldn't handle as a person in the street. But I couldn't [give up]. You know, dozens of people were working on this on voluntary basis, news reports were everywhere. I really thought I'd be an example for grassroots, and if I quit, I'd disappoint a lot of people. (Interview with Lao Meng, May 28, 2010)

Thus, part of Lao Meng's persistence in the gala productions was a performance of the role as a grassroots model. He repeatedly thought of quitting when the boundary between the media world and the ordinary world was so hard to cross. However, he went the distance and performed as a Shanzhai producer who looked, as well as was reported to be, very natural to outsiders. He, or more precisely the reports about him, reinforced the media rituals of, first, an ordinary person achieving extraordinary things on the Internet, second, celebrating the Spring Festival with a televised gala.

Chen Weishi and his family crew also performed to meet the expectations of netizens in their role as grassroots celebrities. Shortly after Chen's videos were reported and went viral, Chen gave a name to the family crew, "Flower not Flower," and created a blog to release updates of their productions. Because many people liked Chen's cousin's performance in the videos, they decided to continue to shoot the third episode during his cousin's next winter break. He also tried to make the productions more professional and even wrote continuity scripts for later episodes. More importantly, Chen even extended an invitation to netizens to compete for the role of Jia Baoyu, a male lead character in the *Red Mansions*. Since he is already an exemplar ordinary person in the news report, the reality-show-style invitation for public auditions can be suitably seen as a performance to confirm both his celebrity status and the replicability

of his own story of an ordinary person turning into a celebrity. In other words, it confirms both the sacred status of him and his story, a trans-media reality.

The third type of evidence to illustrate the sacred status of Shanzhai is through people's "ordering" activities (Couldry, 2000). Couldry called the distinction between a shared social experience and the private quotidian life as a hierarchy with the media world prioritized "ordering." It is a way to consolidate the media power in a ritualistic way, and often times, it is reflected in people's daily talk and their attitudes toward the media world. I distinguish this type of evidence from the previous two types because those analyzed previously mainly come from Shanzhai producers' appearances and performances in media. It is a validation from within the media world. The evidence here mostly reflected other ordinary viewers' discourse and activity that order Shanzhai producers' celebrity higher than the ordinary world. This ordering dimension makes their celebrity more natural.

After the Shanzhai lecture show, the Shanzhai gala, and the Shanzhai *Red Mansions*, there are many other Shanzhai producers who produced their own online lecture shows on various topics. However, I wouldn't argue that there's a chain of influences of the media ritual from the original trans-media ritual to these famous Shanzhai producers and their productions as other trans-media rituals, then to further attempts of similar productions. When the famous Shanzhai producers and their online productions entered the media world, they become a part of the already-existing trans-media ritual and reinforced it. Later imitators lived in the media environment saturated

with all these stories. The trans-media ritual, with their joining, just became ever more impressive and convincing, or from the audience perspective, more real.

It is hard to survey the Internet to exhaust similar productions and to interview all the producers to prove the connection between the trans-media ritual and later productions. However, since the stories of the CCTV *Lecture Show* speakers, those of the CCTV Spring Festival gala, and those of the reality show of actor selections of *Red Mansions*, as well as stories about these famous Shanzhai productions, are so ubiquitous, circulating in different media and presented in different genres, it is safe to say that later producers are also living in the same trans-media ritual that keeps getting more real. At least three types of discursive evidence can suggest the influence of the trans-media ritual of the early Shanzhai productions on later ones. First, many productions are named after a Shanzhai version that is apparently under the influence of media coverage on Shanzhai. Second, some later producers' blogs analogized their production to the three famous Shanzhai productions, or compared themselves with those early producers (Jiang, 2008). Third, many later productions that went viral were shared and labeled as Shanzhai by other netizens. There are the Shanzhai *Zijia Jiangtan* [Self Lectures], the Shanzhai *Lvlin Jiangtan* [*Forest Outlaws' Lectures*], Mou Guiling's Shanzhai Lecture Show, the Shanzhai lecture show on Chinese characters, the campus version Shanzhai *Shuihu*, the Shanzhai *Sanguo*, the Shanzhai *Xiyouji*, the Shenzhen Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*, the Zhongyuan Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*, etc.

Other than the discursive confirmation of Shanzhai's ritual power, people also carried out activities that confirmed the higher social status of the Shanzhai productions.

After the Shanzhai *Red Mansions* was reported by various media, the director of the new television series of *Red Mansions*, for which the actor-selection reality show was held, visited the family crew of the Shanzhai *Red Mansions*. Unlike Han Jiangxue having the chance to go to meet the CCTV *Lecture Show* speakers, Chen's family was paid a visit by other famous people. In Couldry's theorization (2003b), this may be seen as a pilgrimage which confirms the Shanzhai producers' distinction from the ordinary world. The symbolic significance of this visit is that it confirmed Chen and his family's celebrity status, though they are still portrayed by media as ordinary as everyone else. With the media reports of it, this visit contributes to the already-existing trans-media ritual of Shanzhai.

One more example of people's ordering of Shanzhai producers as more important than themselves happens in the Shanzhai gala. Informant No. 6, a performer in the second Shanzhai gala, found that one of the differences between the two Shanzhai galas was that the first one featured a lot more grassroots performers while the second gala received a lot of applications from professional performers. She said, "Many young people in artistic majors, many of them. What's weird is that now quite a few of those in the [professional] troupes like the Navy's Art Troupe or the Air Force's Art Troupe came to him [Lao Meng] and wanted to get in" (Interview with Informant No. 6, 2010). Shanzhai as a now-legitimate way of cultural production is confirmed by the recognition of those in the mainstream who have more access to the traditionally legitimate channels. This informant also cited an incident where one of the sponsors insisted on taking a picture with her after her audition because she "will appear in the show and

become famous.” She said, “after the audition, some investor [sponsors] came to take pictures with me. I am not a celebrity, why take a picture with me?” Even though she didn’t recognize herself as a celebrity, she’s apparently recognized by other people as having turned into a media person from an ordinary person.

Thus, with the three types of evidences presented above, it can be argued that Shanzhai has become sacred in the eyes of many ordinary people, and is apparently seen as the “supposed-to-be” reality which guides people’s actions and reactions in everyday life.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I argued that Shanzhai can be seen as an example of media ritual which is based on the coordination of multiple media channels and media genres. It is a way in which ordinary people attempt to enter the media world guided by the social reality constructed in the trans-media narratives. At the same time, some successful Shanzhai cases that became a part of the media world reinforced the trans-media ritual to further pattern ordinary people’s media uses for their own ends.

To make this argument, I first reviewed factual media genres and their relationships to the society from a ritual perspective. News as a factual genre presents a convincing social reality, often live, to the public. At the time, people use news to monitor the social environment, and they are also oriented to a shared belief of social reality which in turn patterns people’s behavior. There are many techniques in news production to preserve the naturalness of the social reality presented by news such as professional objectivity. They serve to disguise the boundary between the media world

and the ordinary world, hence concealing the power of media exerted on people's life experience.

Popular factual genres ranging from docu-soap to reality game shows are more powerful in the sense that they are popular entertainment, and they feature ordinary people in the media world. The entering of ordinary people into the media world further conceals media power to represent/construct the social reality which, in a highly mediated society, becomes the totality of ordinary people's life experience. The opportunities given to ordinary people to participate, as Couldry argues (2008), substitute for political democracy and threaten the delivery of people's voices. Ways of constructing the hierarchy between the media world and the ordinary one include framing, ordering, naming, spacing, and imagining, which all are evidenced in the Shanzhai phenomenon.

Internet participation and media convergence further provide the entry point of the media world for ordinary people to try on. The Internet is not guarded as strictly as traditional media, thus theoretically everybody has "equal" access to it, considering the issue of digital divide is often ignored. Then ordinary people's participation in the media world via the Internet, either by voting for reality shows or by uploading videos, consolidates the shared social experience of equality and possibility. What is more, the rise of lottery celebrities (Andrejevic, 2004) in Internet participation and, more broadly, in the media convergence finally highlights the democratic nature of the Internet and reinforced people's ritualistic use of it. But at the same time, the boundary between the media world and the ordinary world is further naturalized, so is the media power.

Then, I analyzed two phases of Shanzhai cultural production from a ritual perspective. The first phase is early Shanzhai producers' uses of the Internet under the influence of an existing trans-media ritual. Han Jiangxue saw the rise of ordinary intellectuals on the CCTV *Lecture Show* presented in multiple media and genres as a convincing reality and took advantage of the Internet's open access to try to live this reality personally. Lao Meng, based on the media ritual of the *Spring Festival Gala*, tried to create a Shanzhai gala online. He is both restricted in the ritualistic way of celebrating the Spring Festival with a gala and the ritualistic use of the Internet for migrant workers. Chen Weishi's family shot the Shanzhai version *Red Mansions* based on the belief that anybody can perform it, inspired by the reality show of actor selection for the remake of the *Red Mansions* television series. Chen put his video online to practice the serious belief that ordinary people can be featured in media.

Shanzhai didn't become a sensation, itself a sacred social reality, until they were picked up in trans-media coverage. They are reported in various media, the producers are invited as a media person to comment on broader social issues, they are paid a pilgrimage by both ordinary people and media people, which is also covered in the media. More importantly, the fact that there are later productions by ordinary people that discursively connect themselves to Shanzhai and also are connected to Shanzhai further confirmed Shanzhai as a social reality, a shared belief, and a prescribed pattern of media use on the societal level. For later Shanzhai producers, early producers' stories are like trans-media reality shows which are too real to question. With the joining of later

Shanzhai producers, Shanzhai cultural production is turned into a self-reinforcing trans-media ritual.

Thus, media, and their convergence, propagate certain ways of behaviors and thinking to govern people from a distance. Foucault's enclosed institutions such as prisons and hospitals become the converging and total media environment. The converging media system can be seen as the surveillance assemblages that serve as both panopticons and synopticons that selectively construct a social reality. People living in the mediated reality are oriented to a sense of shared social beliefs which are associated with a certain social order.

As Ouellette and Hay argue (2008), seeing media in an analytic of government helps us understand the relationship, as well as the convergence, between media and society. On the one hand, the media indoctrinate beliefs about the possibility of ordinary people's lives through the converging and constructed social reality. The beliefs highlight possibility, equality, democracy, and the disinterested chances of social mobility. Thus, media promote the mentality of pursuing personal goals with hardworking, self-improvement, and self-reliance, a neoliberal rationality. However, the structural inequality in the contemporary society is defused by the "real" stories of ordinary people getting self-actualized through the patterned media uses. The exemplar Shanzhai producers, often times presented as grassroots challenging the dominant, provide a non-representative reality of powerful ordinary people symbolically, which could disguise structural and yet substantial marginalization of grassroots people, like Shanzhai producers. The freedom and democracy ordinary people have, as presented in



the trans-media reality shows, “is not the opposite of control but is a matter of how one controls oneself by exercising freedom ‘correctly’ through various technologies and rules of self-governance” (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 15). The media ritual perspective provided explicates the cultural mechanism of the internalization of this rationality as a serious life experience, as unquestioned social reality. It explains the process of “learning and mastering ‘the rules’ of individual and group governance” (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 4). On the other hand, the media ritual also prescribes specific ways of using media to pursue these personal goals as disciplines. There could be other creative ways to exercise the neoliberal mentality to carry out their personal life projects. However, the trans-media ritual formulated specific media uses as the way to live a reality. In other words, there is a co-existence of both discipline and governmentality in the case of Shanzhai to exercise power over the people, to govern the society from a distance, through media.

I should clarify that the notion of power in Couldry’s media power and in Foucault’s formulation are not exactly the same. When I use the phrase “media power” drawing from Couldry’s works, the power refers to media’s cultural authority to present a certain reality and to orient people to the beliefs of it. In the Foucauldian sense, this power doesn’t exist until people internalize the beliefs as the logical basis for their actions and carry out the actions to live their lives. Thus, people are not disciplined or governed by media per se, but rather by their internalization of the disciplines and mentality that are represented, reproduced, and reinforced in the convergence of media.

By theorizing Shanzhai as a trans-media ritual, I concentrated on the construction of social reality and its maintenance on the macro social level. However, there are three points I would caution readers against. First, ordinary people, including Shanzhai producers, are not dupes. The media power is breached from time to time and it does raise people's suspicions, especially for those who actually involved in Shanzhai productions. And this suspicion, seemingly directed toward the media, actually jeopardizes their internalization of the patterned media uses and the DIY mentality. Second, the ritualized media participation does meet some of the Shanzhai producers' ends, ranging from personal expression to entertainment, though they could still be picked up by the trans-media environment to as representative of the social reality even though they are not. Third, the relationship between media and government in China is quite different from that in the Western world. The situation is further complicated by China's opening up and reform that brought much hybridity in its media system. In the next chapter, I will look into the strategies that Shanzhai producers used to carve out a space for their own ends, vis-à-vis both the government and the commercial media and sponsors.

## CHAPTER IV

### STRATEGIES IN SHANZHAI PRACTICES

In the previous chapter, I argued that Shanzhai practices reflect the ritualistic uses of media for the participants' own purposes. The *Spring Festival Gala* was imitated by Lao Meng and his grassroots followers because it is *the* way to celebrate the lunar New Year's Day cultivated by the CCTV's galas over the past two decades. Han Jiangxue imitated CCTV's *Lecture Show* because he saw the stories of ordinary scholars turned into celebrities by this show as real and representative of ordinary life, like a reality show. The family shot the Shanzhai *Red Mansions* because they were inspired by the reality show that auditioned ordinary people for the reproduction of the television version of *Red Mansions*. What is more, putting their amateur videos online also reflects the serious belief that the Internet is a democratic stage for everybody. It provides equal opportunity for everybody to pursue their life projects with their personal efforts. Thus, Shanzhai culture, from imitating the original television shows to the online display of the Shanzhai videos to the further imitators inspired by early Shanzhai producers, is largely based on the ritualistic, and nevertheless constructed, belief of media's roles in the society. They reflect the media-prescribed ways to live ordinary lives, which exercise both disciplinary power and governmentality in the contemporary Chinese society.

In these ritualistically patterned media uses, people pursue their own different ends. Their views of media and the meanings of their uses reflect the social spaces they occupy. These different social spaces, or habituses as Bourdieu called them, are also

generative in the sense that they allow actors to carry out actions and reactions. These actors are autonomous subjects, not just agents, though within a certain structure (McRobbie, 2005). Thus, it will be fruitful to examine the strategic and tactical actions and reactions that various parties employed, in the production, distribution, and regulation of Shanzhai online videos, so that the power dynamics in China's media system and, more broadly, the governance and resistance in the society through media could be mapped out.

### **Media Strategies and Social Changes in China**

There have been discussions on the strategies that different social actors use in responses to the changes of the Chinese media landscape. The Chinese government has initiated a series of strategies to consolidate its control over media as well as to facilitate development of the media sector in face of foreign competition. First, the Chinese government initiated a commercialization process in the state media sector in hope of reinvigorating media sector as an economy stimulus and a competent competitor in a more open market. In the 1990s, China carried out a series of attempts to commercialize some newspapers, the television production sector, and radio stations by allowing entry of domestic private capital, by restructuring media's advertisement sectors, reducing subsidies, and allowing more autonomy in personnel management in media (Y. Zhao, 1998). Later, in face of the accession to the WTO and the opening of the publishing sector to foreign competitors, Chinese started a new round of media commercialization (Sun, 2004). Publishing houses and party presses conglomerated to establish stronger media groups, under the direct arrangement of various levels of governments. However,

the achievements of the conglomeration strategy are ambiguous as Sun argued. Secondly, in dealing with the non-state-owned media, a cultural hegemonic norm is promoted while economic containment is carried out by the Chinese government. Weber and Lu (2007) studied the implementation of self-regulation in China's Internet sector, which is mostly commercialized. They found that the "trust-building" strategy was used to secure the government's cultural leadership and its economic benefits in China's Internet. Other than promoting a hegemonic norm with self-regulation, the Chinese government also uses economic containment. For example, to prepare for the handover of Hong Kong and Macau, as Lee witnessed (1997), mainland-based companies were ordered by the Chinese government to advertise favorably on pro-China media in Hong Kong and Macau. On the one hand, this helped those pro-China media in Hong Kong and Macau survive the 1997 economic crisis of Southeast Asia. On the other hand, this strategy successfully contained radical critical discourses against China, if not successfully promoting the favorable ones.

At the same time, media are carrying out their own strategies to survive in the new political economic context too. Under the government's hegemonic strategies, "strategic ambiguity" and "intensified objectivity" are increasingly found in Hong Kong media vis-à-vis the Chinese state power (Fung, 2007). To avoid involvement in the political struggle between Hong Kong locals and Chinese authority, those newspapers that have large advertisement revenues from and circulations in mainland China tried to be very objective and neutral. However, this didn't help diversify opinions in Hong Kong as Fung argued. On the mainland, commercial media such as metropolitan newspapers

enthusiastically embrace the Western journalistic values (Yuezhi Zhao, 2008). Even state mouthpiece media journalists are experiencing the struggle between a Marxist journalist model and the Western one (Chan, et al., 2004).

Online media also have adopted various strategies. Self-censorship is a common and effective one (Harwit & Clark, 2001; Tsui, 2003). Scholars found that ICPs conducted self-censorship, on the one hand actively, to secure their business legitimacy in mainland China, a vast market for commercial companies, and on the other hand passively, to succumb to a panoptical surveillance of the government. However, there are also companies like Google which openly challenged the Chinese government's Internet policies (Helft & Barboza, 2010).

It seems theorization of strategies is bifurcated. When scholars look at the strategies of state authority or transnational corporations, only the structuring influences on other actors are usually in the foreground. When scholars look at audience/Internet users, local, small businesses, and their strategies, the tactics in de Certeau's terms (De Certeau, 2002), are usually defensive, reactive, and often-times idealist, such as poaching meanings and forming fan communities to construct their own narratives (Hebdige, 1979; Jenkins, 1992).

The first research question in this chapter asks what are the strategies different parties employ in the process of Shanzhai production, distribution and regulation? I will try to avoid the demarcation between structural strategies and subjective tactics, but examine the political, economic and cultural power relationships as a totality as advocated by Mosco (2009).

In terms of the broader impacts of the strategies, which reveal the changed power dynamics in the media system, there are two essentialized tendencies. One celebrates the liberalization and democratization of media diversification and new media technologies, while the other frowns on more panoptical surveillances. I have laid out in the Chapter two the context of general economic reform, and the commercial reforms, specifically in China's media system. These reforms are initiated, led, and also regulated by the governments at various levels. They lead to structural social changes in terms of domestic population migration, multiplying of media channels, and a cultural turn from orthodox Marxist ideology to consumerism justified with the "Socialist Market Economy". Seeing these changes as chain reactions, some scholars optimistically celebrate the liberalization and democratization of Chinese society. Those who focus on economic changes celebrate commercialization and globalization as a force of eroding the state's authoritarian power. Giese (2004) argued that "by subdivision into particular fields of interest and topics, the fragmented nature of this highly commercialized network [the Internet] in China provided individuals with ample space for self-realization" (p.23). In addition, the accession to the WTO is also seen as an irresistible force promoting development of the freedom of the press (Sun, 2004, p. 125). Others who study broader social realms attribute some regulatory changes and even legislative amendments to the spill-over of changes in the media system. As documented by Yuezhi Zhao, it was the series of investigative reports conducted by metropolitan newspapers in southern China and the online discussions around them that pushed the mistreatment of migrant workers into public debates and eventually led to the abolishment of the old

shelter and repatriation rules. It is the combination of Internet-wide critiques by Chinese netizens and reports by some liberal media that finally forced the Ministry of Industry and Informatization to withdraw the requirement of mandatory installation of a malicious information filter, the Green Dam (Chao & Feng, 2010).

Some of those who focus on the communication system itself also celebrate changes optimistically. The technical nature of new media is seen as contributive to more evenly distributed media access and to subverting government restrictions (Kluver, 2001). Cartier and her colleagues (Cartier, Castells, & Qiu, 2005; J. Qiu, 2008) found that cheaper technologies designed to incorporate those information-have-less are empowering, though far from equalizing access. Specific new media applications are also theorized as liberal. Esarey and Qiang (2008) studied the subtle forms of political expressions in China's blogosphere. They found that strategies such as political satires in blogs allowed netizens to make sophisticated critiques of the government without harsh repression. Giese (2004) prefers the analogy of BBS to a "speech corner," rather than Bentham's panopticon. Though he recognized the limited potential of China's Internet to pose a serious challenge to the Communist Party, he saw the Internet as an increasingly important substitute for the traditional social institutions, such as the *danwei* or the working units, as a model for social identification and a framework for interpersonal reference. More broadly, Li (2003) even predicted the demise of propaganda in the face of the Internet in China. He sees the loss of "much control over information and image that circulate through Chinese society" as a failure of China's effort to control the Internet and other new media.



Meanwhile, there are also counter-arguments on the social and political implication of China's economic reform and new media development. Hughes and Wacker (2003) argued that the Internet is not likely to be the cause of significant social change, though it's not politically irrelevant either. They argued

[A]s long as the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] propaganda department and the SARFT [State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television], its media extension, exist, the single-party system in the PRC [People's Republic of China] will remain a hindrance to plan to make ICT an engine for economic growth. This is because the CCP views control over the media as vital for its survival at a time when economic liberalization is bringing a host of new challenges, including the treat of social unrest as foreign competition throws millions out of work. (p.98)

Meng (2009) critiqued the celebratory views of social changes in China by pointing out that the democratizing discourse of economic development and ICTs was trapped in the following three pitfalls. First, those optimistic scholars assume that the market and the state are inherently in conflict. Yet they neglect the fact that the Socialist Market Economy reform in China is a top-down process initiated by the state, and it actually contributes to the legitimacy of the party-state. So commercialization doesn't necessarily challenge the state power. Instead they might work in collaboration. Second, optimistic scholars usually suggest a monolithic state agency, ignoring the conflict of interest among various state and provincial agencies. Third, the liberal-democratic framework is based upon a more or less romantic notion of the market being an autonomous and inclusive sphere.

Jens Damm (2007) neatly summarized this debate. He distinguished three discourses on the Internet, or more broadly ICT development, in China. The first one is the Western mainstream Liberation Discourse. It assumes that technologies help liberate

China, promote democracy, and create the civil society. However, in this view, agencies are deliberately reduced to two: the state and the user. The role played by the major Chinese companies in shaping the Internet is neglected. The second discourse is the Control Discourse. Disillusioned scholars tend to interpret every single action taken by the Chinese authorities as “crackdown” and as censorship. The third discourse is actively taken by various agencies within China, the Leap-Frogging Discourse. The government, media, Internet companies, and even many users astonishingly emphasize the development of the infrastructure and new technology as a catch-up strategy in China’s modernization process, ignoring the power relationships in this process.

When new media uses are seen as a cultural form, a similar debate exists. Fiske (1989) summarized two directions in studying popular culture. One is celebratory, a democratic vision of elite humanism, without talking about power; while the other emphasizes the power of the dominant. In the latter view, mass culture produces a “quiescent passive mass of people” (p.20). Hence, Fiske argued against any attempt at essentializing popular culture as either a carnival or an order. This caution applies to my study of Shanzhai online video, both as a political economic struggle and a popular culture phenomenon, both as governance of the society through media and resistance to the governance.

Thus, my second research question is how the strategies available to different parties involved in the Shanzhai culture influence the actors’ positions and power in the larger social structure? In other words, what are the implications of Shanzhai as a media phenomenon on contemporary Chinese society?

Shanzhai provides an ideal site to observe the power dynamics for several reasons. First, it involves multiple actors with different political, economic, and cultural concerns. These parties range from netizens residing in different positions in the social structure to the government, the state media, commercial media that include overseas television channel, metropolitan newspapers, and commercial websites, etc. Secondly, Shanzhai is not a product, but a process that involves various dimensions of the communication system from production to distribution and regulation, etc. The strategies each actor employs are dynamic and constantly in reaction to others' actions. They are actions upon actions, which manifest the exercise of power and resistance in a Foucauldian sense. On this site, strategies employed by all the social actors in relation to each other will provide a peek inside the power dynamics in contemporary Chinese society.

### **The Bourdieusian Framework**

Here, Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Nice, 1984; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1998) and Kopytoff (1986), in combination, provide a useful analytical tool on power dynamics. Bourdieu argued that dominant social groups had various strategies to reproduce the social inequality in all kinds of fields for their self-interest while these strategies appear to be disinterested in societies. People usually misrecognize the nature of the social system as disinterested, and submit to their domination. Based on Marxist Political Economy, Bourdieu extended the concept of economic capital to “all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as *rare* and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formulation” (Bourdieu, 2007, pp. 178, original emphasis). For Bourdieu, culture is a

form of capital that can be both actively acquired such as education and passively inherited such as appreciation of certain art forms, as the result of a long period of socialization. Bourdieu distinguished three types of cultural capital, the embedded, such as languages, the objectified, such as a piece of art work, and the institutional, such as academic credentials. Capital can also be symbolic. It is the resources that are available to certain people based on their prestige or recognition (Calhoun, 2002). People can gain economic favor or other forms of resources with the social recognitions they possess. Durable social networks are also precious resources which Bourdieu called the social capital. Bourdieu saw it as instrumental and often deliberately constructed. Bourdieu analyzed how these forms of capital are inherited, exchanged and transmitted in family, schools and other milieus as unspoken habituses. Bourdieu argued that, in order to struggle for the dominant position in their respective social fields, people make choices in their daily practices based on their dispositions in the society which is associated with different types and amounts of capitals.

Bourdieu's theory is also carried on by other scholars whose works will benefit my analysis. Since Bourdieu is widely known for his work in Algeria and on the French higher education system, his other arguments on the role of the government and mass media were not as influential. Nick Couldry (2003a), as a media scholar, furthered the Bourdieusian framework to argue that the media, as well as the state, have a type of meta-capital which influences what can count as capital and the exchange rate among different capitals in a certain field. Media and the state work in conjunction to, first,

define what counts as capital in each field, and, second, set the agenda for many specific areas of life.

Bourdieu's theory sheds light on the reproduction of social inequality and the mechanism that makes people misrecognize the disinterestedness of social structure. However, Bourdieu is also criticized for his concentration on structure and reproduction, downplaying social agents' tactical uses of habituses (J. Hall, 1992). Sarah Thornton's study of club culture (1996) gave subculture a legitimate status in cultural studies and, at the same time, avoided theorizing it as purely a collective response to the material and situated experience of class as British cultural studies tend to do. She coined the notion of subcultural capital to recognize the club goers' own cultural autonomy. However, as Carrington and Wilson (2004) recognized, Thornton did not say much about the relation between the subcultural hierarchies and the social hierarchies in general. Jensen (2006) in his study of underprivileged non-Danish youths argued that, to both understand subcultures in their own rights and the social structure where they are situated, a variety of socio-structural variables is necessary to be considered.

The Bourdieusian theoretical approach is valuable because, seen from the field of cultural production in Chinese society, various social agents such as Shanzhai producers, regulators, media, commercial sponsors and so on, are constantly struggling in this social field with different kinds of strategies. Involved in these strategies are negotiations, or trade of different types of resources, as well as attempts of inclusion to and exclusion from trading different types of capital. Culturally, the state has the meta-capital (Couldry, 2003a) to define not only the legitimate taste, but also the content of legitimate

cultural expressions, enforced by its Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 2006). Of course, it also has other state agencies to physically enforce its authority. It aims to maintain its own power of definition and to reproduce this definition by promoting a state-sanctioned culture. The commercial media, on the one hand, need to accumulate profits as their economic capital, with the state approval. On the other hand, they also have the partially autonomous, but still powerful, meta-capital to define the taste of mass audience, which I would call the media subcultural capital, and to grant symbolic capital (Couldry, 2003a). The Shanzhai producers, who originally went viral on the Internet, are endowed with symbolic capital in the limited field of the Internet. They need both the economic survival, if not profit maximization, and the subcultural capital of Shanzhai to maintain or increase their symbolic capital.

However, in addition to Bourdieu's discovery of the seemingly disinterested social system that reproduces social inequality through capital transmission and exchange, as Kopytoff (1986) observed in his anthropological field work in pre-colonial Tiv society in central Nigeria, human society is never a free market of commodification and exchange of various capitals or goods. Commodification is a process rather than an "all-or-none" state of being. Sometimes things, or forms of capital, are singled out from an exchange system, while sometimes they are limited to a certain period of time or space. People, residing in different positions in the social structure, resort to different ways to singularize goods from this commoditization process. Sometimes, prohibition of trading certain material or symbolic goods is cultural and upheld collectively. These things can be simply pulled out of the commodity sphere. In other circumstances, some things such

as slaves, cattle, or ritual objects are less commoditized than far more numerous items like yams or pots. Meanwhile, things can also be singularized with sacralization or terminal commoditization in which further exchange is excluded by fiat. The author also argued that exchangeability of goods in simple societies are more homogenous than that in complex societies because perceptions of exchangeability depend on complex social identities on personal, group, and network levels. In terms of exchangeability of cultural capital, either embedded or objectified (Bourdieu, 2001), Kopytoff (1986) said that “behind the extraordinarily vehement assertions of aesthetic values may stand conflicts of culture, class, and ethnic identity, and the struggle over the power of what one might label the ‘public institutions of singularization’” (p.81).

The continuum of commoditization-singularization can also be seen in the field of Shanzhai; only the goods are not cattle or yams any more, but economic, social, cultural, or symbolic capital. The State has the meta-capital to define the values and exchangeability of different types of capital. It wants to harness the media sector as an economic drive, but fears the commercial media gaining so much meta-capital to outweigh its authority, especially in terms of defining popular taste, an important part of the cultural capital. The commercial media recognize the powerful influence on millions of the audience they have and want to trade it for economic interest. However, they also have to negotiate with the state for their legitimacy in the trading system. Shanzhai producers have to have cultural capital to use the Internet and make videos, but have to negotiate with the state to stay in the exchange system (not being censored), relying on the media to turn their cultural capital into symbolic or economic capitals. Meanwhile, in

the negotiations, they also have to compromise part of their own cultural capital, the grassroots Shanzhai style that they want. The commercial sponsors want symbolic capital by advertising themselves in Shanzhai shows, for economic interest in the future. However, this exchange network, or the field, of Shanzhai practices is also a site of power struggles. Each party has their advantages in certain capitals, and each of them also needs other capitals to survive or thrive. The strategies to manipulate or negotiate the exchange relations are indeed a reflection of the power structure in contemporary China, even though most of the strategies are dealing with media, sometimes in ritualistic ways.

I will divide the rest of this chapter into five strategies. In each of them, I will first explain these strategies and describe what each actor did with examples from news coverage or my interviews. Then I will theorize the strategy in terms of exchanges or exclusions from exchange of various capitals, to show to what extent traditionally marginalized social groups gained cultural expressions in the power dynamics.

In the conclusion, the power dynamics of cultural production in contemporary China will be summarized and discussed within the framework of social governance and resistance through media surveillance.

**Strategy One: Policies Regarding Cultural Productions Exclude Non-Profit Cultural Producers from Economic Hegemony, but These Producers Willingly Subscribe to the Economic Hegemony by Putting on a “For-Profit” Coat**

In my interviews and the news coverage on the development of the Shanzhai cases, it is evident that government regulators are trying a combination of direct reactive



commands and proactive policies on non-official cultural productions. But it is increasingly evident that proactive policies, that favor corporate, for-profit cultural productions and that exclude those by individual or non-profit cultural producers, are preferred. Commercial parties as well as some Shanzhai producers voluntarily submit to the economic hegemonic pressure in their production and distribution process.

In the early age of commercialization reform in some media sectors, the government had met increasing tension from commercialized players within the system. These commercial players challenge regulators' authority driven by their economic benefits. However, as Zhao (1998) documented, the government still was a last legitimate resort when these commercial media sectors are still state-owned. It is the personnel control. The government controls these commercial media's recruitment quota and the appointment of high officials, though some officials might be selected on a competitive basis.

With more private enterprises set up in television and radio content production, and Internet business, it is getting harder for the government to control these newly emerged players with funding or personnel. On the one hand, it is seen that the government still tries to grip strict control as they do to state media, which, as Qiu (2004) argued, stems from an institutional legacy. On the other hand, more policies are imposed on corporations, especially their business operations, to promote economic hegemonic pressure, and leaving individual or non-profit cultural activities to the government reactive and rather arbitrary judgments.

In my analysis of the existing regulations, in addition to interviewees' statements, it is seen that cultural and media regulators concentrate on regulating corporations, rather than individual producers or users, and on regulating for-profit operations rather than non-profit ones. Here, by "regulating," I mean the government requiring and providing specific procedural instructions on obtaining legal approval. Individual and non-profit cultural activities, in this regulatory environment, are not unregulated or deregulated, but simply are not provided specific ways to obtain legality. *The Law of The People's Republic of China on Assemblies, Processions and Demonstrations* (Chinacourt.org, 2003) says recreational activities, sports, traditional folk activities, etc. are subject to regulations by corresponding government agencies. However, among the regulations issued by the Ministry of Culture, there was none on non-profit cultural activities. For example, the Ministry of Culture issued *The Administrative Rules of Law Enforcement on the Cultural Market* (文化市场行政执法管理办法) (Gov.cn, 2006) to clarify its jurisdiction over individual and corporate for-profit cultural activities. But there is not a counterpart regulation on non-profit cultural activities. This gives the government a gray area subject to their more arbitrary and case-by-case judgment on approving or prohibiting individual or non-profit cultural productions.

There are even more detailed regulations on specific for-profit cultural activities, such as performance and online video sharing. The State Council issued the *Regulations of For-profit Performances* (营业性演出管理条例) (Xinhuanet.com, 2005a) specifically to regulate commercial performance shows. The Ministry of Culture issued *Rules for Implementation of the Regulations of For-profit Performances* (营业性演出管理条例实

施细则) (Xinhuanet.com, 2005b) as a matching guideline to the State Council decree. Then, in accordance with these regulations, local governments clarified procedures of obtaining approval of for-profit performance in line with the *Administrative License Law of People's Republic of China* (e.g. Bjdch.gov.cn, 2010). These are the basis of the surprising investigation Lao Meng, the organizer of the Shanzhai Spring Festival gala, received from Beijing Cultural Law Enforcement during his preparation of the first gala in 2008. However, as the cultural law enforcement didn't find evidence of commercial operation that year, Lao Meng was also visited by policemen from the local police station. As Lao Meng said, he was not afraid of the cultural administrator because his first gala in 2008 was not commercial at all. However, he did imagine that he could be arrested by the police for some arbitrary reasons such as illegal assembly or disrupting public order.

The same policy orientation targeting commercial corporations is also evident in regulations of online content which is germane to the circulation of Shanzhai videos. In 2003, the Ministry of Culture issued *The Interim Provisions on the Administration of Internet Culture* (Chinaitlaw.org, 2005); it distinguished for-profit and non-profit organizations that provide cultural works on the Internet. For for-profit organizations, it is required they acquire approval from local cultural administrations, and they have to be registered as commercial corporations at the local Industrial and Commercial Bureaus. In addition, the Ministry of Culture requires a minimum of registered capital of one million Yuan RMB (about \$154,000 USD), while China's *Corporate Law* requires only a 30,000 Yuan RMB (about \$4,600 USD) registered capital for companies without

specific regulation. In *The Administrative Rules on Internet Audio-Video Programs Services* (Cnci.gov.cn, 2008) jointly issued by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) and the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) in December 2007, it is stated that, to provide audio-visual content in the Internet, the subject must be a commercial corporation that is either state-owned or with a majority state-owned stake. Only the corporations that have successfully acquired a service certificate from SARFT can provide video uploading and sharing services for Internet users. According to this regulation, individuals, non-profit organizations, and foreign enterprises are not qualified as an online audio-video content provider. However, half a year later, to legitimize those foreign-invested video sharing websites established before the issuance of this regulation, SARFT issued a procedure of applying for a License of Broadcasting Audio-Visual Programs via Information Networks (ChinaSARFT.gov.cn, 2008). It confirmed the qualification of those early foreign-invested video websites to apply for a certificate, but set a very high entry condition for those established and new applicant corporations. Corporations that apply to provide Internet audio-visual services should have a registered capital of no less than 10 million Yuan RMB (about \$1.5 million USD). Those providing multiple categories of audio-visual content such as news, drama, entertainment and professional, etc. should have registered capital no less than 20 million Yuan RMB (about \$3 million USD).

In this regulation, non-profit Internet audio-visual content providers were allowed and exempted from the requirement of a minimum registered capital; however, they have to be established by news propaganda institutions. The news business is still in the firm

grip of the government and not commercialized. It is not even listed in the market areas that China promises to open after accession to the WTO (WTO, 2001). Thus, an audio-visual sharing service becomes an exclusive privilege for large state capital and some large early foreign investors.

While the regulations only clarify how to obtain legal approval for for-profit cultural activities, and, in the above case, for non-profit institutional cultural productions, these regulations are also biased against individuals. *The Administrative Rules of Law Enforcement on the Cultural Market* (Gov.cn, 2006) regulates both individuals and corporations, but detailed regulations on performance and performance brokers are addressed only to corporate subjects. How individuals can obtain legal approval was not mentioned at all. This regulation orientation is also confirmed in my interview with a SARFT official (Informant No. 1). He said that government administrations regulated only corporations, not individuals because individual citizens are under the jurisdiction of the Public Security Ministry and its local offices. This statement is not legally true since some regulations like *The Administrative Rules of Law Enforcement on the Cultural Market* do confirm the cultural administration's jurisdiction over an individual's cultural activity. However, individuals or corporations in those Rules must be conducting for-profit cultural activities such as performances, audio, video import, retail, showing, operations of Internet cafes, trading of art collections, etc. In practice, there is no specific regulation at all on individual non-profit cultural activities, which most Shanzhai online videos are.

In face of these policies that target corporations and for-profit operations, the corporate operators themselves and cultural producers like Lao Meng voluntarily adhere to such policies in order to get approvals and avoid arbitrary interference from different government agencies. First, non-profit cultural producers like Lao Meng turned their production into a commercial one in hope of securing government approval and avoiding arbitrary judgment by the government. To prepare for the second Shanzhai Spring Festival gala in 2009, Lao Meng applied for the License of Commercial Performance from the government of Dongcheng District in Beijing in the name of an established artistic troupe, because only a commercial art troupe can apply for approval of a commercial show. In the application, according to the procedures, he was required to file not only places and the schedule of the performance, but also the content of the show, including lyrics of songs, scripts, etc. This content is subject to the censorship of the cultural administration in terms of the principles of “serving the people, serving socialism, prioritizing social benefits, enrich and enhance people’s spiritual lives” (Xinhuanet.com, 2005a). But an unexpected scenario that later developed was when the Dongcheng District cultural administrator was contacted by a journalist regarding approving the Shanzhai gala. Officials had no idea that the approved application was filed by Lao Meng because the application was filed with Lao Meng’s full name, which is not well-known, and with the title of Folk Spring Festival Gala, instead of the Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala. Later, Lao Meng told me, the officer called him and told him to bring the approval document back for a review. Lao Meng refused to do so and

only agreed to provide any supplementary documents if specified. This interlude ended with no conclusion.

Secondly, Lao Meng's decision of applying for approval as a commercial performance is also a result of sponsors' and the video sharing websites' pressure. These commercial actors involved in Shanzhai productions took serious considerations regarding the legality of this production before deciding to participate. Informant No.2 who is a public relations agent for a domestic company said they had been tracking Lao Meng's gala and its news coverage since 2008. But they didn't decide to provide sponsorship until 2009 when he knew Lao Meng had gotten approval from the cultural administration of the local government. It is the same for informant No.3, a manager of a video sharing website that hosted Lao Meng's second gala for the 2010 Spring Festival.

Unlike a commercial performance's goal of maximizing economic benefits, Shanzhai producers' subjecting their non-profit productions to the economic hegemony is not out of as much concern of maximizing profit as that of economic survival. Lao Meng actually paid much of the expenses of the first gala with his personal savings. He said, "This time [the second gala], even if I'm losing money as a failed commercial operation, I am at least legal, though I really couldn't afford paying that much money on my own again. So, I was worried about an arbitrary ban in the first year, while in the second year I was worried more about money." But here, by "money" he didn't really mean profit, but simply defraying the cost.

These for-profit and corporate-biased policies kill two birds with one stone. First, grassroots cultural producers are excluded from gaining legality for their productions

within an exchange system of various capital. In other words, by not specifying procedures for them to obtain legality of their cultural productions, these productions are subjected to the arbitrary judgment of government agencies. If the government allows non-profit cultural producers to enter this exchange system, it means their cultural tastes and content are sanctioned by the State as legitimate capital which can be used to trade for economic benefits. However, since these grassroots cultural producers are not profit-oriented, they are less likely to surrender any resource in exchange for economic benefits. Hence, it would be hard for the government to lure them into cultural compliance with economic hegemony. Even if they opt in to the economic hegemony in practice, they are less afraid of losing, or gaining less, economic benefits by defending their capital taste and content. Thus, it would be hard for the government to control these cultural expressions in a hegemonic manner. More importantly, if they entered the media system, their cultural capital can be publicized and even popularized. Then they could gain tremendous symbolic and social capital, which threatens the State's ability of defining culture. Thus, subjecting them to domination would be a safer and more efficient way of maintaining the government's cultural dominance. This is why the local cultural administrator wanted to review, or maybe take the chance of review to revoke, the approval already issued to Lao Meng's second gala, after knowing the application for commercial performance was filed by such a grassroots cultural producer. This means that even if Shanzhai producers gained approval by turning themselves into commercial performers, and even if they are also under the economic hegemonic pressure from



commercial sponsors and media, the government still doesn't trust their cultural obedience and tries to exclude these producers from this exchange system.

The second bird killed by the commercial and corporate biased policies is the security of the cultural compliances of the commercial cultural producers. In the paired strategies of promoting economic hegemony and voluntarily adhering to it, the state and commercial cultural producers, as well as commercial media, engage in an exchange of economic benefits and cultural capital. On the one hand, some commercial cultural producers willingly sacrifice their own cultural capital presented in the content and taste of their products, or the authenticity in cultural expressions, in order to enter the exchange process in the field of cultural production in China. By turning their production into for-profit cultural activities, Shanzhai producers have to give up the final say on the content and taste of their cultural expressions, as attested by the fact that they had to submit performance content, lyrics, scripts, etc. to the administrator for censorship. They have to compromise their Shanzhai cultural capital under the economic hegemony of sponsors and commercial media even if they just want to defray their cost by going commercial.

On the other hand, commercial media need real profit for their economic survival. By setting a high entrance barrier with a very large registered capital, the government put high economic stakes on these commercial media, from television and radio content production, to all kinds of online services (metropolitan newspapers still have to affiliate with some party organ, which puts additional political stakes on them), to ensure their obedience to the cultural parameter in their products. As illustrated in the previous

examples, commercial media decided to opt in to hosting Shanzhai videos only after Shanzhai producers had gotten government approval as legal for-profit cultural activities. In order to stay in this lucrative business legitimately, commercial media have to give up part of their media power, or the meta-capital, such as their autonomy in topic choices, the perspectives of presenting social issues, etc. Under this policy orientation, media become allied with the state in controlling unruly cultural expressions that want public access.

Thus, in spite of the government's effort to singularize non-profit cultural productions from the exchange system, producers, as well as commercial corporations, tried to position Shanzhai cultural production as for-profit activities in response to the government's strategic hegemonic policy. They gave up part of their cultural capital in exchange for economic survival, or the legitimacy of their production. This strategy does result in an increased diversity of cultural expressions appearing in media. However, a side effect of this strategy is that, by allowing private capital in cultural productions, the cultural capital of the producers is now not only subjected to the check of the state, but also to that of the cultural taste of commercial agents, such as commercial media and all kinds of sponsors.

This strategy is both an exercise of disciplinary power over cultural production and governance through a market-oriented neo-liberalist mentality with economic hegemony. The inclusion in and exclusion from the capital exchange system is actually a battle for display or censorship in the surveillance assemblage of media. To be picked up by the panoptic media surveillance with state-sanctioned criteria, cultural producers have to

perform in the disciplined manner in order to gain the privilege of being displayed in media synopticons. This means that they have to obtain legal approval from the government as a for-profit cultural activity, usually at the cost of their cultural autonomy. Otherwise, they would be outlawed, censored, or excluded from the exchange system. Meanwhile, the market-driven, competition-based mechanism for cultural production promotes the neo-liberal rationality in cultural producers' pursuit of their cultural expressions, including the Shanzhai producers.

### **Strategy Two: The Government Issues Directives to Intervene in the Content of Cultural Production**

In the previous strategy, commercial media and grassroots cultural producers opted in to the economic hegemony to get government approvals of cultural production. By following the for-profit biased policies, commercial media gained economic capital and cultural producers sacrificed their cultural capital in exchange for symbolic capital through government approval which is the meta-capital the state owns. But other than maintaining cultural compliances through the strategy of economic hegemony, the state also tries to dominate cultural production through direct intervention in their content. In order to enter the media world, non-official cultural producers have to negotiate, even compromise, their specific cultural capital in order to stay in the media synopticons, which brings them more resources.

The government regulators have inertia to use direct administrative command in regulating cultural productions and distributions, especially those in media. Before the media commercialization in the 1990's, since all media were, by definition, the

mouthpiece of different levels of CCP organizations, the Party principle (*dangxing yuanze*) was the only and ultimate guideline of media work in China. As Yuezhi Zhao (1998) summarized, the party principle meant (1) “news media must accept the Party’s guiding ideology as its own”, (2) “they must propagate the Party’s programs, policies, and directives”, (3) “they must accept the Party’s leadership and stick to the Party’s organizational principles and press policies” (p. 19).

The Party has multiple mechanisms for directing media’s work. There are internal messaging channels to convey the general rules and parameters for news operations. In addition, the Party sometimes gives specific instructions for reporting important domestic political and social issues, and it often mobilizes a media campaign for a period on defined topics to be given attention. But these instructions are limited to internal channels and never publicized.

In today’s partially commercialized media system in China, the government is still using direct directives to supervise cultural productions. The following is one example of a directive in the production of the first Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala. Guizhou TV is the official television station of Guizhou province. Its satellite channel, which is accessible nationwide, wanted to co-produce and live-broadcast Lao Meng’s first gala. After a red-carpet-style news conference announcing the cooperation among Lao Meng’s Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala, Guizhou TV, and a major portal website, many media outlets devoted considerable coverage of this rare cooperation between an official medium and a grassroots individual (JinghuaNews, 2008). However, a week after this conference, SARFT issued a document banning television and radio stations from

“involving” or “hying” the Shanzhai Spring Festival Galas (Q. Wu, 2008). Though this document was not referring to Lao Meng’s gala specifically, since there were other grassroots Spring Festival Galas in preparation, it was apparently addressing the cooperation between Guizhou TV and Lao Meng.

Directives are not only imposed on state media, but also on privately owned commercial media, because they are subject to the license system of the government. In fact, as Informant No.3 admitted, their video sharing website that hosted Lao Meng’s Shanzhai gala has a special email address to receive the directives from the municipal propaganda department. They not only follow the arrangement and promotion of topics, but also arduously censor their video content according to these directives. Online video websites, since they have to acquire a license from SARFT, had to follow the ban on “involving or hying” Shanzhai. Thus, the website that Informant No. 3 worked for didn’t cooperate with Lao Meng in 2008.

These direct directives to state media, private media, and other institutions are different from those traditional instructions to report important issues or mobilizations for a media campaign for a given period. Instead of promoting important topics, the government commands media to tone down certain topics, which Zhao (2008) called passive censorship. This strategy has been repetitively used to neglect oppositional remarks of elite intellectuals and leave them in their small circles because public criticism of deviant ideas often has the reverse impact of increasing publicity of these ideas and creating high-profile dissidents and symbols of public opposition, what Liang Limin called “hooks” (2010). Liang examined the controlling strategies of the Chinese

government during the Beijing Olympic Games. One of the suggestions from a high-profile Chinese lawyer who was advised by an American professor changed the government's attitude toward dealing with potential troublemakers during the Games. In a letter titled "Spears vs. Hooks," the lawyer suggested the government draw a line between destructive terror attacks, or the "spears" which wouldn't draw public sympathy, and the "publicity campaigns by rights groups with an intention to provoke the Chinese government into overreaction so as to get media attention," the "hooks" (Liang, 2010, p. 15). But this time, it was a grassroots individual who drew extensive newspaper, online, and television coverage that became a hook. As Lao Meng's friend told him, "you get famous because SARFT bans you." Later when a metropolitan newspaper asked for confirmation of this banning directive from SARFT, the interviewed official denied such a document and said "in terms of the Shanzhai culture, it's a new phenomenon. We haven't had time to issue any administrative measures regarding that yet" (Informant No.4).

However, direct directives are only effective to institutions regulated by corresponding administrations. For example, SARFT supervises state television and radio stations, and it licenses non-news-non-commentary television and radio production institutions and online audio-visual service providers. However, it doesn't directly regulate media based outside mainland China. Those media usually have a very limited penetration in mainland China, mainly in the areas adjacent to Hong Kong or Macau where they are based. Since their viewership on the mainland was not a crucial economic stake, these media do not follow the directives as strictly as mainland media. So

SARFT's prohibition from involvement in Shanzhai galas was not quite effective to MASTV based in Macau, which actually broadcast the first Shanzhai gala during the 2009 Spring Festival. Meanwhile, newspapers also fall out of SARFT's jurisdiction. Even after the secret directives banning involvement in or hyping the Shanzhai Spring Festival gala, newspaper and text-based websites kept reporting on Lao Meng and his team, even with the rumors regarding SARFT's directive on banning Shanzhai. The lack of a trans-media arrangement on the one hand hinders China's ICT development as Ian Weber argued (2010); on the other hand, it leaves cracks for diverse cultural expressions to emerge out of it.

In terms of the exchanges of or exclusion from the exchange of various capital, the directives work in two ways on commercial media and grassroots cultural producers. First, directives that aim to exclude individuals and civil institutions from being reported in the media actually function to prevent these individuals and civil institutions from obtaining symbolic capital. On the one hand, the authority of the directives intervening in cultural productions is derived from meta-capital of the State which decides what counts as cultural capital and what is not (Couldry, 2003a). Under this "No involvement, no hype" directive, Shanzhai's cultural capital is denied the exchangeability by the State. On the other hand, as Couldry argued, media also have meta-capital. The directive of passive censorship insulated Shanzhai producers from symbolic capital granted by media's synoptic displays. Thus, the cultural expression of this marginalized group was not able to get recognition, let alone prestige, via media. Without the recognition of their cultural expressions, these grassroots producers cannot capitalize on it in order to

exchange for other social resources, such as bargaining with the government or commercial sponsors. Also, without these social resources, these producers and their productions are subjected to the government's arbitrary disposal.

However, as the empirical evidence suggests, Shanzhai producers are far from being insulated from any possibility of expression. Text-based websites and metropolitan newspapers still provide symbolic capital. As Lao Meng said, some "warmhearted rich people" actually donated money to his team during the preparation of their first gala. This is not really sponsorship since the donor didn't ask for publicity in return. But their authentic cultural expressions of the masses, or Shanzhai's cultural capital, and the symbolic capital granted by online media and newspapers did bring them economic capital, though not much.

Secondly, the directives, which circumscribe the parameter of allowed and prohibited content, serve to cultivate cultural producers with the habitus of the state-sanctioned cultural capital. Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is not a one-shot directive or a printed manual, but the competence or grasp of unspoken rules (habitus) apprehended in long-term inculcation (Bourdieu, 2001; Bourdieu & Nice, 1984). For-profit producers, in order to secure the legality of their commercial operation, willingly and arduously learn these boundaries and align themselves with the official cultural capital. This is similar to Bourdieu's description of how a child is nurtured with specific cultural tastes in her early age in a bourgeois family. However, only commercial producers, included in the exchange system under the preceding strategy, have the privilege to receive these directives like a parental guide in a family. The non-profit and



individual cultural producers, discriminated against by policies mentioned in strategy one, are actually excluded from this possibility of inculcation.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the state directives are sorting standards in the media surveillance assemblages that decide what can be publicly displayed in the synopticons and what can't be. The sorting function of the media surveillance system is also one of the mechanisms of social governance to promote docile and disciplined model citizens while confining and isolating cultural deviants. Media's proficiency with the sorting standards, as the cultivated cultural habitus, is a resource for themselves to survive and to economically succeed. However, we should not assume that media, especially commercial media, are loyal enforcers of the official cultural standards, wholeheartedly promoting and cultivating their audiences with the official cultural capital. Commercial media also have their own professional standards and other choices of sorting standards (cultural capital) which could bring them more benefits. The next strategy will address the autonomy of media and the tensions between the official cultural capital and the grassroots one.

### **Strategy Three: The Government Promotes Cultural Hegemony While Commercial Media and Shanzhai Producers Manipulate Their Messages as Voluntary Self-Censorship**

Censorship has been a routine resort and an effective method of controlling media discourses in China (Wacker, 2003; Zhang & Fleming, 2005; Y. Zhao, 1998; Yuezhi Zhao, 2008). It involves the Party's direct involvement such as issuing directives to promote or to ban certain topics, even shutting down certain media outlets.

In face of the commercial drive and the user-generated content in new media, the traditional censorship measures are losing their effectiveness. It is almost impossible to censor those media content in a centralized manner. As Bill Clinton said, the Chinese government's attempt to control free speech on the Internet was like trying to nail Jell-O on the wall.

New strategies are implemented to promote a hegemonic norm in addition to direct interference. The first strategy already discussed is the government's effort to promote an economic hegemony by regulating and allowing only for-profit, corporate cultural activities, and leaving non-profit or individuals' cultural productions to a more subjective, case-by-case judgment. In addition to that economic hegemony, the government also encourages strategies that promote consensus among cultural workers. Government-appointed media managers explicitly promote consensus on the political boundaries among media workers to convert overt censorship into self-censorship (Y. Zhao, 1998, p. 121). In new media industry like the Internet, model enterprises and professional association take the lead in drafting self-regulation to implement self-censorship (Weber & Lu, 2007).

It is also evident in the cases of Shanzhai I examine herein that sponsors, commercial media, and Shanzhai producers are constantly guessing the parameters, negotiating for their space, and voluntarily repackaging their messages or even telling lies as self-censorship.

One example concerns the guessing and testing of online discourse parameters as self-censorship. Though there were guidelines for prohibitive content in the regulations

of cultural activities and online video sharing services, they were usually very general and vague. Cultural producers, service providers, and commercial sponsors have to constantly guess and test the parameters. For example, in *The Administrative Rules of Internet Audio-Visual Content*, issued by SARFT, ten items of online audio-visual content were listed as prohibited for service providers to host. They include content deemed unconstitutional; harming national unity or sovereign and territorial integrity; leaking national secrets; harming national security, national honor or interest; disrupting social order or breaking social stability. For example, when Han Jiangxue was invited to record a lecture show on Napoleon by a commercial website, he and the website editor couldn't agree on a small detail that mentioned the current Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. Han pointed out in his lecture show that many historical figures had education or a career background in geology, from Napoleon's Chief of Staff to George Washington, to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. But the editor asked Han not to mention Chinese politicians at all to avoid any sensitive connotation. Han couldn't agree since he didn't mean anything negative about Premier Wen and refused to record this part again. He said he was simply presenting a historical fact. Then the controversy was reported to a manager of the website to make a decision. The final decision was that they would put the version mentioning Wen Jiabao online and see if there would be any reaction from the government. It turned out no objections from the government were sent back. Thus, this version survived. Successful media entrepreneurs have to know, at least intuitively, where the boundary of political discourses is. Like Hu Shuli, manager of *Finance*

magazine which is famous for its investigative journalism, said that they never crossed the boundary, but were constantly testing and pushing it (J. Chen, 2009).

The second example of self-censorship concerns SARFT's ban of television and radio stations' involvement in Shanzhai Spring Festival galas. Though this was a direct interference into television and radio stations' work, the way Guizhou TV and Lao Meng explained the discontinuity of their cooperation was apparently the result of self-censorship. A few days after announcing that Guizhou TV and Lao Meng would co-produce the first Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala, SARFT issued a document banning all mainland television and radio stations from "involvement with or hyping" Shanzhai galas. Guizhou TV had to give up its plan of co-production. However, when some metropolitan newspapers reported the discontinuity of the cooperation, SARFT denied the existence of this document and Lao Meng cited his being afraid of losing the grassroots nature of Shanzhai as the reason for breaking the deal. In my interview with Lao Meng, he admitted that this was an excuse agreed upon between him and the Guizhou television station, in order not to expose SARFT's intervention since it had denied that. This lie protected Guizhou TV from further offending its central administrator, SARFT. By citing his personal decision Lao Meng also avoided putting himself opposite a government agency and possibly inviting more severe interference. In this case, cultural producers and even a state medium self-censored their public message by telling a lie to secure their own survival.

Another example of self-censorship in Shanzhai production was the name change of the second Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala. After meeting the qualifications and acquiring

all required approvals, Lao Meng's second gala was in good shape as a for-profit cultural activity hosted by a corporate subject. However, other than his own website and intermittent metropolitan newspaper reports calling it the Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala, this activity appeared as the Folk Spring Festival Gala in all the application documents for government approval and video sharing websites that host its videos.

Lao Meng decided to substitute "Folk" for "Shanzhai" more because of the pressures from cooperative commercial media and sponsors than his own will. First, he was told by the video websites that they couldn't host his video if it was still called Shanzhai. These video websites work under the license of SARFT. They proactively self-censored the "Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala" based on SARFT's reaction to the first Shanzhai gala a year before. Second, some sponsors were reluctant to provide support because they considered Shanzhai not compatible with their brand image. For example, a world-renowned camera equipment enterprise agreed to provide video cameras for their recording. However, they insisted on dropping the label of Shanzhai. In this last case, Lao Meng, based on the pressures from sponsors, cooperative media, and government agencies, self-censored his gala by changing its name. The websites hosting videos of the Folk gala also self-censored by naming all related video clips the "Folk Gala". However, these video clips are also tagged as the Shanzhai gala, so users can still find these videos when they search with "Shanzhai."

Unlike avoiding or deleting certain content as self-censorship, in the last two cases cultural producers and media channels carried out a new measure of self-censorship.

They reframed certain content and even lied to avoid confronting the parameter set by the government in order to secure the survival of their message.

The commercial media and commercial cultural producers, as described in Strategy One, are granted legitimacy to (re)produce culture that is sanctioned by the state. Their economic capital (both registered capital and possible future profits) are like bail bonds in the exchange to legitimacy of cultural production. If they don't acquire enough and correct official cultural capital, their economic stake is jeopardized.

The second strategy, as I argued previously, is both a way to exclude non-corporate or non-commercial cultural producers from the field of cultural production, and a way to cultivate legitimate producers about the rules or habitus of the official culture, in order to acquire the official cultural capital.

However, in this strategy, other than the compliance relationship between the government and the cultural producers illustrated in the second example, in example one and three, we see that these commercial media or cultural producers are not dupes, and they do their own calculations. The strategy of self-censorship in Shanzhai cultural productions is simultaneously the internalization of official cultural tastes and the attempts to test, negotiate, and even evade it. In the first example, we see that the websites struggled about self-censorship. Although this struggle seems to be between the individual Shanzhai producer Han Jiangxue and the website editor, the managers' decision to keep the mention of the Chinese premiere reflects the website operator's unwillingness to fully commit to self-censorship and a willingness to take an opportunity cost to test the boundary of censorship. Here, the cultural capital of producers or media

is not always unconditionally sacrificed in face of economic security, although they are willing to sacrifice it if objections are raised by the government. Rather, they would test the exchange relationship, in order to avoid unnecessary loss of cultural capital because of a misconception of the boundary of the official cultural capital.

In the third example, the self-censorship achieved a conforming-cum-evading effect. On the surface, Lao Meng and the video websites did drop the name of Shanzhai, as a self-censorship of Shanzhai informed by their comprehension of the government's cultural parameter. On a deeper level, they successfully evaded the censorship by changing the name into the Folk Spring Festival Gala. The content of their cultural production did reach the audience. What's more, the websites tagged these videos as Shanzhai in order to be found by search engines. In this way, they successfully defended their own cultural capital without jeopardizing their economic benefits or legitimacy of production. Thus, self-censorship actually enabled the preservation of Shanzhai cultural producers' subcultural capital, rather than, as a simplified view of self-censorship suggests, it served as selfish accomplices that sell their own cultural capital for an economic one.

To fully understand self-censorship, Lao Meng and Guizhou TV station's explanations of the discontinuity of their cooperation in the second example provide another perspective about how dominant cultural capital is naturalized, reproduced, and reinforced. Usually, we understand self-censorship as voluntary conforming to censorship directives. These directives are sometimes issued publicly, and sometimes not. When they are publicly issued, like the requirements for content of a commercial

cultural performance, the way dominant official culture is maintained is exposed to the public. It is not natural, thus it invites critical thinking and criticism. But as Bourdieu argued, to preserve the cultural capital of the dominant group, it is important to do it naturally, make it appear disinterested, and make people misrecognize it. In the second example, by denying the existence of the “No involvement, no hyping” directive, and by citing Lao Meng’s personal reason for discontinuing the cooperation between the Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala and Guizhou TV, the direct interference in cultural production by the government was concealed. Lao Meng and Guizhou TV’s self-censorship, though protecting their survival, actually hid the way cultural dominance is maintained with a lie. Thus, the final preservation of the mainstream culture is not attributed to the government’s deliberate censorship, but rather to some random reasons that protect the government’s cultural legitimacy.

#### **Strategy Four: Shanzhai Producers Voluntarily Adopted Professional Taste**

If Strategy Two is various parties’ reactions to the promotion of the economic hegemony and Strategy Three is the reactions to the promotion of the cultural hegemony regarding media content, then Strategy Four is related to another aspect of cultural hegemony: taste or style of cultural products.

The aesthetic sense is an important disposition that Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Nice, 1984) theorized to illustrate how cultural capital marks class distinctions. For Bourdieu, it is “one manifestation of the system of dispositions produced by the social conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence” and it is also “a distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space whose distinctive value



is objectively established in relationship to expressions generated from different conditions” (p. 56). Aesthetic tastes, as manifested social spaces as wide as art works, clothes, cosmetics, home decorations, both unite people with the similar social dispositions and separate them from others. In fact, a taste is usually asserted in negation of other tastes. The competition between tastes or, more generally, between different types of cultural capital, is seen in the strategies different parties employed in Shanzhai practices. Meanwhile, the negotiation of tastes is also intertwined with socio-economic factors.

All the Shanzhai producers and performers that I interviewed took actions to ensure quality production or at least to adhere to the norms of popular taste defined by media professionals. For example, Han Jiangxue tried hard to examine mainstream cultural products and then imitate them and practice to enhance his presentation skills and writing style. As I described in Chapter three, Han Jiangxue later, with more contacts with media, put his faith in arduous practicing in order to grasp the professional skills and styles, and no longer attributed his being denied by mainstream media to the lack of a legitimate title or affiliation. When talking about his second book on a heroic figure in Chinese history, he said:

I consciously tried to write it better. In the past, I was done with it after finishing writing. I didn't know how to make it enjoyable for readers. Now I have this in mind. I try to read more elegantly written books. In the past I concentrated more on the stories, the conflicts, the fights, and didn't pay attention to how readable it was. Now I'm leaning toward the elegance of language use... I hope I could have someone giving me instructions, and disabuse me... Now I'm trying to figure it out myself. You fail, and then you realize some problems. Then you resolve it to make progress. (Interview with Han Jiangxue on May 31, 2010)

He also commented on Lao Meng's first Shanzhai gala:

He [Lao Meng] didn't really know how to make a Spring Festival gala at that time. He was not competent, just like me in the early time when my works were for fun and not good enough. If you were given a chance, it flashes away, and you can't grasp it. (Interview with Han Jiangxue on May 31, 2010)

When I asked him how he practiced his presentation skills, he said, "Nothing, but speak more. I take your interview as a chance to practice speaking. I've been talking with many journalists, and some interviews were as long as three hours. I feel I'm better at speaking now than before" (Interview with Han Jiangxue on May 31, 2010). He especially told me that a popular speaker of the *CCTV Lecture Show* instructed him for about ten minutes, and he found it enlightening. During the recording of the Napoleon lectures for a video sharing website, he was also instructed by an editor with a professional media background. He felt that he made progress in making that show and that he understood more about professional media production, which he should have learned. To Han Jiangxue, a good presentation or elegant writing comes from work experience in mainstream media and suggestions from professional media workers. As a strategy, he took every chance to align himself with the professional standard of presentation and writing style or taste.

Another example of opting in mainstream production style is the second Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala. As Lao Meng said, there were more volunteers with professional media backgrounds and more hired media professionals involved in the preparation and performance of the second gala. He realized the "poor" quality of the first gala, which was like an "amateurs' get-together," and that it wouldn't help Shanzhai's long-term and

sustainable development. Then, in the grassroots audition for the second gala, he and other judges agreed to pay attention to performers with more media experience. They also used a professional studio and crew to shoot the second Shanzhai gala.

The third example is the Shanzhai *Red Mansions*. The Shanzhai videos clips imitating the TV drama of *Red Mansions* got popular not only because they were shot during a family reunion during the Spring Festival holiday in 2009, and the background of the videos is family members watching television and playing mahjong, but also because, as a news report and many online posts suggested, it's a "20 Yuan budget production" (Z. Chen, 2009). However, after gaining viral popularity on the Internet and being widely reported on by newspapers, the family crew, especially the director-as-cameraman, started to write the continuity shooting scripts and paid more attention to clothes, makeup, lighting, and other professional aspects. They even gave their crew team a name, "Flower-Not-Flower."

These actions of adhering to professional standards and taste are widely witnessed after certain Shanzhai products, including those of cell phones, got popular whose producers wanted to secure their long-term survival and appeal to broader audiences/customers.

In my analysis of Shanzhai video producers, it seems they did this both due to the pressure from media and sponsors and out of their own will. Lao Meng's second Spring Festival Gala was explicitly required to be better produced by some sponsors and the video sharing websites as a premise of cooperation. A manager of one of the websites said "in a mainstream online medium like ours, they [Shanzhai video makers] won't

survive in the long run, neither will our cooperation, if they keep their DIY style, because our audience won't buy it" (Informant No.5). Han Jiangxue kept practicing following the styles of mainstream cultural products because he believed in the virtues of mainstream styles, though he admitted this was not the fun part of his writing, even when he insisted that he wrote for fun.

Behind these adoptions, producers also experienced struggles between maintaining grassroots autonomy and following professional advice. Han Jiangxue had a number of disagreements with the website editor who had a background in professional media production. They couldn't agree on how and when to release a suspension in Han's presentations, and they had different opinions on the placement of captions in the videos. While in most cases he at last gave up his insistence and followed a professional's opinions, Han felt his own way of expression was compromised. A few performers in Lao Meng's gala I interviewed also had mixed feelings toward professional standards. On the one hand, they agreed with the better production quality and better promise of long-term development. But on the other hand, they felt they were kept-under and even disparaged by members in their crew who had professional backgrounds. While sometimes they thought they had creative ideas, professionals usually saw them as weird, unfeasible, or simply nonsense. But these struggles didn't prevent most Shanzhai producers from opting into professional taste and production standards, which is a popular strategy of these producers for their survival.

Undoubtedly, media coverage grants Shanzhai cultural producers enormous symbolic capital. Han Jiangxue's lecture show was promoted to the front page of

sina.com, one of the top Chinese Internet portals. That link brought his video more visits in a few days than in the weeks after he uploaded it to his video-log. Metropolitan newspapers also thronged around him to request interviews. Lao Meng's Shanzhai Spring Festival gala drew extensive attention after first being reported by a metropolitan newspaper in Beijing. With the circulation of his story in various media ranging from local TV stations to metropolitan newspapers nationwide and Internet news portals and BBS, his fame as a grassroots hero soared. Chen Weishi's Shanzhai *Red Mansions*, after being shared across the Internet and reported by local metro newspapers whose reports also went viral on the Internet, made Chen a local celebrity.

Such symbolic capital is valuable for Shanzhai producers who lack other types of capital and are generally marginalized. Han Jiangxue received some opportunities to make lecture shows and to freelance for some magazines. Lao Meng got many volunteers nationwide to participate in his gala. Chen Weishi even got a job offer from a local media production company. In the next strategy, I will describe how these Shanzhai producers even used the symbolic capital to negotiate the government's suppression.

However, these Shanzhai producers gained the symbolic status with a cost. By opting into professional standards and tastes, they had to sacrifice their own cultural capital of Shanzhai, or the authenticity of grassroots spirit as some see it.

As illustrated in the examples above, producers had to sometimes give up the final say of their works to professionals. Han Jiangxue, though he disagreed on the presentation style and details of video editing, had to follow the website editor's

opinions. Lao Meng, in order to gain support from video sharing websites, had to favor professional performers, some of whom were even paid workers rather than volunteers, in the auditions for his production crew. Chen Weishi's later production of *Red Mansions*, as himself becoming a media professional, was produced with more professional polishing. The pursuit and attempts of maintaining symbolic capital greatly compromised Shanzhai producers' authentic subcultural capital.

The reason why commercial media constantly pressure Shanzhai media is out of consideration of their own economic benefits. As Nick Couldry (2003a) argued, media have the meta-capital to define popular tastes. They use this power, on the one hand, to lure cultural producers to comply with their tastes with symbolic capital (media exposure), and on the other hand, to harvest economic capital for themselves. The popular taste defined by the media, especially commercial media in this case, are more aligned with that of the urban elites who have higher commercial values but are not necessarily the audiences Shanzhai productions are originally intended for. As the manager of a video sharing website (Informant No. 5) said:

[G]ames, beauties, hot social issues, otherwise, nothing is mainstream...we consider the content of videos from the perspective of our advertisers. They won't advertise in poorly made videos...We don't want to bear social responsibility, which is too risky for a business.

This manager who was directly involved in Han Jiangxue's later lecture show on Napoleon said that Han was too "stubborn" in defending his own style.

Thus, Shanzhai producers are not only subjected to the discipline of official cultural tastes, though not necessarily recognized as discipline by Shanzhai producers, as illustrated in the previous strategy. Shanzhai producers are also subjected to the popular

taste defined by commercial media. They have to negotiate and, most of the time, compromise in face of two different cultural tastes. Meanwhile, they have to diligently learn to acquire both the official cultural capital and the popular cultural capital, and suffer constant struggle with their own subcultural capital, in exchange for legitimacy of cultural production and economic survival, if not profit maximization.

A problem of the Shanzhai producers who adhere to the mainstream tastes is that they, as Bourdieu said, “misrecognize” this style change as something disinterested, without seeing the power relationship behind the cultural negotiation. Han’s later change of his explanation of his failure to enter the mainstream is a perfect example. At first, he thought he was rejected by CCTV because of his lack of a legitimate title, or the institutionalized cultural capital. But, at that time, he didn’t question his own competence of presenting his history knowledge. However, later with more media exposure and opportunities to present himself, he came to attribute his rejection to his incompetence in presenting things in an appealing way, rather than the discrimination against his cultural capital. The mechanism through which the dominant culture maintains its hegemony was misrecognized by Han as the process of learning elegant words and appealing presentation skills for his own good. While he saw himself gaining more official cultural capital with arduous learning, he didn’t really think it’s also a loss of his own cultural capital, or suppression of his cultural expression. This perfectly delineated the process of internalization of a neoliberal mentality of self-improvement toward a market-decided “professional quality,” without realizing the structural inequality and discrimination. Shanzhai producers’ adherence to professional standards

manifests how the neoliberal rationality “enterprises” subjects as the “technology of the self” (Foucault, 1988; N. Rose, 1992). Meanwhile, the pleasure of producing Shanzhai videos arises not only from the making-do itself, but also from the success of enterprising the self with “the technology of the self”.

However, again, we need to caution against an essentialized image of Shanzhai producers as passive dupes. There is never a lack of struggle among Shanzhai producers regarding defending or surrendering to media professionals’ pressure. In my interviews with the performers who attended Lao Meng’s second Spring Festival gala, there are abundant accounts of different opinions on professionals’ involvement or take-over. Informant No. 6, a 22 year old freelancing actress in Beijing, said that the thing that she disliked most in the process of the Shanzhai gala production was the condescending or even disparaging attitudes of those performers and directors who had more professional experiences toward those who had less. Informant No. 7, though seeing the commercial operation and the professionals’ involvement necessary for Shanzhai’s long-term survival, insisted on the presence of “folk, even vulgar” elements in the Shanzhai performance to maintain its identity. But Informant No. 8, a graduate of an artistic major who’s preparing to enter graduate school, supports more professional production and mainstream tastes in Shanzhai production. He explained that “for us in the production, we feel the fun of the amateur production, but the audience can only see your final products and products like these are not good enough to meet their expectations.” The same for Han Jiangxue: though he arduously tried to acquire the popular cultural capital



by reading mainstream books, talk to mainstream producers, he also had odds with the website editor on production details during his later lecture shows.

But we don't have to lament the weakness of Shanzhai producers. The symbolic capital at the cost of some of their authentic subcultural capital also empowers Shanzhai producers as illustrated in the following strategy.

**Strategy Five: Shanzhai Producers Use Media Exposure as Leverage in Negotiation with Media, Sponsors, and Government Agencies**

All Shanzhai producers and their works received extensive attention in the media. Some of them were spotted by traditional media first, and then were followed upon by other traditional media or went viral on the Internet. For example, Lao Meng's Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala* was first reported by a metropolitan newspaper that got a tip from one of its readers. The reader saw a mini-van carrying a banner saying "Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala: Challenge CCTV, Wish the People a Happy New Year" and called the news hotline. Then visits to the website of the Shanzhai *Gala* spiked since the day it was reported. As Lao Meng told me, dozens of media visited his office or called for interviews in the first few days after the gala was reported. Also because of the extensive coverage by many metropolitan newspapers and the circulation of these news stories online, Lao Meng drew the attention of Guizhou TV station, which decided to co-produce and broadcast the first Shanzhai Spring Festival gala.

Some other Shanzhai producers first went viral on the Internet and then were followed by traditional media. Chen Weishi's Shanzhai *Red Mansions* was circulated on BBS and video sharing websites first. Then some local metropolitan newspapers in the

Sichuan province where Chen lived reported on him and his family crew. These local reports were posted and shared online with the videos, and drew wider attention of media nationwide. In follow-up reports, more detailed stories were written on Chen, Chen's sister, the performer of Lin Daiyu, a lead character in the video clips, and the shooting of these videos. Han Jiangxue, who produced the Shanzhai Lecture Show, also was first popular online. About two weeks after he uploaded his videos, they were linked to the homepage of a large portal website, Sina.com, and then went viral on the Internet. Newspaper and television stations followed up and gave him even more exposure. After getting famous, these Shanzhai producers were not only interviewed about their own lives and works, but also were asked to comment on broader topics such as popular culture, innovation, and so on. In other words, after entering into the "media world" and becoming "media persons" (Couldry, 2003b), they were granted tremendous symbolic power by the media like other celebrities.

Shanzhai producers also know the importance of media attention, which leads to more resources, and do not even hesitate to cheat to maintain media enthusiasm about their works. Most of these Shanzhai producers were born after the opening up and reform policy, and are baptized with the ideology of commercialization. Just as Naomi Klein described the emerging generation of activist artists in New York, Shanzhai producers "will not concern themselves with old ethical dilemmas like selling out since they are a walking sales pitch for themselves already, intuitively understanding how to produce prepackaged art, to be their own brand" (Klein, 2002, p. 294). For example, right after Lao Meng's Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala* was covered in newspapers, more

journalists flooded into his office. But he had no applicants to participate in his Shanzhai gala by that time, and he even hadn't designed an application form. He admitted that he then designed an application form and made up more than ten of them with his friends' information before journalists came to interview him. During the interviews, he showed these forms to the journalists but didn't allow them to take pictures of these forms or to contact these applicants. He told the journalists that the applicants "are not here, and they have their jobs. Please don't disturb their lives before we decide to select their performances." Lao Meng said that "the media and I use each other. They need my story to attract eye-balls, and I need a time difference. They reported on me, and I got more applicants with that [media coverage]."

Shanzhai producers also use media attention to leverage government decisions. Government agencies in China's more dynamic media landscape are constantly in the media spotlight. State media serve as the mouthpiece of the CCP and rarely challenge government administrations. Their "media supervisions" (or oversight) functions are very limited compared to their supposed role to sing the praise of their bosses. Most negative exposures are limited to blaming individual officials or institutions and are usually a part of an orchestrated media campaign. However, with the spinning off of commercial sectors from party organs, these more liberal media have felt the push of market competition and started to conducting more investigative reports with critical stances (Yuezhi Zhao, 2000b). These commercial media, such as metropolitan newspapers and business magazines, tend to report on the dark side of lower level administration more than their own political affiliations (C.-c. Lee, et al., 2006, p. 593),

or of the regions outside the jurisdiction of their political affiliations (*yidi jiandu*), though the *yidi jiandu* was later discouraged by the central government to appease some local officials (Yuezhi Zhao, 2008). Other than the commercial drive, these media also have a stronger adherence to Western journalistic norms. As Informant No. 9, a metropolitan newspaper journalist, said, they tried hard to maintain their objectivity and provide direct evidence and quotes of the news subjects. Government officials, then, see them as instigators of social unrest with controversial news issues. These officials try hard to restrain from “falling into their traps” and even refuse to comment to avoid misinterpretation or being quoted out of context. When asked about metropolitan newspapers’ interviews with him regarding Shanzhai, Informant No. 10, a producer of the official China Central Television, said “I refuse to comment on that. No matter what I say, I am always wrong.”

Shanzhai producers take advantage of government officials’ reluctance to be involved in Shanzhai news directly to negotiate for their benefits. When the Law Enforcement of Culture in Beijing came to investigate Lao Meng’s preparation of the first Shanzhai gala and accused him of organizing an unlicensed commercial performance, Lao Meng immediately contacted the Macau-based satellite television station. During the investigation visit, the primary inspector from the Beijing Law Enforcement of Culture told Lao Meng, in a bossy tone, that “the Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala is a good thing, but...”, Lao Meng immediately took note of it, interrupted the official and said that journalists were on the way and he would tell media this comment. The inspector immediately denied his positive attitude toward Shanzhai. The

investigating team finally gave Lao Meng some “advice” and decided that it was a non-commercial performance and left before the Macau television crew arrived. Lao Meng carved out his space by playing the media card with the government officials, so the government would not be able to arbitrarily ban his show without substantial evidence.

In contrast to government agencies’ avoidance of media exposure, the sponsors have mixed feelings about media coverage. On the one hand, advertisers and various media wanted to be involved in Shanzhai production and distribution to gain more public attention and viewership. There were public relation companies that offered goods and money to Lao Meng’s gala in exchange for the appearance of their clients’ logos or mention of their clients’ products in the show. The Guizhou television station and a handful of websites offered to broadcast the show or even to collaborate in production. But on the other hand, they also tried to avoid negative coverage in the media on Shanzhai issues.

One example of Shanzhai producers taking advantage of commercial sponsors’ mixed attitudes happened between Lao Meng and a vacation resort, which provided his team free meals, lodging, and studio space during the first gala. With plenty of news coverage on Shanzhai production and wide circulation of these productions online, Shanzhai had obtained tremendous symbolic capital. At this point, it was hard for the government to ban Shanzhai without a legitimate reason. Then, government agencies had to turn to other parties in the Shanzhai production to stop or discourage it. Various agencies of the local government ordered some commercial media and sponsors to secretly withdraw their support. At the time these commercial actors had to follow the

directives from the government. They couldn't tell the real story when media reported the reasons of their withdrawal since it was a secret order by the government. During the preparation of the first Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala in 2008, a very large and famous resort in suburban Beijing offered Lao Meng free accommodation and meals for his team, which was comprised of volunteer performers from different provinces. One day a manager of the resort told Lao Meng and his team to leave and refused to provide further support. Lao Meng was told privately that the resort was under pressure from the local public security department. Later, in the presence of the resort manager, Lao Meng told reporters that the resort withdrew their sponsorship, and he would give up the whole activity. Immediately, the resort manager contacted his boss regarding this. Before long, the resort agreed to continue supporting Lao Meng secretly, but asked the journalists to stop reporting their withdrawal. They also toned down their presence in the whole gala as a sponsor.

In this strategy, we see that Shanzhai producers used the symbolic capital granted by media in exchange for all kinds of resources that are important to their cultural production. First, the producers tried their best to maintain public attention through news coverage. They even called the media themselves to provide information about their progress. This helps Shanzhai producers get a continuous supply of symbolic capital in order to "buy" other resources. Second, in face of the government agencies, though Shanzhai producers are excluded from a capital exchange system as much as possible and are subjected to arbitrary judgment, they can capitalize on their substantial symbolic capital to bargain with the government for their survival and development. Third,

Shanzhai producers' symbolic capital is an important attraction to commercial sponsors. In order to get media exposure along with Shanzhai products, these sponsors are willing to contribute their economic capital to Shanzhai productions.

However, we should also be aware that, though Shanzhai producers harvested enormous symbolic capital, this capital is granted mostly by commercial media such as metropolitan newspapers, video sharing websites, and syndicated entertainment shows on television and radio, which the government does not fully trust. As shown in Strategy four, the symbolic capital of Shanzhai producers is earned at the cost of their subcultural capital. They had to sacrifice their cultural expressions in terms of taste and content and follow the popular cultural taste defined by commercial media. Strategy two, regarding government's censorship, and strategy three, regarding cultural producers' self-censorship, also showed that media-sanctioned cultural capital is not necessarily in line with the government-sanctioned one. Their relationships are under constant negotiation and struggle. Thus, excessive symbolic capital from the media could also invite the government's negative attitude. In fact, SARFT's banning television and radio stations from involvement or hyping Shanzhai emerged amidst extensive and intensive news coverage on the cooperation between Guizhou TV station and Lao Meng. Thus, the symbolic capital of Shanzhai producers could be either leverage to negotiate with the government or a well-marked target inviting government interference.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked two research questions. First, what strategies are employed by different actors in the process of Shanzhai cultural

production, circulation and regulation? The second is regarding the implications of these strategies on the power dynamics among these actors.

There are five strategies presented: (1) policies regarding cultural productions exclude non-profit cultural producers from economic hegemony, but these producers willingly subscribe to it; (2) the government issues directives to intervene in the content of cultural productions; (3) the government promotes cultural hegemony and commercial media, and Shanzhai producers manipulate messages as voluntary self-censorship; (4) Shanzhai producers adopt taste and production standards defined by media professionals; (5) Shanzhai producers use media exposure as leverage in negotiating with media, sponsors and government agencies.

Using the conceptual frameworks of Bourdieu and Kopytoff, I analyzed the strategies of various actors in the field of Shanzhai cultural production in terms of capital exchanges or inclusion in/exclusion from it. I tried to avoid an essentializing stance on the empowerment or disempowerment of Shanzhai cultural producers in the current communication system in China. Instead, the complex relationships of power dynamics are presented in terms of capital acquirement and surrender.

From the perspective of social governance and resistance through the assemblages of surveillance, all these strategies that are employed by different social actors involve media surveillance. To evade censorship, or the hostile panoptic gaze, commercial media and Shanzhai producers repackaged their messages, such as turning a Shanzhai gala into the “folk” gala. To gain access to the synoptic display in the media assemblages, many of which are commercial in nature, Shanzhai producers opt in to the economic



hegemony, the state-sanctioned cultural hegemony, and/or the media-sanctioned cultural hegemony. But in order to preserve their subculture and, sometimes, economic benefits, these producers also use the symbolic capital granted by media to challenge these hegemonies, which co-exist as discrepant sorting standards in the Chinese media assemblage. Media, on the one hand, are the site where these negotiations, governance, resistance, or compromises are made. On the other hand, media themselves are also part of the assemblage that change the availability and rates of capital exchange.

Thus, it is found that, in the current communication system, grassroots cultural producers do have more opportunities to acquire social capital, symbolic capital, and even economic capital in exchange for other types of resources. The government does not have an ironclad power of decision as traditionally conceptualized and has to control cultural production with a combination of multiple measures. However, in order to survive, the cultural producers in this exchange system have to subject themselves to two partly overlapping but independent cultural habituses, one of the official-sanctioned culture and the other of popular taste constructed and backed by commercial media. The alliances among actors are constantly shifting depending on the exchange relationships.

The subjection to media cultural hegemony and the government cultural hegemony are different in the way Shanzhai producers think about them. On the one hand, the Shanzhai producers use self-censorship to repackage their message simply to pass through it. It manifests the state's disciplinary power exercised upon media and Shanzhai producers. They know the existence of the disciplines articulated in regulations, directives, and even in their guesses, and internalize them to carry out certain aligned

actions. On the other hand, it is evident that some Shanzhai producers are subject to the media cultural hegemony by putting real faith in it. It is identified by Bourdieu as misrecognition. In this case, it is the market-driven, self-improvement mentality that is internalized while also being misrecognized. Shanzhai producers carried out creative actions based on this rational calculation in order to “improve” their products, by learning, practicing, and favoring professional participants and operations, etc.

However, Shanzhai producers as a social group should also not be essentialized. Among themselves, there were conflicting opinions about the strategies that should be used and on valuation of their own sub-cultural capital. Not only the different Shanzhai productions, the gala, the *Red Mansions*, and the *Lecture Show*, employed different strategies under their respective conditions, but also participants in one production, such as the Shanzhai gala, also disputed the directions for the show to follow. Every single Shanzhai producer is a social agent out of his/her own habitus, and their habituses are generative of social interactions on the macro level. With the study of strategies of Shanzhai cultural production, circulation and regulation, we can see complex power dynamics in the communication system that is rooted in the complex social structure of contemporary Chinese society.

## CHAPTER V

## THE DISCOURSE ON SHANZHAI: CONFLICTING DISCIPLINES

In the previous chapters, I examined the production, circulation, and regulation of Shanzhai videos as ritualistic uses of the media/surveillance system and the strategies different parties utilized to carve out spaces in the surveillance assemblages either to be spotted and displayed or to evade gazes and to avoid censorship. Hence, I argued that Shanzhai practices manifest the governance and resistance of how people live their lives through media. It is a combination of disciplinary power and governmentality that is promoted and resisted simultaneously. However, in the media assemblage, we should not assume a monolithic standard that decides model citizens or deviants. There are internal conflicts in terms of the sorting standards of the media surveillance system, considering that the official and commercial media co-exist in a complex relationship.

The reason why Shanzhai became a prominent phenomenon and the reason for which these investigated cases here are widely seen as representatives of Shanzhai cultural productions are attributed, at least to a great extent, to extensive media coverage. It is rare for spontaneous grassroots cultural activities to draw such attention from all kinds of media, not only the commercial ones, but also the official ones. In fact, the commentary on Shanzhai in *Xinwen Lianbo*, one of the flagship news show broadcast by CCTV everyday at 7 pm and relayed by the primary channels of all provincial stations, invited extensive interpretation in other media. Not only domestic media, but also overseas media, from Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV to the *Wall Street Journal* and *New*

*Yorker* reported and commented on this unique Chinese phenomenon. Media representation, or construction, of the Shanzhai phenomenon must have interacted with how Shanzhai is viewed by Shanzhai producers, audience, and officials.

Thus, this chapter will concentrate on how China's domestic media constructed Shanzhai culture discursively. Since Shanzhai has been reported and commented on by both commercial media and the Party's mouthpiece media, specifically, I want to know how Shanzhai culture was framed, and how the frames might be different in media of different natures. This is a key question to ask in order to understand Shanzhai because the struggle in discourses is the site of the construction of the "normal" culture. It is this negotiated standard(s) that define the function of the surveillance assemblages and, more broadly, the governance and resistance of social expressions through the media system.

It is necessary to study the discourses regarding Shanzhai because, first, discourse is not a route to social reality, but part of the social reality. Under the umbrella of a strong social constructivist epistemology (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), the constitutive nature of discourse has been discussed in multiple academic contexts. John L. Austin views speech as actions (1962). According to Speech Act scholars, words are not always passive descriptions of a given reality, but actions and performances that can be used to invent and affect realities. An utterance has not only its ostensible semantic meanings, but also an "illocutionary force" that is intended by the speaker, as well as a "perlocutionary act" or the actual effect, be it persuading, convincing, enlightening, or scaring. Ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel, 1967) called for a shift away from seeing talk as resource to seeing talk as a topic, or as itself a behavior to be explained. Writer

Rushdie said in a radical way that “the things that make up the social world -- including our very identities -- appear out of discourse” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 2). Thus,

Potter (1997) summarized that the analysis of discourse

[H]as an analytic commitment to studying discourse as texts and talk in social practices. That is, the focus is not on language as an abstract entity such as lexicon and set of grammatical rules (in linguistics), a system of differences (in structuralism), a set of rules for transforming statements (in Foucauldian genealogies). Instead, it is the medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do. (p.146)

In the variety of discourse planes, in critical discourse analysis terms, media discourse is undoubtedly an important one deserving careful examination. We are living in a more and more mediated world, and our social realities partly rest on the media discourse we consume every day. Couldry (2003b) argued that in the modern world, mass media occupy the center of our society. It is the cultural center that is constructed by mediated communication (Carey, 2009). Down to the micro levels, Gitlin (1980) pointed out that media discourse serves as interpretive packages that are “largely unspoken and unacknowledged” (p. 7), what Gamson and Modigliani (1989) called “media frames.”

News media are especially important and powerful in their construction of the social reality (Tuchman, 1978). News media “organize the world both for journalists who report it and, to some important degree, for us who rely on their reports” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). They organize the world by persistent selection, emphasis, and exclusion of topics and images (Gitlin, 1980), and their discourses function on multiple structures of syntax, script, themes, as well as rhetoric (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

This cultural center is so important, powerful, and effective that it has become a site where various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality (Gurevitch & Levy, 1985). Studying the media discourse around Shanzhai promises a better understanding of how the meaning, or the social reality, of a grassroots cultural practice is constructed in contested ways. It will also provide insights into not only the discursive nature of Shanzhai culture, but also the power dynamics in governance in contemporary China through media.

Secondly, it is found that new-media-related discourse studies are still underdeveloped. Tomasello, Lee and Baer (2009) examined the publication patterns and outlets on Internet and related digital technologies over a 17-year time frame. While we don't know in the journals of journalism, mass media, technology, telecommunications, advertising, public relations, etc., which accommodated the majority of new media research, how many articles about new media actually tapped into issues of discourse, it is sure that fewer new media research made it into journals of discourse, rhetoric, oral/speech, and nonverbal than those made to media-oriented journals.

Thus, studying media discourse of Shanzhai will also help mitigate this gap in new media studies. This chapter's topic incorporates discourse in different types of traditional print media and grassroots user-generated new media content. It will provide an additional spin to both studies of media discourse and new media.

This chapter will be set up in the following structure. First, I will review the notions of cultural authenticity and legitimacy in the Chinese and the Western contexts to provide a conceptual backdrop of my analysis. Then I will review the

commercialization reform in China's media sector and the roles of metropolitan newspapers and Party newspapers in the current media system. After that, I will review the approach of discourse analysis, specifically on media discourse. Next, sampling methods and the sample will be described. It will be followed by analyses of categories and themes with examples. Last, a discussion will be provided to interpret the found themes, categories and dimensions to connect empirical evidences with theoretical understanding of Shanzhai.

### **Mass Culture and Popular Culture: Authentic Culture in China and in the West**

Although by no means I am suggesting that there's a complete discontinuity between China and the West in terms of their understandings of mass culture, as Hong(1994) pointed out, the seemingly similar debates on mass culture in China are quite irrelevant to the Western ones.

Hong (1994) summarized the contemporary Chinese understanding of mass culture with three debates throughout the ruling period of the Communist Party. The first one happened between the early 1930's and the mid 1940's. This debate was between the feudalist culture and the new democratic culture, a Chinese-styled mass-culture as formulated by Mao. Mao suggested in *The New Democratic Culture*<sup>6</sup>, the first systematic blueprint of the "new democratic culture" that it should be a "national, scientific and mass culture," and should be "anti-imperialist and anti-feudal" (p. 90). This Maoist understanding indicated that because a given culture is the reflection of the politics and economy of that given society, China's mass culture should belong to the

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<sup>6</sup> This title appears in Hong (1994). However, there are other sources citing this piece of Mao as "*On New Democracy*" or "*New Democratic Politics and New Democratic Culture*".

people and "should serve the toiling masses of workers and peasants who make up over 90 percent of the nation's population" (from Hong, 1994, p. 90). Mao's talk in the Yan'an Literature and Art Forum put an end to the first debate and became the basis of the Maoist cultural theory. It stated that the purpose of creating a mass culture is to gradually reduce the domain and weaken the influence of feudal culture. The culture should be a remarkable trademark of the working class. Because many workers, peasants, and soldiers were illiterate and uncultured as a result of the prolonged rule of the feudal and bourgeois classes, they badly needed a widespread campaign of enlightenment with the works of new revolutionary writers and artists.

The second debate started in the 1950's between the proletariat culture and bourgeois culture. Mao proposed a policy called "Letting One Hundred Flowers Blossom and Letting One Hundred Schools of Thoughts Contend" in multiple occasions in the 1950's. The Party encouraged the debate and was hoping that writers and artists could gain a clear understanding of the socialist mass culture and align their works to it. Mao viewed that the turbulent class struggle had ended and, in the socialist construction period, the class struggle will mainly appear on the ideological fronts. Thus, Mao in his summary of the second debate, the speech on the National Convention of Propaganda Cadres of the Chinese Communist Party in 1957, pointed out that the socialist mass culture should be proletariat-based (Hong, 1994).

The third debate happened in the 1980's after China's opening up and reform. This debate was on the relationship between China's traditional culture and the Western culture, on that which should be the post-Maoist mass culture for China. Some saw



traditional Chinese culture as the essence of the national identity, while others saw it as a social and historic burden to China's modernization. While there is not an official end of this debate, the democratic movement in 1989 did constrain this debate and reinforced the Party-line in interpretation of mass culture. It is proposed that although culture should prosper under the principle of "Letting one hundred flowers blossom and letting one hundred schools of thought contest," it should be serving socialism and serving the people in the first place (Hong, 1994).

Though the three debates happened in different historical and social contexts, they all reflected the Marxist view of culture. According to Marxism, truth is assumed to have been found in Communist ideals, "communication thus functions to propagate and elaborate this" (P. S. N. Lee, 1997, p. 90). Mass culture in this view is positioned as an educator to indoctrinate correct ideology to the people (Seldes, 1957). This means:

take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action. (Y. Zhao, 1998, p. 24)

This understanding makes the debate on mass culture in China mainly focus on the question of content and theme without questioning the power relationship in cultural expressions because the prevailing culture represents the masses, is correct, and is under the leadership of the Party.

Thus, in the Chinese sense, the authentic and correct culture has three characteristics. First, it has to follow the mass line. Second, the mass line is manifested in the Party line which the culture should follow. Third, culture should guide and indoctrinate people.

In the West, especially in the contemporary capitalist societies, mass culture usually refers to the commodified, industrially produced, and standardized cultural products that are promoted, sold, and consumed by a mass audience. To critique its commercial nature, academics usually juxtapose mass culture with authentic culture, originally mainly folk culture. However, there is not an authentic culture in the sense that it is pure and static. As Hall (1998) argued, culture is the site of power struggles; thus, the definition of authenticity is both dynamic and historicized. Different schools of scholars concentrate on different types of culture for the discussion of cultural authenticity, oftentimes juxtaposed with the commercial mass culture. Scholars of the Frankfurt School have long been in agony over the “industrialization” of culture and the loss of “aura.” They believe that it is not only the mass production per se, but also the written-to-be-a-hit nature of art works that jeopardizes the spirit of human aesthetics (MacDougald, 2004). Horkheimer said the definition of the beautiful as an object of disinterested pleasure had its roots in the purely aesthetic feeling that is “the reaction of the private atomic subject,” “the judgment of an individual who abstracts from prevailing social standards” (Horkheimer, 2004, pp. 158-159).

These scholars, some of whom are high artists themselves, prioritize individuality over social values and ends, especially the prevailing economic system which carves all men to one pattern. Benjamin summarized that the eliminated element as the “aura,” or “the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition” (1969). Horkheimer and Adorno (2004) further commented the role played by media in destroying the aura. They said “modern communication media have an

isolating effect... The lying words of the radio announcer become firmly imprinted on the brain and prevent men from speaking to each other” (p. 181). For Frankfurt School scholars, mass communication establishes uniformity among people by isolating them. In their opinion, audiences blindly enjoy the pseudo-individuality in the mass media while their minds are standardized by the industrialization of culture.

While scholars of the Frankfurt School still fantasize about an uncontaminated high art in pessimism, scholars of Cultural Studies have celebrated the authentic “making do” of the weak people in this inevitable age of mechanical reproduction. This time, mass culture is positioned against popular culture of certain groups of consumers, the sub-culture. Thus, the issue of real or authentic art is divested from how consumers are subjected to mass culture and directed toward how consumers use commercial cultural products for their own ends. The similarity between the two schools of thought lies in, as mentioned before, the Western concern of the power relationship among different cultures.

Authenticity is an important concern in subcultures. For example, Hebdige (1979) examined the styles of punks and especially the meanings of these styles in the consumerist society, which tends to incorporate and commodify everything. Jenkins (1992) studied content and the meaning of texts in different fan communities. The everyday appropriation of commercial texts by punks and fans help them find the authentic “aura”, not in a pure esthetic pleasure, but in the tensions with commodification or incorporation. As Hall (1998) noted on the popular culture, it is not who possesses a certain culture that makes it authentic or not, but rather the

contradiction between the power bloc and the popular force. The contradictions make the notions of “popular” and “authentic” dynamic and historically situated.

In this highly mediated and commercialized society, subculture practitioners seek authenticity in two ways, both of which manifest the contradiction Hall theorized (Moore, 2004). The first is to try to evade the influences of the culture industry and hence to renounce “the prevailing culture of media, image, and hypercommercialism” (p. 307). Here, it is not the ultimate truth or absolute real that matters, but the antithesis between the artifice and the sense of real. “[A]uthenticity must be defended against artifice; the terms only make sense in opposition to each other” (Lack, 1995). However, this tactic tends to drive subcultures underground and insulate them from the “superficiality of postmodern culture.” These fan activities are usually seen in DIY productions like “fanzines” in independent media or interpersonal networks in opposition to corporate media. For example certain punk groups label theirs as the “hardcore” or “straight-edge” subcultures, or the culture of authenticity. People following these strategies tend to evade the panoptic surveillance of the media system and isolate themselves as the deviants from the “norm.”

In contrast to the first way of hiding underground to achieve authenticity in celibacy from commercialization, the second way is in direct appropriation of commercial texts with dominant meanings. Some subculture followers such as the early punks recycle cultural images to parody them so as to deconstruct their dominant meanings (Hebdige, 1979). These artists who claim themselves authentic could be trained in orthodox schools of art (Frith & Horne, 1987), or simply raised in the mass-

mediated, consumer-driven environment to be a natural “sales-pitcher” like some cultural jammers (Klein, 2002). The signs and spectacles which fall victim to consumerism are turned against themselves in these subcultures. In the subculture of punks, those who appropriate, parody, and ridicule the consumerist culture are called the nihilists in contrast to the straight-edge ones. Grossberg (1992) pointed out in his study of rock music that in a postmodern response to the anxiety and ambivalence experienced by the baby boomer generation, consumer culture is parodied as a parody itself. The reflexive hyper-authenticity is what Grossberg called postmodern sensibility, which is defined as a logic of “ironic nihilism” or “authentic inauthenticity” (Lack, 1995). These people tend to compete for media attention rather than evade the gaze. They are self-sales-pitchers and usually comfortable with being displayed in the media synopticon. Many Shanzhai producers and performers are like them, only their relationship with the mainstream culture is more complicated.

The authenticity of popular culture should not be essentialized, either as absolute “authentic inauthenticity” or as really free from incorporation. In the whole continuum between the two poles, subculture followers are involved in complex power relationships against the dominant bloc. As Fiske (1989) said, in capitalist societies, there is hardly a so-called “folk culture” against which to measure the “inauthenticity” of mass culture (p. 27). What is important is the complexity and tension between the dominant strategy and the guerrilla tactics.

### **Legitimacy of Culture: Containment and Resistance**

No matter how much a culture involves commercialization, professionalism, or state intervention, in other words how “authentic” a culture is, as Hall said, containment always goes together with resistance in the culture. This notion of “popular culture” as pointed out by Raymond Williams is “not identified by *the people*, but by others” (Williams, 1985). Once a cultural expression is recognized as a part of the dominant structure, it is partly contained and becomes legitimate in the sense that it conforms to the dominant norm. The containment, or legitimization, could be facilitated by “industrialization, social mobility, mass communications, politicization, commercialization, musical, theatrical, artistic, and literary professionalism, and a dozen other forces” (Stites, 1992, p. 1).

In China, the legitimate culture for the masses is contained, on the one hand as suggested by the review above, by following the Party’s cultural leadership such as censorship and government approval. On the other hand, in the attempt to harness the cultural industry as an economic force, legitimate culture for the masses in China is also contained within the logic of commercialism and professionalism, which is also the concern of many Western scholars.

I will call a culture’s state of being sanctioned, or contained, by the power bloc “legitimacy.” The Oxford dictionary (“Oxford Dictionary of English,” 2010a) has two explanations for “legitimacy.” One of them is “conformity to the law or to rules.” The other is the “ability to be defended with logic or justification, validity.” When the externally justified legitimacy refers to laws and regulations, this dimension can also be

understood as “legality” which the Oxford dictionary defines as “the quality or state of being in accordance with the law” (“Oxford Dictionary of English,” 2010b). Thus, legitimacy refers to a broader and more general status of a culture being legitimate. It could be externally justified with factors such as financial viability, the cultural taste of the dominant class, or professionalism. By legality, I only refer to the legal legitimacy, or the abiding by government regulations and laws.

In summary, legitimacy, though referring to different aspects, from commercial viability or government approval to professionalism of cultural production, represents the power bloc’s containment of culture in both China and the West. It will be seen working together with the notion of authentic culture in the case of Shanzhai discourse based on China’s political, cultural, and historical specificities.

### **China’s Press Reform**

Since I am studying the newspaper discourses on Shanzhai video productions, it is necessary to contextualize the discussion within the contemporary Chinese media system, especially in the newspaper field. I have covered the reform and current structure of Chinese media in general in the second chapter. Here I will concentrate on the reform and commercialization of China’s newspapers and especially the ownership structure, the social and political roles of newspapers, and the interaction between the Party journalism and the western journalistic professionalism.

To correct the ultra-left orientation during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Chinese media reform started as early as the late 1970’s. As Zhao (1998) argued, it returned to the earlier ideals of the Party press such as “seeking truth from facts” and

having relevance to the everyday lives of the people. During this period, Chinese journalists started to become more receptive to the western journalistic concepts such as objectivity and timeliness.

Throughout the 1980's, the momentum of changes in media's role and structures was fermented. On the one hand, journalist professionals demanded more autonomy and independence in the editorial process. On the other hand, high level leaders started to stress the roles of media, such as supervision over the government, informing the people of important events, and as forums for people to participate in discussion of important issues (Y. Zhao, 1998). In this period, although the basic principle of Party leadership was not substantially challenged, there were multiple voices in the continuum between reformers and the hardliners such as democrats, neo-authoritarians, and technocrats.

However, after the crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in 1989, the debate on media reform was shut down, and the Party principle was reinstated as the theoretical guideline for journalist work. As Zhao (1998) documented, Jiang Zemin reiterated the mouthpiece theory, and Li Ruihuan, who was in charge of propaganda and ideology work, emphasized the tradition of positive propaganda. Liberal leaders were purged from the central governing body, and the daily practice of editors and journalists was restricted again.

The return to the reform discourse didn't come back until the iconic talk Deng Xiaoping made during his inspection trip to southern China in 1992 (Chan, 1993). Later that year, Deng's proposal of a socialist market economy was officially adopted in the Fourteenth National Party Congress, and the pragmatic orientation overrode ideological



debates. But the practical changes in the media sector, which is so closely related to the political control, lagged behind until the mid-1990s.

The changes in the newspaper sector during the reform period happened both in the operation of newspapers and the distribution side. From the early 1990s on, publishers started to contract out the editorial operations of newspapers. While the license holder of newspapers received fees from contractors and still supervised the newspapers, the contractors actually operated the newspapers on a daily basis both editorially and financially. In terms of the distribution system, as Zhao (1998) argued, the street newspaper sellers greatly contributed to the change of the city landscape in reform-era China. Because they tended to sell evening dailies and radio and television weeklies, which were general interest papers, these non-Party-organs boomed in the 1990s. The evening news usually catered to everyday urban life and carried more soft news than Party papers. They are more entertainment and audience oriented, rather than leader oriented. Though they still operate under the Party principle, the approaches are less straightforward. In contrast with the Party-line newspapers, Yuezhi Zhao called them the “mass-line” newspapers (1998, p. 131).

After the first wave of organizational innovation within the traditional Party press structure, the second wave witnessed the flourish of tabloid papers and weekend editions in 1990s (Yuezhi Zhao, 2000b). Though tabloid papers had been accused of “spiritual pollution” for focusing on sex, murder, and gossip in the mid-1980s, they continued to be popular throughout the 1990s. In addition, the weekend editions of Party newspapers developed rapidly in the 1990s in China. These “special economic zones” are seen by

their parent Party newspapers as an opportunity to circumvent the confines and cover whatever sells. Most of the journalism work in that period was caught between the two extremes of the Party line and the bottom line. In this tension, those that balanced the two strengths well were increasingly hailed as the model journalism, such as the *Beijing Youth Daily* (Y. Zhao, 1998).

Into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the commercialization of the Chinese press has gone beyond the contracting or weekend edition and beyond the audience of general interest to joint-venture, urban-elite-oriented metropolitan newspapers. The first metro paper was launched in 1995 in Chengdu by the Party organ of Sichuan province, the *Sichuan Daily*. It applies market calculation and targets the mass appeal market in an urban area. This practice was copied throughout the country. In 2001, the central Party organ *People's Daily* launched its subsidiary *Jinghua Times* in Beijing jointly with a state-owned enterprise. These metro papers:

operate as semi-autonomous business units of the traditional provincial Party organ, serving as the perfect media for the Party to reach the rising urban consumer strata, thus reconstituting them as the new power base, while simultaneously functioning as the 'cash cow' that cross-subsidize and sustain the traditional party organs. (Yuezhi Zhao, 2008, p. 81)

Along with the rise of commercialism, was the struggle between the traditional Party journalism paradigm and the Western professional journalist paradigm. It was found that the more market-oriented press was eroding the Party-press ideology and giving rise to journalistic professionalism such as objectivity and job autonomy (Chan, et al., 2004; He, Lee, & Huang, 2007; C.-c. Lee, et al., 2006; Pan & Chan, 2003; Pan & Lu, 2003). This was also confirmed in my interviews with metro paper journalists who

reported on Shanzhai productions. They confirmed that the orientation of their report was objective and informative. They tried to present facts and leave the interpretation to the audience, rather than render their articles opinionated.

However, this shift in the perceptions of journalistic paradigms is also complicated. Zhongdang Pan, Joseph Chan and their colleagues (Chan, et al., 2004; Pan & Chan, 2003) empirically tested the perceptions about the Party media paradigm and the Western professional media paradigm among journalist professionals in Shanghai. On the one hand, journalists in general tend to think that professional media are more desirable than Party organs in relation to their professional ideals. On the other hand, journalist professionals' job satisfaction was both related to job autonomy, a distinct Western journalistic value, and the interpretive role of press, a Marxist view of media's social function. It was found that the *Xinmin Evening News*, a mass-appeal urban newspaper, was perceived as the Party paradigm, when compared with a well-acknowledged liberal outlet, the *Southern Weekend*. However, the interpretive role was not found to be related to the *Xinmin Evening News*. The authors explained that "evening or urban papers targeted at urban residents or services-oriented TV or radio shows, while still toeing the Party line, may concentrate on providing practical information to or expressing grievances among target audiences" (Pan & Chan, 2003, p. 668).

Another characteristic that is related to the nature of these mass-appeal papers is their elite bias. Yuezhi Zhao (1998) attributed the decline of newspapers for peasants to the commercialization of newspaper operation and distribution. In terms of the content of metro papers, she pointed out that the elite-biased views on civil rights and legal

justice limited metro papers' views and their ability of mobilizing the civil society . These papers' appeals to urban middle class readers do not help mitigate the existing urban-rural divide in Chinese society; if anything, it amplifies it.

Thus, by examining the news coverage of Shanzhai in both metropolitan newspapers and Party newspapers, I expect to see different frames and discursive strategies. These frames and strategies to represent Shanzhai are actually an active construction of Shanzhai culture. How Shanzhai culture is defined, be it grassroots and authentic, vulgar and illegal, or educational and informative in line with the socialist mass culture, actually reflects the struggle for power or, in Hall's terms (1998), the contradiction between the popular force and the power bloc. Meanwhile, these media discourses on Shanzhai also serve as the sorting criteria for further synoptic display or censorship of Shanzhai videos in the media assemblage. They are the contesting disciplines in the media system that are both effective and need Shanzhai producers, video websites, sponsors, regulators to negotiate with.

### **Discourse Analysis of Media**

Because I intend to analyze the discourse of Shanzhai in the newspapers of different natures, it is necessary to review the discursive devices examined in the literature of discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis provides an approach to tackle the underlying meanings embedded in our daily uses of language (Johnstone, 2008; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Wood & Kroger, 2000). There is a wide range of discursive devices from macro to micro level discussed in the literature. Johnstone (2008) discussed the structure of paragraphs. A paragraph could consist of statements of a problem,

solution, topic, restrictions, illustrations, etc. (p. 87). The narrative structure could include abstract, orientation, complicating action, result, evaluation, and coda, etc. (pp. 92-93). The structure of narrative is a set of pre-formed expectations that simplifies information processing. It is similar to what van Dijk called a cognitive schema (Van Dijk, 1986). Frame is also a cognitive structure that links the attributes of constructs to each other to form a web of relationships. Thus, activating one node in this web might activate others (pp. 187-188).

Discourse analysis also provided some guidance on analyzing participants of social practices. First, the indexical aspect of their conversation and the performance in conversation could help researchers understand discourse participants' social identification (Johnstone, 2008). Second, positioning could also serve as a replacement for traditional concepts of roles because the selves are multiple and shifting under a constructive perspective. "Position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons" (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 100). Third, the agent-patient distinction is another important perspective to understand the discursive construction of Shanzhai participants in media. An agent is someone who is seen to make choices, follow plans, and orient to rules while a patient is someone who is seen to suffer the consequences of external forces or internal compulsions (p. 101). Fourth, discourse analysts also draw metaphors to help the analyses of participants. Metaphors could make certain attributions available to the subject matter (p. 104). Analyzing metaphors used in media could help explicate the construction of an intended reading of Shanzhai.

Most of the above constructs are derived from discourse analysis of conversations and literary works. An analytical approach that suits the characteristics of media discourse was later developed by scholars in discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough, 1995; Richardson, 2007; Van Dijk, 1988, 1991). Fairclough (1995) proposed to study the text, the discourse practice which includes both text production and text consumption, and the socio-cultural practice of particular communication events. Furthermore, he also proposed to study the more general order of discourse, which cuts across the private discourse and public discourse.

Carvalho (2010) specifically proposed a framework for analyzing media discourse. He listed six important aspects of textual analysis, including layout and structural organization, objects, actors, language, grammar and rhetoric, discursive strategies, and ideological standpoints. First, like traditional content analysis, he advocated to study surface elements of the newspaper and of the text itself, such as the sections in which the articles were published, the page number, size, visual elements, etc. Second, objects refer to topic or theme, but connote a constructed nature of discourse, rather than a representational one. Third, actors are the individuals or institutions mentioned in news reports and constructed as certain social identities and relations. Fourth, language, grammar, and rhetoric help identify the relationship of key concepts to wider cultural and social ideological frameworks. Thus the verb or adjective choices, the metaphors, and writing styles all contribute to meaning constructions. Fifth, discursive strategies refer to the forms of discursive manipulation of reality by social factors, such as journalists and editors. They could include a variety of discursive intervention, such as

framing, selective inclusion and exclusion, and specific strategies of positioning, legitimation, and politicization. Positioning, as mentioned above, involves in constructing the relationship between a social actor and others. Legitimation consists of “justifying and sanctioning a certain action or power, on the basis of normative or other reasons” (p. 18). Politicization attributes a political nature to a certain reality. These strategies could also be used in the reversed way as de-legitimation and de-politicization. Sixth, ideological standpoint is a concern to critical discourse analysis of media. Carvalho advocates the attention specifically to ideological closure where “the multi-accentual ‘potential for meaning’ of the chosen signs...are filled in until the signs are ‘closed,’ apparently uni-accentual” (p. 19). Meanwhile, the author also proposed two frameworks of contextual analysis: comparative-synchronic analysis and historical-diachronic analysis, which treats the time plane of journalistic texts differently.

These perspectives in discourse analysis will inform my further examination of the newspaper articles. They will be the lenses through which I extract consistent underlying meanings in the media discourse of Shanzhai. I will further describe my uses of them combined with the procedures of grounded theory in the section of reporting themes and categories. Before that, I will first describe my sampling strategies.

### **Data Collection**

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Shanzhai became a prominent social issue largely because of the extensive coverage not only on the Internet, but also in traditional mass media like television and newspapers. Thus, media discourses greatly contributed to the overall construction of the Shanzhai phenomenon.

My analysis in this chapter will be mainly based on newspaper coverage of Shanzhai cultural productions. This is because, first, as I reviewed above, the media reform in the past 20 years in China provides Chinese readers with newspapers of different functions and coverage orientations. Newspapers serving as the cash cows or as the Party mouthpieces could gate-keep differently on grassroots issues like Shanzhai, or position themselves differently in their overall agendas. Or, if Shanzhai makes it to the different types of newspapers, they could be framed differently. These discourses jointly contribute to how Shanzhai is understood in the Chinese society. Second, I found in my field work that newspapers were the first media to report the three cases of Shanzhai videos in this study. Though these videos or proposals of production were put online by these producers, the producers and journalists attested that they were first reported and popularized by various metropolitan newspapers. Then the reports and their videos went viral on the Internet, and more media of various types rushed into the coverage. Thirdly, newspapers can be more reliably archived compared with other media materials in China. Currently there is no database that provides transcripts of major television or radio shows in China. Neither are comprehensive audio-visual archives of television or radio shows available. On the Internet, on the one hand, the Shanzhai videos are cross-posted on numerous websites. It is virtually impossible to get a comprehensive archive of how these videos are titled and tagged, as a part of the discursive construction of Shanzhai. On the other hand, as I found in my preliminary browsing of these videos on various websites, there were few replies, let alone in-depth comments, to these videos. It is not clear whether some of the replies were removed due to the filtering protocol, or if



viewers didn't comment on these videos at all. The attested censorship of China's Internet (MacKinnon 2010) rendered archiving reliable online records of Shanzhai videos and comments impossible. Thus, I will concentrate on newspapers in this study.

I selected eleven metropolitan newspapers and five central level Party newspapers to study. The 11 metropolitan newspapers are all the Chinese metropolitan newspapers that are listed in the top 100 daily newspapers by total circulation released by the World Association of Newspaper and News Publishers ("2009 nian," 2009). There are 25 newspapers in mainland China that appear on this list, and they include Party newspapers such as the *People's Daily*, metropolitan newspapers, and evening newspapers. Since the evening news, as reviewed above, has an ambiguous role as the Party mouthpiece and the commercial leg of Party organs (Pan & Chan, 2003), they are excluded from my sample. The 11 metropolitan newspapers are the *Information Times* (*Xinxi Shibao*), *Southern Metropolitan News* (*Nanfang Dushi Bao*), *Chutian Metropolitan News* (*Chutian Dushi Bao*), *Yanzhao Metropolitan News* (*Yanzhao Dushi Bao*), *Metro Express* (*Dushi Kuaibao*), *Peninsula Metro News* (*Bandao Dushi Bao*), *New Express* (*Xin Kuaibao*), *Western China Metro News* (*Huaxi Dushi Bao*), *Modern Express* (*Xiandai Kuaibao*), *Eastern Today News* (*Dongfang Jinbao*), and *Jinghua Times* (*Jinghua Shibao*).

The five Party newspapers are located according to the list in CCP's Party Newspaper and Magazine Database (2006). All of them are central level Party newspapers. I didn't include local level Party newspapers because they serve as the mouthpieces of local Party branches and therefore usually only concentrate on local

issues, while metropolitan newspapers of different areas, catering to more homogeneous urban elite readers, pay more attention to national social and cultural issues in addition to local news. Many metropolitan newspapers, though mainly in circulation in a certain area, are available for subscription nationwide. The five Party newspapers I included in my sample are *People's Daily (Renmin Ribao)*, *People's Daily (Overseas Version) (Renmin Ribao Haiwai Ban)*, *Guangming Daily (Guangming Ribao)*, *Economy Daily (Jingji Ribao)*, and *Liberation Army's Daily (Jiefangjun Bao)*. Only *People's Daily* appeared in the circulation list mentioned above. However, the discursive influences of these official newspapers should not be underestimated for the less circulation compared to the popular press.

Since I failed to locate a comprehensive newspaper database that archives all the selected Chinese newspapers, I had to turn to the websites of these newspapers or Internet search engines. Fortunately, all of them have e-paper sites where I could either retrieve articles with certain key words directly or within which I could search for articles with certain key words with a third-party search engine. To concentrate on Shanzhai cultural production, I didn't search for the word "Shanzhai," which yielded many articles discussing or reporting Shanzhai cell phones. Instead, I searched for "Shanzhai Chunwan" (Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*), "Shanzhai Baijia Jiangtan" (Shanzhai *Lecture Show*), and "Shanzhai Honglou" (Shanzhai *Red Mansions*) in Chinese characters in these sites without limiting the time frame. I retrieved 109 articles with at least one of them in each article. All of the retrieved results are relevant to my subject matter, and thus entered my data pool (Table 1).

**Table 1** Article-counts of Each of the Metropolitan and Party Newspapers

Metro Newspaper	Amount of Articles	Party Newspapers	Amount of Articles
<i>Jinghua Times</i>	19	<i>People's Daily</i>	5
<i>Information Times</i>	12	<i>People's Daily (Overseas Ed.)</i>	6
<i>Southern Metro News</i>	10	<i>Guangming Daily</i>	5
<i>Chutian Metro News</i>	10	<i>Jingji Daily</i>	0
<i>Huaxi Metro News</i>	18	<i>Jiefangjun Daily</i>	1
<i>Peninsula Times</i>	9	<b>Average</b>	<b>5.7</b>
<i>Metro Express</i>	2	<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Modern Express</i>	5		
<i>Eastern Today</i>	5		
<i>New Express</i>	2		
<b>Average</b>	<b>16.7</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>		

## **Themes and Categories**

In this study, I will ground my theorization of the media's Shanzhai discourse in the data. In this process, I will combine the procedures of finding a grounded theory (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the analytical framework of discourse analysis I reviewed earlier (Carvalho, 2010; Fairclough, 1995; Johnstone, 2008; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Wood & Kroger, 2000).

I follow grounded theory procedures not as a theory to guide data theorization, but an inductively derived representation of the Shanzhai phenomenon. Glaser (1978) described the process of data coding in two stages. "Substantive coding" is first-order and works closely with data. "Theoretical coding" is second-order which conceptualizes the substantive codes (p. 55). Strauss and Corbin (1990) provided more elaborate coding procedures. They distinguished between three phases of coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. According to the authors, open coding refers to the preliminary screening of data and the generating of basic categories. Axial coding involves reorganizing the data and connecting categories in new ways. The authors suggested analyzing conditions, contexts, action/interactional strategies, and consequences of the social process being categorized in axial coding (p. 97). Selective coding involves selecting the core categories and linking them in a systematic way. However, Glaser (1992) argued against any pre-conceived coding paradigm. He insisted that a grounded theory should emerge out of the data purely in an inductive manner.

Despite Glaser's critique, Strauss and Corbin's guidelines proved to be popular among scholars and have invited further elaboration in the community of qualitative

methods. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) provided a three-step procedure of grounded theory involving open coding, integration, and dimensionalization. Open coding and integration correspond to Strauss and Corbin's open coding and axial coding. Open coding is the categorization of data in an unrestricted manner. This opens up the inquiry, but every interpretation at this point is tentative. Lindlof and Taylor suggested using both codebook and memo to keep records of categories and rationales of categorization. The theoretical memos serve to flesh out the thematic qualities of the coding categories. These notes proved to be very helpful in the later stages of my analysis. Integration functions similar to Strauss and Crobin's axial coding, which emphasizes on causality, context, strategy, and consequence. The dimensionalization step is derived from Spiggle (1994). It identifies the properties of categories and explores the attributes of dimensions.

This study will follow Strauss and Corbin (1990), and the derived method guide (Dey, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), rather than Glaser's radical stance of pre-conception-free version of grounded theory. It is hard for a scholar to start with absolutely no preconception since scholars always immerse themselves in literature and start their research with personal interest and enthusiasm in it. Rather, I would follow Dye's suggestion to come to open coding with as many ideas as possible (2004, p. 85). Thus, I reviewed a variety of literature on discourse analysis and sensitized myself to as many discursive cues as possible, especially those that are suggested as important in studying media discourse. But these concepts will not be used as categories directly. As Wood and Kroger (2000) said, these analytical concepts are sensitizing concepts, not

categories. Categorization is the process of characterizing the meaning of a unit of data with respect to certain generic properties (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Categories include the chunks of data that represent a more general phenomenon. At the same time, as Wood and Kroger suggested, I would also attend to not only what was there, but also what was not there (2000, p. 92). In the step of dimensionalization, I will identify the common attributes of different categories and draw examples from my data to justify my interpretation, which is what a grounded theory should do (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 80).

I will follow two ways to enhance the validity to achieve a better chance of more plausible, insightful, and useful interpretation of the texts. First, scholars have argued that corpus linguistics could benefit critical discourse analysis. Traditional discourse analysis, whose analytical frameworks I will follow in this study, usually concentrates on deep and thick reading of a limited amount of texts in order to gain insights to the subject matter. Mautner (2009) argued that corpus text could “help reduce researcher bias, thus coping with a problem to which CDA [Critical Discourse Analysis] is hardly more prone than other social sciences but for which it has come in for harsh and persistent criticism” (p. 123). Though I will not use software to facilitate my analysis, the merits of texts corpus will help gain validity of my interpretations.

Another way is to “triangulate” multiple sources (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 241). I will concentrate my analysis on the newspaper articles I collected, but my interpretation will be triangulated with other sources such as other commercial or social media, and my interviews with Shanzhai producers and journalists. However, even with

these methods of validation, I would not say, as Lindlof and Taylor agreed, there is *the* right interpretation (2002, p. 240).

After an iterative process of open-coding all articles from metropolitan newspapers and Party newspapers, ten codes were established. They include (1) the poor quality and inexperienced operation of Shanzhai producers, (2) the attempts of improving production quality, (3) the mass-appeal nature of Shanzhai programs, (4) tastes of established cultural productions, (5) evading sponsorship, (6) cooperation with sponsors, (7) the problematic legal issues of Shanzhai, (8) efforts of getting Shanzhai legalized, (9) Shanzhai as an expressive channel, and (10) incorporation into mainstream channels.

In the axial coding process, these themes were integrated into 5 higher-order categories: (1) Quality of Shanzhai production, (2) Tastes of Shanzhai production, (3) Sponsorship in Shanzhai production, (4) The legal status of Shanzhai production, and (5) Shanzhai culture as an independent expressive channel. Table 2 illustrates the definitions and examples of each of these thematic codes as well as the first-order categories.

**Table 2** Summary of Coding Categories

First-order Categories	Themes	Definitions	Examples
Quality of Shanzhai Production	1. Poor production	Poor quality of Shanzhai programs, and lack of experience of Shanzhai producers	In the Shanzhai <i>Red Mansions</i> , you can not only see sister Lin going to Jia's mansion, but also some family members playing Mahjong in another room [a goof in the video]. The spirit of self-entertainment invites netizens' respect. (Hu, 2010)
	2. The attempts of improving production quality	Attempts and efforts of making Shanzhai production more polished, and the controversy around it	The new year is approaching, and Lao Meng is staging a comeback for the Spring Festival Gala of the Year of Tiger. He claims to hire professional teams, and check on the quality of programs strictly. (Duan, 2009a)
Tastes of Shanzhai Production	3. Mass-oriented nature of Shanzhai	Statements about and attempts to stick to mass appeals.	[ <i>Red Mansions</i> ] was hailed by many netizens, it is not seen as blasphemy of the masterpiece, but an interpretation of the spirit of mass-appeal arts. ("Huo," 2008)
	4. Tastes of established cultural productions	Statements about and attempts of avoiding established cultural genres	People feel repulsed by the lack of innovations, the lip-synching, and the sub-rules of CCTV's <i>Spring Festival Gala</i> ...How can we make sense of the life around us that appears to be coarse with the flawless pictures on television year after year. (Guodong, 2008)
Sponsorship in Shanzhai Production	5. Evading sponsor-ship	Statements and attempts of evading, stopping or avoiding sponsor involvements.	The new message recently is that the grassroots festival that planned to hold the hand of television media has decided to break up with the contracted station, to avoid the rumor of being incorporated, and to guarantee to be more Shanzhai. (Bao, 2008)
	6. Cooperation with sponsors	Statements and deeds of contacting, negotiating, and introducing sponsorship	Guizhou Satellite Channel will provide professional support, and guidance of art, technology, to make the Shanzhai Spring Festival to reach a higher level. (Hou, 2008)



**Table 2** Continued

First-order Categories	Themes	Definitions	Examples
The Legal Status of Shanzhai Production	7. Problematic Legal issues	Questioning and intervening Shanzhai production on the bases of government regulations	It is not known whether there will be commercials during the online broadcast, or whether the audience will be charged for admission. If so, the Shanzhai Spring Festival takes on a certain commercial nature. Commercial performance and advertisements have to be approved by the Industrial and Commercial Bureau and the cultural administration. It has to register for taxation, keep financial records, and pay taxes according to laws. Lip-synching is strictly prohibited in commercial performances, and if found, the performances will be banned and fined. ("Wangyou," 2008)
	8. Efforts of getting Shanzhai legalized	Statements and efforts of making Shanzhai production in accordance with government regulations	On the morning of the day before, the organizer of the Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala, Lao Meng, was granted the performance license by the Cultural Committee of Dongcheng District, and he showed it to the staff excitedly. ("Shanzhai chunwan gengming," 2009)

**Table 2** Continued

First-order Categories	Themes	Definitions	Examples
Shanzhai culture as an expressive channel for people	9. Shanzhai as an independent channel	Stories of Shanzhai as an expressive channel for those lack of access to voice for themselves	[After Han self-recommended to CCTV for the first time], the show said there were requirements for the speaker and it looked like I had nothing. They said you were not qualified because you had no reputation, no professional rank or title...The second time he called to ask for taking the speaker's audition, and he was refused again for not having a published work. Later he thought to himself why not shoot a video of the lecture myself. After shooting it, he called the lecture show, and the staff said they had no time, and didn't accept self-recommendation. ("Shanzhai ban," 2009)
	10. Incorporation into the main-stream	Accounts on cooperation with established media or on mainstream's channels' incorporation of Shanzhai	As an existing cultural phenomenon, we cannot turn a blind eye to it. We'll actively guide it and provide some platforms for them. (Guo & Fan, 2009)

In the next part, I will present the dimensions that cut across all the themes and reveal the natures of discourses on Shanzhai in Chinese media.

### **Dimensions in the Shanzhai Discourses: Authenticity and Legitimacy**

Following the dimensionalization step in analyzing themes and categories extracted from the news discourse (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Spiggle, 1994), two dimensions were found cutting across the different discursive categories. They are authenticity and legitimacy.

As I reviewed earlier, cultural authenticity refers to different meanings in Western literature and in Communist China. In the West, authenticity of a culture is usually set opposite to the contamination of commodification or industrialization as a dynamic and historical power struggle. Thus, authentic cultural practitioners usually either hide underground to evade commercialization, or appropriate commercial texts and parody them to deconstruct their dominant meanings (Moore, 2004). Thus, the western sense of authentic culture concerns itself in relation to the power bloc, mainly the commercial power. In Communist China, after several debates over authentic culture for the Chinese people throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century led by the Party, it is agreed that authentic culture for Chinese people, or the real mass culture in the Chinese sense, should be rooted in the masses, should be led by the Party, and should educate the masses with the correct ideas. The Chinese sense of authenticity concerns itself more with the content and themes of the culture.

The other dimension is legitimacy. As I mentioned before, it refers to the state of being sanctioned by external standards in line with the interest of the dominant structure.

Corresponding to the categories in my coding scheme, legitimacy, in different categories, refers to a professional standard of production quality, the taste of mainstream cultural products, Shanzhai projects' financial viability, or government regulations regarding copyright compliances, public assembly, and commercial performances.

The relationships of the two dimensions vary in different newspapers. Sometimes the newspapers framed them as opposing each other, while for the rest of the time they are referred to as being compatible with each other. I would call the opposing relationship of authenticity and legitimacy the rivalry discourse, and the compatible relationship the harmony discourse.

Next I will illustrate the rival or harmonic relationships in each of the categories in Table 2 with examples from the news articles.

### **The “quality of Shanzhai production”**

In the category of “The Quality of Shanzhai Production,” there are two themes, “the poor production of Shanzhai” and “the attempts of improving production quality.” Across all the collected news articles, the poor quality and inexperience of producers are consistently framed as unique indexes of the DIY nature of Shanzhai production, hence the authenticity of the Shanzhai culture. *Huaxi Metropolitan News* reported on the Shanzhai *Red Mansions* with the title “Young Man from Luzhou Shot the Shanzhai Version of Red Mansions with 20 Yuan Budget, Went Viral Online” (“Luzhou,” 2008). The mantle of a character was actually an almost 20-year-old bed sheet, and the article called it “a shining and magnificent dress.” The article also cited a netizen that “the

swaying postures of the bed sheet is much better than the linen mantle [used in the original TV series of *Red Mansion* shot in 1987].” Another article commented on the lack of sophistication in the production of the *Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala* that “from the angle of entertainment, providing a platform *for the people to have fun* [emphasis added]” which is “the biggest difference between a *Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala* and an ordinary television gala” (“Laomeng,” 2008). In light of the meanings of authenticity reviewed before, the poor quality of *Shanzhai* production is apparently talked in a euphemistic way that brings the producers non-utilitarian fun that is free from commercial or state intervention. It is the “*for the people to have fun*” in which the politics of popular culture, the people versus the power bloc, is embedded (S. Hall, 1998).

However, the DIY nature is also framed as problematic in terms of the institutionalized standards of cultural production, or as a lack of legitimacy in quality. Thus, some people, including some producers, some audience, and media professionals, believe that *Shanzhai* videos are not legitimate cultural products. For example, Jiang Fangzhou, a young female writer still in college, shot a *Shanzhai* lecture with her knowledge on literature after Han Jiangxue’s *Shanzhai* lecture got famous. But eventually, she was “not courageous enough to put the videos online” because of their poor quality (Jiang, 2008). Netizens also commented on Han Jiangxue’s *Shanzhai* Lecture Show as “amateurish and not suitable for the hall of noble” (“Jiang Fangzhou,” 2008). A professional association of online audio-visual service providers cited “the lack of artistic quality” as a reason to discourage its members from broadcasting *Shanzhai*

galas. In the same article, a major sponsor was cited as saying “As the major sponsor, we want the gala to be upgraded, and to emphasize quality” (“Shanzhai chunwan,” 2009b). Here the poor quality of Shanzhai production is seen as an illegitimate feature that needs to be overcome.

This is where the other theme, the attempts of improving production quality, comes in. This theme includes the efforts Shanzhai producers made to improve the quality of their production, but it is framed differently in the rivalry discourse and the harmony discourse. In the rivalry discourse, the improvement of quality is said to threaten the authenticity of Shanzhai culture. For example the *Peninsula Metropolitan News* questioned Lao Meng’s decision to advertise the offer nationwide to hire the general director for his show and Lao Meng’s vows to improve the “level of content” by asking, “Is it still the Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala that represents the grassroots spirit?” (“Shanzhai Chunwan,” 2009a). In another article, the Shanzhai gala was described by the journalists in the following manner:

[t]he scene of the Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala was arranged quite presentably—a front and a back stage, lightings from different angles, sophisticated audio equipment, and five cameras shooting panoramic views, close-ups, and the audiences’ expressions. There is even an arm shooting performers from multiple angles. It’s almost become a professional gala. (Duan, 2009b)

A Shanzhai gala with these professional features is “almost a professional gala” which, as the article concluded at the end, “raises people’s doubts about the gala’s purpose and the authenticity of its ‘self-entertaining’ nature.”

But in the harmony discourse, the improvement of production quality is framed as a technical change, which does not influence the authenticity of Shanzhai. Of course, in

this discourse, the authenticity doesn't point to the Western notion of cultural politics between the people and the powerful, but rather to the Chinese notion of socialist mass culture. In this sense, authenticity and professional legitimacy can be achieved in harmony. For example, in preparation for the second Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala, Lao Meng told *Jinghua Times* that he would “check on [programs'] quality strictly” and would be willing to pay for programs of higher quality for the benefit of the gala. His cooperation with a professional troupe was to “guard the gate of quality” (Duan, 2009a). An editorial in the *People's Daily* also cited a scholar saying that “the selection and arrangement of programs are the weak points [of the Shanzhai gala]... The only way to strengthen the ‘grassroots’ Spring Festival gala is to speak with [high quality] programs” (Yuanyuan Zhao, 2010). Thus, in the harmony discourse, quality improvement, or legitimate professional production, is not framed as opposite to Shanzhai's authenticity which is understood with the Chinese notion mostly appearing in Party newspapers.

### **The category of the “tastes of Shanzhai production”**

There are also both the rivalry discourse and the harmony discourse in the category of the taste of Shanzhai products. The first theme of this category, mass-appeal, is explicitly applauded in the rivalry discourse and positioned against the guidance of the officially sanctioned culture, which legitimizes the Chinese notion of mass culture. For example, Qiu (2008), in the *Eastern Today News*, analogized a local Shanzhai gala to “a large bowl of stewed noodles,” a cheap, popular and traditional local food, which the local newspaper says “represents the simple, unadorned, and meaningful nature of central China's culture.” It caters to the mass's taste and is trying to resist or distance

itself from the officially sanctioned culture. The established cultural production such as the CCTV Spring Festival gala is said needed to be “awakened by some fresh air, otherwise it would be more and more like ‘chicken ribs’” and “moving away from the real life” (Y. Qiu, 2008)<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the mass-appeal culture in this category is different from the mass culture as the Chinese understanding of an authentic culture. The mass-appeal here connotes more of a popular culture in the Western notion, which signals the opposition between the people/the mass and the cultural authority.

However, as an editorial in the Party mouthpiece, the *People’s Daily*, stated, in the harmony discourse, “intervention” and “guidance” from the mainstream culture to Shanzhai is indispensable for Shanzhai to be a healthy mass culture (F. Li & Zhang, 2008). The government sanctioned, established cultural productions are framed as not only comprising authentic mass culture, but also representing it and guiding other sub-cultures. Another editorial published by the *People’s Daily* said:

“in the development, the mainstream culture keeps thriving, and there are also some non-mainstream culture emerging... In order to build a harmonious society, non-mainstream culture is a necessary complementary to the mainstream culture, and the harmonious culture is the mutual tolerance and mutual advancement of the two of them” (Xiaoyu Li, 2010).

Then, the Shanzhai culture is said to be “malleable” and “should be checked.” According to the harmony discourse, the forces of malleation and the criteria of the check should be found and guided by the government sanctioned legitimate culture.

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<sup>7</sup> Chicken rib is an allusion from *The Romance of Three Kingdoms [Sanguo Yanyi]*, one of the four classic ancient novels in China. It refers to tasteless or meaningful things that people are reluctant to give up or throw away.



Thus, the harmony discourse in the Party newspapers sees the tastes of established cultural productions as legitimate and representative of mass culture, which is authentic in the Chinese sense. The rivalry discourse in the metropolitan newspapers sees the taste of officially sanctioned culture as opposing the taste of Shanzhai culture. This rivalry not only manifests the difference of cultural tastes, but also is actually the struggle of cultural power in China. In the media system, the different interpretations will result in the appearance or censorship of cultural products of different tastes. Media outlets of different natures serve as synopticons. To enter the synopticons, the producers have to actively learn and adopt a certain cultural taste in order to catch the “gaze” in the panoptic media assemblage and be displayed. For cultural practitioners, they are contested disciplines that need to be internalized as cultural capital.

### **The category of “Sponsorship”**

The same pattern can be witnessed in the category of sponsorship of Shanzhai productions. In both rivalry discourse and harmony discourse, the accounts in the theme of evading sponsorship are consistently framed as authentic. When Lao Meng was preparing for his Shanzhai Spring Festival gala, there were also other imitators in other parts of China organizing their own galas labeled also as the Shanzhai version. Some of them, seeing Lao Meng’s increasing cooperation with commercial media and sponsors, tried to differentiate themselves and emphasize their freedom from the sponsorship/commercial intervention. The producers of a Spring Festival gala organized by some netizens in Shenzhen claimed that “all the cost of this 3-hour long pure Shanzhai Spring Festival gala was provided by all participants, and the show was

absolutely grassroots” (Chen, 2010). The 20-Yuan budget of the Shanzhai *Red Mansions* and the fact that Han Jiangxue shot and edited his Shanzhai lecture videos with his own savings are also mentioned widely in media reports, respectively. It is believed that doing Shanzhai with the producers’ own financial ability free of commercial involvement is a hallmark of the authenticity of “the people’s” production. This fits the Western notion of authenticity perfectly. However, the legitimacy of the self-reliance of Shanzhai production is also questioned in some accounts. The fact that Lao Meng owed 100 thousand yuan (about \$15,000 USD) after emptying his own pockets for the first Shanzhai gala was reported in multiple articles. Another Shanzhai gala, the Southern Spring Festival gala, was reported to have been aborted for the lack of funds to pay for the transportation of performers (Xinxin, 2010).

However, the theme of cooperation with sponsors in this category is framed in different ways, as compromising the authenticity of Shanzhai in the rivalry discourse, or as a legitimate method to help Shanzhai develop sustainably without influencing Shanzhai’s authenticity in the harmony discourse. For example, in the rivalry discourse, the fact that Lao Meng had attracted nearly a million yuan (about 150 thousand USD) sponsorship for his second Shanzhai gala made it to the headlines of several reports. One of the reports asks “Will Lao Meng’s Spring Festival Gala still be Shanzhai?” (Du, 2009) The rumor that Lao Meng sold the recorded Shanzhai gala to some websites was also reported and tied to Lao Meng’s credibility to represent the spirit of authentic Shanzhai. As confirmed in my interview with some journalists of metropolitan newspapers who covered Lao Meng, there was increasing suspicion of Lao Meng’s

intentions in the later phase of his operation with more and more evidence of commercial cooperation with sponsors.

However, in the harmony discourse, there are quotes of some Shanzhai producers framing authenticity and financial viability (legitimacy) as compatible with each other. For example, the *Huaxi Metropolitan News* reported Lao Meng's plan of introducing a commercial model into the Shanzhai Spring Festival in the next year and that he wanted to "use commercialization to benefit the common good. In terms of allocation of profit, [Lao Meng] will have much say, but will also take netizens and other participants' opinions broadly" ("Laomeng," 2009). The legitimacy of commercializing Shanzhai is also backed in Party newspaper editorials. Shanzhai production is repeatedly framed as "a niche market to cater to the personalized and diverse demands of netizens" (Xiaoyu Li, 2010), and a candidate of "a subject in the market competition" if "it goes beyond imitation toward innovations" (F. Li & Zhang, 2008). Thus in the Party newspapers, involvement of commercial factors is not at odds with the authenticity of Shanzhai as long as it follows the Party's cultural orientation.

#### **The category of "Shanzhai's legal status"**

The next category, the legal status of Shanzhai production, concentrates on the relationship between Shanzhai production and government regulations. In the theme of "the problematic legal issues of Shanzhai productions" there are accounts raising questions about Shanzhai's legality in terms of government regulations on mass assembly, commercial performance, etc. For example, an editorial of the *People's Daily* said, "'Shanzhai' doesn't have a clear definition. It is usually comprised of novelty and

originality, and flashes of inspirations, but it could also include infringement and illegal operations” (D. Yang, 2009). Two metropolitan newspapers also pointed out specific legal barriers facing Lao Meng’s Shanzhai gala. “If Lao Meng accepts sponsorship and advertises for the sponsors during the show, the gala becomes commercial and needs to be approved by the government and to pay tax” (“Shanzhai Chunwan,” 2008). Another paper cited a sponsor that provided accommodation and studios that “if approval is not obtained, when the guests exceed the number requiring approval of mass assembly,” they would withdraw support (Duan, 2009c). This theme concentrates on the problematic legal nature of Shanzhai. Authenticity is not spelled out explicitly in this theme.

The other theme of this category, “efforts of legalizing Shanzhai,” is framed differently in the rivalry discourse and in the harmony discourse. In the rivalry discourse, Lao Meng’s strategy of substituting the word “folk” for “Shanzhai” in the gala’s name is reported as an effort to obtain government approval, which constrains Shanzhai’s autonomy. The authenticity of the legally-problematic Shanzhai is reflected in the concerns over seeking the government’s approval, or, in other words, over being overpowered by the government. For example, the *Information Times* reported netizens reactions to the change of name and that “Lao Meng did this against his will. Emotionally, he didn’t want to give up this name. It [Shanzhai] is not his creation, but represents many ‘grassroots’ wishes” (Hu, 2010).

But on the other hand, the harmony discourse also manifests itself in Lao Meng’s statements regarding applying for and receiving government approval. Here it is framed

as a symbol of legal status rather than a substantial governmental interference of Shanzhai production. It is even indicated that the government approval protects the Shanzhai gala from the harassment of some government departments, thus guaranteeing the producers' autonomy. As Lao Meng sees it:

the Shanzhai gala doesn't have to apply for the certificate of commercial performance because it does nothing to do with the commercial. It's purely self-entertainment, not selling tickets, not paying for the performers. He described it with an example, 'just like a bunch of people going to Karaoke'. (Hu, 2010)

The reason why Lao Meng decided to apply for the approval of the 2010 Folk Spring Festival Gala is "to 'avoid some people picking a bone,' and meanwhile 'to encourage himself, and to give confidence to performers and sponsors'." Thus, the government approval is not framed as interference, but a legal guarantee for the producers to carry on their authentic production.

### **The category of "Shanzhai as an expressive channel"**

Other than reporting on Shanzhai video productions, news articles also discussed Shanzhai culture in general, as an independent expressive channel or as a part of the mainstream culture. In this category, Shanzhai is either portrayed as an alternative channel outside the mainstream, a voice for often-marginalized producers and performers, or is portrayed as a part of the mainstream cultural expression which needs guidance from the mainstream. Here I will analyze the discursive construction of the nature of Shanzhai in general in terms of the dimensions of authenticity and legitimacy.

The category of Shanzhai as an expressive channel goes beyond the discussion on the quality, taste, government approval, or financial viability of particular Shanzhai productions and concentrates on the authenticity and legality of Shanzhai culture as an

expressive channel in the contemporary Chinese society. Similar to other categories, the first theme, Shanzhai as an independent expressive channel for the marginalized people, is framed as a hallmark of authentic Shanzhai culture. This is in line with Hall's (1998) argument of seeing popular culture as a cultural politics between the established power and the marginalized people. There are some accounts explicitly praising Shanzhai as an alternative discourse channel to challenge the "cultural hegemony" ("2008 Shida," 2008). In other reports, Shanzhai as a channel of expression for some underprivileged grassroots people is suggested with stories of their lack of access to express themselves. The *Information Times* reported three examples of grassroots applicants to the second Shanzhai gala. Han Zurong, also reported in other articles, is a poor migrant worker. He loves music and writes his own songs without even knowing musical scores. He was so poor that he owns only one pair of pants, but he bought an MP3 player with all his savings. Du Xiaohong is a "Beijing float" (*Beipiao*)<sup>8</sup>. He wrote his own song *The Grassroots* and said it represented the aspirations of people like him. Another example is an unidentified girl who had spent more than 3 million yuan RMB (about \$450,000 USD) of her parent's savings to look for all kinds of opportunities to get famous. She was reported as "[having] undesirable body shape and only good at the bel canto which is too highbrow to be popular." She was given an opportunity in Lao Meng's Shanzhai gala because "it's not her fault to look ugly, and she should not be deprived of the rights of entertainment" ("Minjian Chunwan," 2010). This girl, though from a family being able to afford 3 million Yuan, is not framed as a spoiled kid in a rich family, but a girl

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<sup>8</sup> *Beipiao* refers to the group of migrants living in Beijing with temporary jobs, especially those in the media industry waiting for one-or-two-day casting jobs in TV dramas.

with a dream but discriminated against by society. The article quoted Lao Meng as saying that “like people going to karaoke together, those not good at singing should also be allowed to sing.” Thus, the girl’s dream is not framed in terms of getting famous or wasting parents’ savings, but as the equal right to pursue her dreams. And Shanzhai provides this opportunity for people like them. Another performer that was reported in multiple accounts was Xie Pengju who was diagnosed with cervical atrophy and had only approximately two years before becoming paralyzed. He is a music teacher in a high school with a formal musical education. However, he was not framed as a professional, but as a grassroots performer with limited time to realize his love of music. In the case of the Shanzhai Lecture, the producer Han Jiangxue was also consistently portrayed as a history fan with unique perspectives but repeatedly rejected by the establishment for lacking official or professional credentials. In this theme, the stories didn’t indicate the quality or tastes of these performances, but concentrated on Shanzhai as an alternative channel to help realize their dreams. In this way, the authenticity of Shanzhai is presented as a channel outside the mainstream to provide ordinary people an opportunity, especially those marginalized in different ways. In this sense, Shanzhai is a challenge to the power of cultural monopoly, a typical Western notion of authentic popular culture.

However, the legality of Shanzhai as an alternative voice channel was raised by the deputy Minister of Culture (Guo & Fan, 2009). He confirmed the Chinese notion of authenticity by saying that “Shanzhai should not set itself opposite of the mainstream...Shanzhai is grassroots culture, we don’t have to worry too much. It is fine

to self-entertain.” However he continued that “If it [Shanzhai] is organized, being non-commercial doesn’t mean the public good.” For this official, the leadership of the Party guarantees the “public good.” Thus, Shanzhai has to follow the Party’s cultural leadership, not stand outside of it as an alternative, to be authentic.

Thus, in the theme of “incorporating Shanzhai into the mainstream,” the rivalry and the harmony discourses diverge on the relationship between the legitimate mainstream channels for people’s expression and the Shanzhai culture as the people’s expression. The rivalry discourse frames the incorporation as “enlistment for amnesty,” a strategy of the dominant to deprive the marginalized of the right of voice. A story is widely reported in multiple newspapers that Lao Meng announced the cooperation with the Guizhou Television Station’s Satellite Channel. The *Huaxi Metropolitan News* reported this with the title of “Go not for ‘enlistment for amnesty’, but for grassroots to the end” (“Buyao zhaoan,” 2008). It quoted netizens as saying that:

When Lao Meng announced a deal with Guizhou Satellite TV on the broadcasting of Shanzhai gala, it is like a death certificate issued for the Shanzhai gala...It is imaginable, that after being enlisted, the Shanzhai gala will change its face and become another victim after reality shows.

Lao Meng also used a rivalry discourse to justify the discontinuation of cooperation between the Shanzhai gala and the Guizhou TV Station. Lao Meng, later, announced the discontinuation with Guizhou TV station, citing the concerns of losing the grassroots nature of Shanzhai. He said that “forced by netizens’ opinions,” he had decided to “keep the pure grassroots nature of the Shanzhai gala, and stop the cooperation with the Guizhou television station.” He also said that “what’s needed for the Shanzhai gala is bravery, and audiences nationwide will know that everybody can make a Spring



Festival.” However, in fact the cooperation was suspended by the Guizhou Television Station after the SARFT banned radio and TV stations from being involved in the Shanzhai gala. This was confirmed in some newspaper accounts, in my interviews with Lao Meng, and by a director of Guizhou TV that was involved in this cooperation.

The harmony discourse in this category concentrates on incorporating Shanzhai as a part of the authentic mass culture which provides expressions for the people under the Party’s leadership. This discourse insists that it doesn’t hurt Shanzhai’s grassroots nature. The deputy Culture Minister said that they “will actively guide it [Shanzhai] and provide some platforms” (Guo & Fan, 2009). An editorial in the *People’s Daily* said, “Shanzhai culture has its own principles of popularity. To construct a contemporary harmonious culture, guiding it [Shanzhai] following the principles is more beneficial than cracking down on it”. Thus the status of Shanzhai as an authentic culture is confirmed with its own principles; also, the legitimacy is guaranteed by being guided to become a part of the harmonious culture.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, I will discuss the dimensions of authenticity and legitimacy, as well as their relationships as framed in Chinese newspapers. The implication of these findings will be discussed in terms of the governance and resistance through contemporary media in China.

First, readers should note that the compatibility or rivalry is between the dimensions of authenticity and legitimacy, not between the two themes in each of the categories. In fact, the two themes in each category are, for most of the time, set opposite

to each other. In the category “Quality of Shanzhai production,” when attempts of improving production quality are made, which is the second theme in this category, the poor quality, the first theme, will likely be changed. In the category of “Sponsorship in Shanzhai Production,” when the Shanzhai gala has obtained government approval, which is included in the second theme, the legal problems, the first theme, will go away. In fact, the divergence between the rivalry discourse and the harmony discourse lies in the dispute about whether the authenticity in Shanzhai culture, usually manifested in the first theme such as poor quality, non-mainstream taste, evading sponsorship, etc., will diminish when the second theme in each category joins to solve the problems.

Second, authenticity refers to different notions in different contexts. I have reviewed the Western perspective and the Chinese perspective previously. In Western literature, the authenticity of cultures concentrates on the issue of struggle for cultural autonomy, or the freedom from, mostly commercial, interference. Though there is not an ideal authentic culture, the struggle for cultural authenticity, be it the individualist aesthetic for the Frankfurt School (Benjamin, 1969; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2004) or the popular culture for British Cultural Studies (S. Hall, 1998; Williams, 1985), manifests the continuous and historically contextualized cultural politics between “the people” and the power bloc.

The Chinese notion of cultural authenticity is more concerned with the themes or content which should be in line with the Party’s view because Marxism assumes that the truths have been found, and the Communist Party represents the advanced culture. Moreover, because of the propagandistic role of culture in the Communist view,

authentic culture is the one that follows the Party's instruction and educates people with the truth. Thus, culture as a form of power struggle is not part of the meaning in the Chinese notion.

The rivalry discourse usually uses the Western notion of authenticity to argue that the solutions to the legitimacy problems will result in the diminishing of authenticity. That is, with professional standards, established tastes, commercial sponsorship, government approval, and mainstream guidance, the Shanzhai culture will not stand on its own but surrender to the powerful. Thus, the notion of authenticity in this discourse is the Western one referring to the struggle of the people to resist established cultural powers.

Then, if the Western authenticity refers to being free from "contamination" of the legitimating solutions, how can authenticity and legitimacy ever be achieved together in any discourse? Here, the existence of the harmony discourse depends on a different notion of authenticity from that in the rivalry discourse.

When it is argued that authenticity and legality are compatible, it is usually the Chinese notion of authenticity that is referred to in this discourse. The Chinese notion of authenticity is concerned with the content and themes of the culture that belongs to the masses, but endorsed, guided, and propagated by the Party. Under the Communist cultural theory, because truths are assumed to have been found in Marxism, the dominant cultural quality standards, tastes, economic operations, and government regulations under the leadership of the Communist Party are authentic. Thus, the legitimating conditions themselves, such as the involvement of professional standards,

commercial sponsorship or government approval, are just technical and logistical improvements to Shanzhai culture, and the legitimacy and authenticity of Shanzhai can be achieved simultaneously if only it's still under the Party's correct guidance.

Third, different parties in this debate over Shanzhai utilize the two discourses differently and, sometimes, even pragmatically. Mostly, the harmony discourse is seen made by cultural regulators and other established cultural authorities, both in the Party newspapers and in metropolitan newspapers. For example, there are multiple accounts on the deputies of the Political Consultative Conference during the convening period in March 2009. The deputies suggested that the government supports “benefit” Shanzhai culture (Xia, 2010), or “actively provide guidance and some platform” (Guo & Fan, 2009).

However, Shanzhai producers also use this discourse as a discursive strategy for survival. Shanzhai producers tend to justify their hiring professionals, their cooperating with sponsor and their applying for government approvals with the harmony discourse. By acknowledging that Shanzhai culture is consistent with the officially endorsed criteria, Shanzhai producers rendered the professional standards, commercial operations, and government approvals, or incorporation into mainstream channels as purely operational issues which are irrelevant to the nature of Shanzhai culture. By subscribing to this harmony discourse, Shanzhai producers, though discursively surrendering to the cultural authority, carved out a practical space for their own cultural practices and identity construction. Just like Lao Meng said, “Hiring professional directors and

soliciting sponsorship is meant to provide a gala of higher quality to the masses...the Shanzhai nature will not be lost, and it is still our own gala” (Du, 2009).

It is noteworthy that in the official harmony discourse, if following the Party line, the commercialization of culture is not only endorsed, but also explicitly encouraged. In the harmony discourse, the commercialization of Shanzhai culture is suggested as improving legitimacy without hurting authenticity. The *People's Daily* framed Shanzhai as, or encouraged it to be, a competitor in the cultural market catering to a niche market. This stance not only reflects the government's intention to harness the Internet's economic potential as an entertainment medium, but also indicates the pragmatic view on culture in general as an economic drive. From a Foucauldian perspective, this promotion of market oriented culture actually encourages the neo-liberal governmentality in cultural production. It is a way to govern grassroots culture from a distance.

Fourth, other than attending to the discursive devices such as positioning, politicization, and legitimation (Carvalho, 2010), the time plane and media plane, including the outlets and genres, also reveal the discursive construction of Shanzhai. The rivalry discourse mainly appeared in metropolitan newspapers. Many Shanzhai producers and performers, netizens, and some scholars are cited in the rivalry discourse. In the early months of the Shanzhai cultural phenomenon, mostly in 2008 when the Shanzhai *Lecture Show*, the Shanzhai *Red Mansions*, the Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*, as well as other Shanzhai cultural products went viral, Shanzhai producers and netizens were cited predominantly in the rivalry discourse. It is a period of constructing the

identity of Shanzhai producers and their products as resistance to the established cultural order.

Most articles in Party papers were also published in this period apparently as a counter-discourse to the commercialized metropolitan press. Shanzhai, in Party papers, was predominantly constructed in harmony discourse where authentic Shanzhai culture can be achieved under the leadership of the Party and the established cultural authorities. The Party newspapers were trying to avoid positioning Shanzhai as the opposite, or resistance, to the mainstream, officially endorsed culture. Instead, the Party papers tried to establish the cultural leadership over the newly-emerging cultural phenomenon to offset the rivalry discourse in metropolitan newspapers. This tendency can also be seen in other official media such as the most important television news show *Xinwen Lianbo*, and the Xinhua News Agency. They also commented on Shanzhai in this period. This official attention provoked netizens' extensive discussion and reports of the official stand in metropolitan newspapers.

But as time passed, the topic of Shanzhai cooled down, and most productions either faded out from public discourse or became commercialized. The preparation of the second Shanzhai gala starting in the fall of 2009 became much more commercialized than the first one. Regarding this, news reports in metropolitan newspapers turned into a combination of rivalry discourse and harmony discourse. In general, the metropolitan newspapers, in the later period, adopted a more critical stance toward Shanzhai productions. Because of the apparent incorporation of Shanzhai into the dominant cultural order, the official attention on this issue faded out with less discussion. There

were only four articles published in the Party papers during the preparation of the second Shanzhai gala among all 17 archived articles.

In terms of genres, metropolitan papers mostly carried news reports, while Party papers had only one piece of descriptive accounts, and all other articles were editorials. The only exception is the overseas edition of the *People's Daily*. It is listed as a separate Party organ in an official website. However, its genres and discourse constitution resemble those of metropolitan papers more than Party papers. This might be due to the role of the overseas edition as more of a briefing outlet about China to overseas Chinese than the role as propagandist.

On the construction of Shanzhai producers, metropolitan papers had an evident elite bias. They consistently portrayed Shanzhai producers, especially in the early period, as humble grassroots producers with little access to established channels of expression. The metropolitan papers showed sympathy to these producers by selecting stories like Han Jiangxue being repeatedly refused by CCTV, the little girl's being discriminated against for her obesity, Lao Meng's identity as a migrant worker in Beijing, etc. However, these people are far from the most grassroots people in contemporary Chinese society. Han Jiangxue is a Beijing resident who can live on his savings earned in the stock market in his early years, Lao Meng has his own wedding catering business, and the girl spent her parents' 3 million yuan for performance opportunities. Most of them are living better-off lives, are well educated, and have adequate access to ICTs. The elite bias, the same as what Zhao (2008) recorded, is repeated in the discursive construction of Shanzhai.

All these strategic uses of the discursive devices manifest intertwined struggles for cultural powers in contemporary Chinese society, mainly through the media system. Under the theoretical framework of governance and resistance through the media assemblage, the rivalry and harmony discourses are actually competing for surveillance standards in the media assemblage. The two discourses try to define what a normal culture is, so that Shanzhai culture can be picked up by the interconnected media panopticons according to the sorting standard and be put to public display in media synopticons, or otherwise simply censored. For the official cultural authorities, they want to use the harmony discourse to propagate their version of authentic culture that follows the Party line.

Thus, the rivalry discourse and the harmony discourse manifest the co-existence of multiple, competitive standards in a media assemblage. This argument helps correct a pessimistic view of the monolithic, functionalist, and powerful surveillance assemblage of media theorized by some scholars (Bogard, 2006; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000). As the different discourses of Shanzhai and the different notions of cultural authenticity show, there are competing sorting standards, or “norms,” in contemporary Chinese society. There are also multiple social constituents other than the people and the state such as sponsors, commercial media, and netizens. Their involvement in this discursive construction of Shanzhai culture is indeed a battle of cultural politics where the sorting standard in the media assemblage is one important focus.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I have examined the Shanzhai phenomenon from various perspectives. As Su Shi, the great ancient Chinese poet, wrote in the *Inscription on the wall of the West Woods Temple*,

It is a range viewed in face, and a peak viewed from the side; assuming different shapes viewed from far and wide; of mountain Lu we cannot make out the true face; for we are lost in the very heart of the place.

To really understand Shanzhai, like grasping the true face of the mountain Lu, we need to jump out of the phenomenon and assume a holistic view with the social, political, economic, and cultural implications of Shanzhai in sight.

Thus, in this chapter, based on the arguments I made previously, I will provide a discussion on the relationships between Shanzhai practices and the Chinese society: the implications of Shanzhai on the governance and resistance in contemporary China. I will also discuss potential topics on Shanzhai for further explorations.

#### **Summary of the Findings**

Shanzhai has become part of the popular vernacular only in recent years, though it has a much longer history. The prominence of the Shanzhai phenomenon lies not only in the variety of artifacts Shanzhai can refer to, ranging from cell phones to amateur online videos, but also in the rich cultural connotations Shanzhai practices and artifacts have. The Shanzhai phenomenon exists in those artifacts, but it also exists in grassroots

producers' negotiation with the government, in media coverage, and online posting, as well as people's daily conversations.

This study is based on the in-depth interviews and analyses of news coverage on three famous Shanzhai online videos, the Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*, the Shanzhai *Lecture Show*, and the Shanzhai *Red Mansions*. The Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala* is created by Lao Meng and his followers. They attempted to make a grassroots gala, imitating CCTV's gala, for migrant workers who can't go home during Spring Festival holiday. The Shanzhai *Lecture Show* was made by a young man in Beijing, Han Jiangxue. He recommended himself to CCTV's *Lecture Show*, and was repeatedly rejected for his lack of officially recognized credentials. Then he made a multi-episode lecture show following CCTV *Lecture Show*'s format, and put the video online. The video went viral later and Han became a famous grassroots hero. The Shanzhai *Red Mansions* was shot by a family during 2009 Spring Festival. The amateurish but sincere performance was applauded by netizens. The family was interviewed by many journalists as their videos were shared widely online. All of the three cases are amateur imitations of popular television shows in China. They raised netizens enthusiasm to participate and to watch them, and they drew extensive media attentions.

I adopted a Foucauldian framework of surveillance, discipline, and governmentality in modern societies because it provides insights into the power relationships inherent in the Shanzhai phenomenon. Foucault's discussions cover various modalities of power from panopticism and disciplinary power to the governmentality as the control from a distance. Both of the modalities help explain specific choices people

who are involved in Shanzhai production, circulation, and regulation made. In addition, Foucault's attentions to the "actions upon actions" in the analysis of power provide an important perspective to look at how power is exercised and embedded in the Shanzhai phenomenon. Other scholars' appropriations of Foucauldian theory on power are also referred to in my analyses. Synopticon and surveillance assemblages are introduced to explicate how power is exercised and resisted through media uses.

In this framework, Shanzhai is a microcosm comprised of civil society, ICTs, the government, the media of different natures, the regulations, the cultural and professional norms, and the discourses, etc. It is through the strategic and tactical uses of various media that the power relationships manifest in Shanzhai practices. Thus, Shanzhai can be seen as a drop of water which reflects the whole world in it. Nevertheless, it also constitutes the ocean of society.

I adopt this framework in order to argue that the current media system in China serves as assemblages of surveillance where panopticons and synopticons are combined to both present and shape the ideas and behaviors of different social groups. In this way, people are disciplined by certain rules and governed by certain mentalities in their everyday lives. The media system is not only channels of expressions, but also technologies of governance. Nonetheless, there is both resistance from the monitored subjects in the assemblages and inherent conflicts between the monitoring agencies in these assemblages. These forces also transform the surveillance assemblages themselves. In other words, the power relationships are dynamic and are undergoing constant negotiations.

Shanzhai also exists in the unique context that has many inherent conflicts. The structure of China's media system is designed both to indoctrinate people with the Party's ideas and to cater to people's needs as an industrial sector. There are complicated relationships among the government, the official media, the commercial media, as manifested in the journalistic values, regulation and censorships, etc. The conflicts of power and interest are even more intense on China's Internet. The constellation of China's Internet consists of the government's promotion of the Internet, its censorship of it, netizens' consumerist Internet uses, and popular resistance.

In Chapter 3, I assumed a media ritual perspective to understand how the disciplinary power and the power of governmentality are internalized by the people through the converging media system. I argue that Shanzhai is actually the ritualistic uses of media under the influence of a convergent media environment. The ritualistic uses are the ways people are governed by certain disciplines and rationalities. I argue that there are two layers of ritualistic uses of media in the Shanzhai cultural production. First, the Shanzhai producers saw the shows they imitated as media rituals, or a prescribed way to live their everyday lives. People's shared life experience synchronized by reality media genres and their convergence are life rituals that direct people to live their real lives in specific ways. The media ritual perspective explains the cultural process of internalizing the discipline of our lives, a power exercised on people through media.

The second layer of ritualistic media uses is that all Shanzhai producers "happened to" use the Internet as their platform. The discourse constructed around the Internet as a

democratic forum is uncritically received as a serious belief, or a media ritual. It is perceived as an “equal opportunity” platform without discrimination, or *the way* for ordinary people to express themselves. In this sense, putting the Shanzhai videos on the Internet is oriented by the ritualistic belief of the Internet’s social role. A specific mentality is internalized that, through an equal-opportunity, free-competition marketplace, people can rely on themselves to achieve their life goals. In addition, the popularity of these three Shanzhai cases further reinforced this ritualistic perception of the Internet, or the mentality to govern people’s lives, and invited further Shanzhai production and imitations.

What’s more, the convergence of various media, from Shanzhai producers’ imitating popular TV shows to their putting Shanzhai videos online, to their being reported and further imitated, form a totality of everyday experience, though largely mediated. The convergent media environment is almost a total institution of everyday life as Goffman (1961) argued. Both disciplines, as specific media uses, and a neoliberal mentality govern the way people live their lives through media.

However, the ritualistic view on Shanzhai production seems to be functionalist and pessimistic which I tried to counterbalance in Chapter IV. In Chapter IV, I specifically categorized the strategies that Shanzhai producers and other parties involved in Shanzhai practices used in order to understand the power dynamics of cultural production, circulation, and regulation in contemporary Chinese society.

To analyze the advantages that Shanzhai producers can take of the partially commercialized media system and the government’s promotion of the Internet as a

commercial public entertainment medium, as well as the disadvantages inherent to Shanzhai producers, I used a Bourdieusian framework in Chapter 4. In this framework, the different parties in the Shanzhai cultural production, ranging from government agencies, commercial sponsors, media of different natures, grassroots netizens, are constantly involved in negotiation and exchange, or exclusion from exchange, for social, economic, as well as cultural, capitals. In this detailed analysis of what exactly happened in the three Shanzhai cases, I tried to correct the pessimistic sentiment under the media ritual perspective, and show the leverage and strength of Shanzhai producers' tactics. Indeed, in the intertwining network of power relationships, the weak grassroots Shanzhai producers did manage to get their words out to the hundreds of millions of netizens and mass media audiences.

From the Foucauldian perspective, the strategies are really focusing on the visibility of Shanzhai producers and their works. Shanzhai producers want to enter the media synopticons staged by commercial media. But in order to be picked up in a panoptic surveillance assemblage of media, the Shanzhai participants have to constantly assume that the media are watching, and take efforts to draw media's gazes by performing in the way commercial media want, such as opting for the professional standards. Meanwhile, the state is also monitoring the media, both centralized and user-generated, to decide which should be confined, or censored, according to their "norm." The combination of panopticons and synopticons are trans-media and rhizomatic, which share the captured content in the assemblages but attribute different properties due to their different categorizing codes. What is more, evidence showed that Shanzhai's

popularity gained from being staged in the synopticons can serve as leverage to negotiate with other monitoring agencies', in this case government regulator's, "norms."

The interactions of these strategies employed by different parties showed the complexity of media uses and power dynamics. On the one hand, strategies like adopting professional production standards reflect a neoliberal mentality of market-orientation and self-improvement in pursuit of personal life goals through media, a modality of governance from a distance. On the other hand, the media surveillance assemblages also grant marginalized social groups opportunities of resistance. The more flexible media system gives Shanzhai producers more freedom. The lines of flight in the surveillance assemblages reflect the "recalcitrance of the will and intransigence of freedom" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790) as resistance to the rigid discipline.

After examining socio-cultural driving forces behind Shanzhai from a media ritual perspective, and what has been done in Shanzhai productions, by examining the strategies in the network of power, I turned to the discursive side to examine how Shanzhai is portrayed in popular media. This is important because it partly shaped the perception of Shanzhai for the general public as well as for all other parties. In terms of social governance, these discourses manifest the sorting standards in the rhizomatic surveillance system either to find model-citizens and put them in synopticons or to find deviants and isolate them by confinement. In the real media world, these standards decide whether a grassroots performer becomes a celebrity in the mass media or censored and blocked.

By examining the discursive construction of Shanzhai in metropolitan newspapers and Party mouthpiece papers, I found that Shanzhai was framed in two dimensions: authenticity and legitimacy. In most of the accounts in the commercial metropolitan newspapers, authenticity and legitimacy are constructed as in a rival relationship where they cannot be achieved simultaneously. While in the Party mouthpiece newspapers, the two dimensions are dominantly portrayed in a harmonious relationship which is consistent with the more general official discourse of harmonious society in China.

Discourse analysis of these newspaper accounts revealed different meanings of authenticity. In the rivalry discourse, authenticity refers to a Western notion of autonomy, freedom and resistance to the corporate or state power. Thus, in the rivalry discourse authentic Shanzhai culture should not be “contaminated” by commercialization, professional standards, government guidance, or any external norm. In this sense, authenticity and financial, political, and professional legitimacy cannot co-exist. However, in the harmony discourse, if Shanzhai follows the Party’s guidance and the government’s policy regarding cultural production, as well as intellectual property laws, Shanzhai culture is both legitimate and authentic socialist popular culture. The two discourses are the sorting standards in the media assemblages. They are both the disciplines that the commercial media and the state want Shanzhai producers to follow. The divergence of discursive constructions on Shanzhai, or the two conflicting standards, demonstrated the heterogeneous enunciative dimension in the surveillance assemblages. This divergence provides the opportunities for Shanzhai producers to take



advantage of as resistance to power. Thus, this complex power relationship provides chances of social change through media production, circulation and regulation.

### **Implications of This Study**

Having made these arguments with the empirical evidence, I will discuss the implications of Shanzhai culture on the Chinese society and our understanding of the postmodern media surveillance.

First, the findings in this research suggest dialectic power relationships in the media system in China. When we talk about the Chinese media, especially the popular uses of ICTs, we sometimes find ourselves caught between the pillars between optimism and pessimism, or between utopia and dystopia. The cases of Shanzhai productions show us that the new social, technological and economic conditions, while they crack the older system to grant people new autonomy, also subject people to these new conditions. For example, the commercialization of the Chinese media system, such as metropolitan newspapers and the Internet, provide great opportunities for ordinary people to enter the media world, to acquire the once-monopolized media power, they also prescribe the forms of media uses, culturally, and access to them, economically. The media rituals are people's serious cultural beliefs manifested in and contributive to these media uses. While people are given chances to actually produce media content, they have to negotiate with new agencies such as commercial media and sponsors for access and publicity. In addition to the state's cultural norms, they have to learn the new cultural capital of commercial media, and compete for attention under a neoliberal logic.

Second, as a socio-cultural phenomenon closely connected to the media system, the cases of Shanzhai also attest to the truism of the rhizomatic assemblages of surveillance. In the past, when the surveillance system was more centralized and monopolized, the sorting standard tended to be monolithic. For ordinary people, while there's less chance to be picked up by the surveillance system and become famous, in the sense of either a celebrity or a deviant, there's also less chance to be censored. However, the rhizomatic assemblages decentralized the surveillance system. In this process, as evidenced in the commercialization and professionalization of China's media, there are increasingly conflicting sorting standards in the rhizome. Thus, there's a better chance for traditionally non-mainstream subjects to be picked up and staged in media synopticons. In the meantime, because of the easy sharing of surveillance data, these "media persons" hailed under one norm are also likely to be seen as deviant by other norms.

Third, other than the previous empirical contributions to the understanding of China's media system, this research also makes conceptual contribution to the social surveillance as a disciplinary power in the postmodern conditions. The cases of Shanzhai showed the tension between different sorting standards existing in the media assemblages. Mathiesen's theorization (1997) of the combination of synopticon and panopticon and Haggerty and Ericson's theorization (2000) of a powerful and pervasive inter-connected surveillance system are rather pessimistic and concentrate on the totality of surveillance and oppression. In fact, there could be multiple norms in one surveillance assemblage. The disagreement between different sorting standards could potentially

benefit the traditionally marginalized groups to gain expression. Nonetheless, those groups also have to subject to the alternative standards as disciplines.

However, I also want to raise the caveat that the different sorting standards are negotiating with each other and are not necessarily equally powerful. As in the case of censoring the Shanzhai gala, the commercial televisions finally had to drop their plan of co-production with Lao Meng, commercial video sharing websites had to delete “Shanzhai Chunwan” in video titles, and Lao Meng had to change the name to the “Folk” Spring Festival Gala to get the approval of commercial performances from the government. In this sense, the power of different norms, or the machines to announce “truth,” is different.

Fourth, the explication of the strategies used in the Shanzhai practices adds to our understanding of popular resistance through media. We have been talking about the textual poaching (Jenkins, 1992) and tactics of making-do (De Certeau, 2002) in cultural studies as symbolic resistance to the power bloc. The power of “decoding” is an important part of popular resistance ranging from interpreting and parodying to posting and sharing. However, the study of Shanzhai actually shows the political economic struggles in which the weak gained some material favor. For example, Lao Meng used the presence of the Macau-based television station to leverage commercial sponsors and government regulators for his benefits. In these negotiations, the power of the weak not only gives them idealistic autonomy, but also the material resource and contributed to their strength in power relationships.

Lastly, this research assumes a holistic view on the Shanzhai participants and the media environment. This view helps us understand the nature of cultural phenomenon in the environment of media saturation like ours. On the one hand, just like the transition that the fandom studies identified from concentrating on devoted fans to the relatively loosely involved people, from an extraordinary activity to everyday life (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007), studies of media phenomena like Shanzhai should attend to the emotionally-uninvolved netizens or mass media audiences. A media phenomenon should be seen as a synergized, though not deliberated directed by anybody, social process under certain social conditions. On the other hand, it is the convergence of multiple media and the trans-platform circulation that usually gives rise to a society-wide sensation like Shanzhai. We can neither see Shanzhai as a new-media phenomenon or the work of a specific group of people, or social stratum. The combination of panopticons and synopticons, and the rhizomatic assemblages sharing social surveillance, should not be theorized separately.

In addition to the previous implications, I would also provide a few critical points of this study as well as suggestions for exploration of Shanzhai or, more broadly, other forms of participatory cultural phenomena. First, this study is based on the data I collected between early 2008 and the summer of 2010. However, while I was working on these data, the Shanzhai cultural phenomenon has kept changing. On the one hand, Lao Meng had produced the third, a fully commercialized, Spring Festival gala. This time, not only it is not labeled Shanzhai, but actually titled with the sponsor's brand. Meanwhile, Han Jiangxue and Chen Weishi haven't provided any new Shanzhai work. I

would be reluctant to say it is the demise of Shanzhai, but I think further exploration should examine and explain the current trend of Shanzhai productions.

Second, I understand Shanzhai as a microcosm of the governance and resistance of everyday life in contemporary Chinese society. However, I must raise the issue of the digital divide in China which is not theoretically explored in this study. The Shanzhai producers are marginalized in terms of their access to institutional expression channels. However, they, as well as the producers of some later Shanzhai works as far as I know, are still mostly urban, male, and quite well educated. Though somewhat marginalized in urban settings, they are still quite privileged in the general population of China. They not only have Internet access, mostly broadband, but have the computer skills to “digitize” their cultural expressions. In fact, it is the mass media that heavily highlighted their “grassroots” identity and made a case of people’s resistance to the powerful bloc in China. This is quite evident in the rivalry discourse of metropolitan newspapers in Shanzhai coverage. The economic, educational, and gender divide is not fully explored in this study. They could be topics of further explorations on Shanzhai, as well as other participatory media uses in China.

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## APPENDIX A

## REFLECTION ON RESEARCH METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

**Case Selection and Interviewee Sampling:**

In this study, I concentrated on three Shanzhai cases: the Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*, the Shanzhai *Red Mansions*, and the Shanzhai *Lecture Show*. I discussed the reasons for choosing them for detailed case studies in the background chapter. To recap my rationale, first, in these three cases, both the producers and the videos they produced are the most famous in terms of the circulation of their videos and the media coverage they received. Second, because of the public recognition, they also invited media participation in the production, in addition to news coverage, commercial sponsorship, as well as government intervention. These full-fledged cases showed how the power dynamics among different parties were played out. Third, these cases, because of their popularity, also invited further imitations of them. Thus, these further imitations and the cases themselves as imitations of the original television shows repeated the cultural logic behind Shanzhai practices and provided further evidence for my arguments.

I decided to employ in-depth interviews to examine these Shanzhai cases because “every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness” (Seidman, 2006, p. 7). According to Seidman, through well-designed interviews, researchers can access the context of people’s behavior which explains the symbolic significance of that behavior. This is my goal to recover my interviewees’ life experiences in order to understand what Shanzhai means to them.

To prepare for my research design, I started with reviewing multiple types of documents on Shanzhai (Thøgersen, 2006), including the news reports on these Shanzhai cases and those on Shanzhai cell phones and the Shanzhai phenomenon, government regulations on online video production and circulations and on commercial cultural activities, popular Shanzhai videos and viewers’ comments, online forum discussions, etc. These written materials provided me an important understanding of Shanzhai as well as the broader context of cultural production in China. Many of my interview questions actually emerged from these materials. However, I was also always cautious about that my perspectives could be potentially framed by these materials, and I kept my mind open in my actual interviews and asked more open-ended questions that allowed for less-structured conversations.

I applied for the IRB review in April 2010. My interview questions, confidentiality protocols, informed consent procedures were approved in May. However, as I will elaborate later, the Western-based research procedures and protocols didn’t apply to the Chinese context and sometimes were even counter-productive.

To target the important parties involved in Shanzhai cultural production, circulation, and regulation, I decided to start my interviews with the Shanzhai producers and media workers who directly dealt with any or multiple Shanzhai cases, government

officials whose departments intervened in Shanzhai cultural production in any way, and commercial sponsors of Shanzhai productions. Because of my personal connections with the news media in China, it was not hard for me to obtain access to journalists that covered these Shanzhai cases. Through the journalists, snowball sampling was used to get access to Shanzhai producers, video sharing websites, and producers of the television shows that Shanzhai videos imitated. Then through the Shanzhai producers, I also accessed more journalists, commercial sponsors, and other participants in these Shanzhai productions.

The access to an official of the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT) (Informant No. 1) was noteworthy because of the role “*guanxi*,” or the connection, played in my negotiation for access. Western scholars have recognized the importance and discussed the cultural meanings of “*guanxi*” quite abundantly. Most of the time, good and close *guanxi* with the subject, or subjects’ employers, is seen as a necessary and sufficient condition to get research access, even though the concept of *guanxi* itself is constantly changing within Chinese society (M.-h. M. Yang, 2002). Kriz and colleagues (Kriz, McSwiney, Purchase, & Ward, n.d.) even equated good *guanxi* with “*xinren*,” or trust, in the research process. However, my experience of interviewing the SARFT official taught me that a good *guanxi* with the interviewee is far from valid information.

Initially, my father, who has been working for the SARFT his entire career, arranged a visit to one of the top officials of the SARFT’s Propaganda Management Department (formerly the Chief Editing Office of SARFT) for me. This department is in charge of “drafting policies and plans of propaganda, and implement them on radio and television”, “monitoring propaganda and the broadcasting of radio and television, and dealing with major cases of violation of propaganda policies or propaganda orientations,” etc. (SARFT.gov.cn, 2008). I was sure that this official knew about the banning of Lao Meng’s Shanzhai gala because Lao Meng, newspaper journalists, and the producer of Guizhou Television Station all confirmed the issuance of this prohibition by this department. I expected him to talk a little about it, even not in detail for confidentiality concerns, because my father was an acquaintance of his for years. However, upon my visit introduced by my father, he immediately denied this banning decision and referred me to a subordinate of his whom he said was in charge of specific issues. The referee, though much younger than my father, also knows my father, and has the same official rank as my father. He accepted my interview and my father left right after introducing me. We talked for more than two hours during which he constantly digressed from my questions and apparently dodged sensitive issues. I couldn’t call this interview a successful one since I barely got the information I wanted.

Other than the issues of my position as the interviewer vis-à-vis him as a high-ranking government official and the possibly counter-productive role of my consent information which I will discuss later, I attribute this failure partly to my naïve understanding of *guanxi*. I realized that acquaintance between the departmental official and my father didn’t guarantee the trust (*xinren*) between them, let alone the trust between the official and me. The departmental official’s agreeing to see me is more a result of “face” than willingness to talk. My father’s *guanxi* with him simply made him

obliged to give “face” to my father, an acquaintance for years in the SARFT. The referred subordinate official probably also accepted my interview because of the facework for my father and his superior’s reference as a task. Cynically, I even suspect that the department official informed the referee on the boundary of the answers during the few minutes my father and I went to the referee’s office on another floor. As an official with a higher rank than my father, the department official probably didn’t trust either my father or me enough to open his heart. Thus, an optimistic understanding of *guanxi* as trust (Kriz, et al., n.d.) seems to be very naïve. Of course, there are also many other factors playing a role, such as the hierarchy between the interviewee and my father and I, or the tactics of obtaining informed consent.

Since trustworthiness is linked to validity in interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I had been critical of the answers of this government interviewee and tried to triangulate this interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) with information from different sources, especially that from the producer of the Guizhou TV Station and a former producer of CCTV’s *Lecture Show* who are closer to the government administration.

Meanwhile, the subordinate officer answered my questions in a very official and diplomatic manner, in the *ganbunese*, or cadres’ language. Thøgersen (2006) contrasted the *ganbunese* as the official’s language and the *baixingese* as the ordinary people’s language. They are two language systems in China (Q. Li, 2000). The *ganbunese* is dominantly used in official documents, newspapers, and official speeches. “It is closely tied to the construction of the party-state and by using *ganbunese* one signals identification with the state, or at least demonstrates one’s knowledge and mastery of the state’s rules” (Thøgersen, 2006, p. 112). I triangulated the official stance to Shanzhai manifested in their language uses with the Party mouthpiece newspapers I examined in Chapter 5. It helped my research in this way more than as I expected in the research design.

### **Subject Position and Positionality**

During my interviews, I deeply felt the fluidness of my interviewees’ perception of my identity as an insider or an outsider. It greatly influenced the subsequent outcome of our talks. This prompts me to reflect on my lack of recognition of the complexity of my position in my fieldwork from the beginning of my research design.

Chacko (2004) refers “positionality” to “aspects of identity in terms of race, class, gender, caste, sexuality and other attributes that are markers of *relational* positions in society, rather than intrinsic qualities” (p. 52, original emphasis). There are power relations implicated in the positionality as a result of people’s identities which might vary as perceived in different social situations (C. Katz, 1994). These identities as an insider or an outsider are fluid; thus, scholars often find themselves positioned differently in different research contexts which is a result of what Entrikin (1991) calls “in-between.” This in-between position implies a middle-ground of epistemology between totality, or “the objective pole of scientific theorising” and contextuality, or “the subjective pole of empathy and understanding” (p. 113). Scholars have called for self-reflexivity to cope with the subject positions of researchers, however, which itself may become a privilege of scholars’ power to construct knowledge (McDowell, 1992; G. Rose, 1997).

The subject positions that I experienced in doing fieldwork, mainly in-depth interviews, echo the situations other scholars have faced (Mohammad, 2001; Sæther, 2006). I grew up in China and am native to the culture that I study. I am from a middle class family in Beijing and am quite privileged among the whole population in China. I am male, well-educated, and I had worked in a quite well-known university in China. I communicate in our shared native language with my interviewees. Meanwhile, I am also studying in a foreign university in a developed country in my early thirties. All these factors intertwine together to give me both advantages and disadvantages simultaneously, both in terms of accessing my research resources and of theorizing the data I collected. However, I was not aware of the complexity and mostly took my position as a cultural insider for granted until I stepped into the research field.

On some occasions, my “outsiderness” as a student bathing in foreign literatures and perspectives/ideologies, as perceived by my interviewees, resulted in both welcome and suspicion. For example, Lao Meng and Han Jiangxue, as well as other performers in the Shanzhai gala, were very happy when I first contacted them and introduced my background and intention. Some of them even explicitly expressed their feeling of being flattered for being recognized and approached by a scholar from a foreign country. However, the SARFT officials were not as friendly. As I discussed in the previous section, even though I gained access to them, their agreeing to see me is more of giving face to my reference than willingness to talk to me. Because of the lack of personal contact, or a good *guanxi*, with the Law Enforcement of Culture of Beijing, upon calling their staff’s office and introducing myself, I was immediately turned down because I was “working for a foreign institution.”

Among these rejections and suspicions, one episode is especially interesting. When I visited a former producer of the CCTV lecture show (Informant No. 10), I introduced myself and my research, as well as all the information required by the IRB protocols. Especially I emphasized the fact that I went to and was a lecturer of the Communication University of China (CUC) where he and many employees in CCTV went for college. Learning from the lesson of a too formal informed-consent procedure, I intended to draw his attention to our common background of college and toned down my foreign background. I just told him that I was at that time pursuing my Ph.D. degree at Texas A&M University. However, for some reason, he thought my interview was for a research project of the CUC. During the early stage of my interview, he answered all my questions in a quite “*ganbunese*” manner and repeatedly referred to articles that he published in different official outlets during the years when he was working on the lecture show. As I tossed more questions to him, he almost lost patience and told me to read those articles. He said “it is all there, everything you want.” Then he started asking me why I was doing this research and asking these questions. I explained my research interest and my understanding of the significance of this study, and he suddenly said “well, now I got it. If you are doing this for the foreign university, then that makes sense. Foreigners like studying this.” On the one hand, I felt embarrassed for not making my background clear, and on the other hand, I felt happy for his finally understanding me, recognizing my research, and, more importantly, starting to open up to me. Soon after, we started to talk about the survival strategies to balance official propaganda discipline

and appeals to audiences. He said “I know what to do, but I never let others see that I know it.” To his colleagues and in the articles he wrote, he frames the success of the lecture show as a result of following the themes and approaches called for by the Party. However, as he admitted, he recognizes the power of urban elite viewers in China who he was trying to mobilize in another show he was working on at the time of my interview. He believes that is the real strength of the lecture show. At that moment, I felt that I had established a rapport with him and gained his trust, partly as a result of my outsider position perceived by him. Our talk lasted almost three hours, and I felt I gained insights more than I had ever imagined.

My talk with that SARFT official is apparently also a result of my complex identity as a foreign scholar, a native Chinese, a young man without any institutional power, and the son of an acquaintance whose official rank is no higher than my interviewee. Again, I had to admit that my formal briefing of my research and the interview probably highlighted my identity as an outsider as perceived by that government official. His use of the “*ganbunese*,” his educational and patronizing tones, and constant digression were probably results of him seeing me as simultaneously a cultural insider who should be fine to take his patriarchal manner because of the high power-distance culture of China and an organizational outsider to whom he should only say safe things.

However, even though some of the interviews didn’t yield my intended information, or didn’t even happen, they nonetheless strongly signal the official discourse, attitudes, and orientations, as well as how the power relationships are performed on the visible surface. As Kevin O’Brien (2006) reflected about his research experience in China, it is sometimes productive to allow talks with economic, social, and political elites be less structured. On the one hand, high-level interviewees usually find it confining and insulting to be led around by the nose, and on the other hand, their spontaneous talks can often lead to unintended insights and answer questions that researchers didn’t even think of asking. Of course, when interpreting these conversations, I made sure to take the subject positions into consideration. Meanwhile, to avoid ego-centric reflection on my positionality (G. Rose, 1997), I also tried to triangulate these interviews with other interviews and newspaper discourses.

### **Informed Consent and Chinese Culture**

Acquiring informed consent is an important part of the protocols and procedures for studies of human subjects. *The Belmont Report* suggests that the research subject, “to the degree they are capable, be given the opportunity to choose what shall or shall not happen to them” (1979). An informed consent should be based on information, comprehension, and voluntariness. In my research design, I included the topic, significance of my research, uses and archiving of the interview data, confidentiality, voluntariness, and contact of the IRB of Texas A&M University. I prepared copies of consent forms for my participants to sign after I got through the information and answering their questions.

However, this standard procedure actually invited unexpected reluctance and even resentment to my study. There have been scholarly discussions on defects of cross-cultural operation of informed consent (Adams et al., 2007; Hyder & Wali, 2006), but



most of them are in clinical studies. The backfire that I experienced is a result of my failure to consider the Chinese cultural norm, and uncritical and dogmatic adherence to the research procedures originated in another culture. Before entering the field, I was actually quite satisfied with my consideration of my research subjects' well-being, especially the potential risks of job security of some of them. I carefully planned the methods of data archiving and thought through ways to conceal their identities and the potential identifiers of them. I candidly disclosed these measures and potential risks in the consent form and rehearsed oral informing. This candidness was welcomed by all Shanzhai producers and performers, most of their commercial sponsors, and most journalists. Because I have to reveal the identities of the Shanzhai producers and some performers since they are already public figures and their works are famous, I informed them regarding this issue and the potential risks. Many of them appreciated my consideration and the measures to protect them. Journalists and commercial sponsors I interviewed agreed with my procedures, and some of them asked me not to mention some specific details. However, the official of the Propaganda Management Department of SARFT explicitly expressed his concern regarding signing the consent form. Although he referred me to his subordinate, he repeatedly suggested that it would be a "casual talk," and "he [the subordinate] probably doesn't know what you want." In the interview with the subordinate, I decided not to ask him to sign the form, but fully inform him in detail, though in a very casual and conversational tone. I got his oral consent which I do not have any record of because I thought he wouldn't talk if I had audio-recorded it.

This incident teaches me that even if I had good intentions to protect and inform my research subjects, cultural norms have to be carefully taken into consideration. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued, in qualitative research, we should substitute trustworthiness for validity because it provides the basis of rapport which is the basis of valid information. However, the trust, in China, is more based on personal connections (M.-h. M. Yang, 2002) than a signed contract as in the West. Presenting a contract could ruin the personal rapport that is based on personal *guanxi* and face. Of course, as I described in the previous part, *guanxi* itself is not sufficient for trust; however, it is necessary. By following the IRB procedures adamantly, I was actually being Western-centric holding and imposing an alien "ethic" protocol. The good will and care for research subjects is necessary; however, the implementation of IRB procedures has to be situated and negotiated.

## APPENDIX B

## THE LIST OF INFORMANTS

Only the names of the following informants, if they agreed to reveal their identity, appear according to the Chinese convention where the family name goes first. All other names in this dissertation follow the Western convention where the first name goes first, including the name of some Chinese scholars cited.

**Informant No.1:** An official of the Propaganda Management Department at SARFT. The interview was conducted on June 5, 2010 in person.

**Informant No.2:** A manager of a public relation company based in Shanghai. His company is contracted to handle the public relations for a prestigious domestic food company which provided sponsorship for Lao Meng's second Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*. The interview was conducted on May 27, 2010 via telephone.

**Informant No.3:** A marketing manager of a leading video sharing website based in Beijing. He is one of the decision makers to track Lao Meng's Shanzhai Spring Festival Gala and to decide to host the videos of the second gala in 2010. The interview was conducted on June 1, 2010 in person.

**Informant No.4:** A journalist of a leading metropolitan newspaper in Beijing. She had tracked Lao Meng's Shanzhai gala for two consecutive years. The interview was conducted on June 6, 2010 in person.

**Informant No.5:** A content manager of a leading video sharing website. His website invited Han Jiangxue to shoot the lecture on Napoleon after Han got famous. This manager has an education background on television production. He involved in training Han on presentation skills, also in the actual shooting, editing of the video. The interview was conducted on June 1, 2010 in person.

**Informant No. 6:** Wang Yanan. She agreed to use her real name in this study. She had studied performance and singing in various art schools in different parts of China. By the time I interviewed her, she was a freelancing performer in Beijing, what I called "*beipiao*" (the Beijing floating). She participated in the second Shanzhai gala and her song was well liked. The interview was conducted on May 26, 2010 in person.

**Informant No. 7:** Shanpao. This is his nickname which he agreed to use in this study. He is a *Beipiao* too. By the time I interviewed him, he had been in Beijing for four years and mainly lived on figurant jobs in television drama and movies. He participated in Lao Meng's second Shanzhai gala. The interview was conducted on May 31, 2010 in person.

**Informant No. 8:** Xie Pengju. This is his real name which he agreed to use in this study. His college degree is in music. He taught music in middle school for two years before he moved to Beijing to prepare for the graduate entrance exam. At the time I interviewed him, he worked part-time at a restaurant playing Chinese musical instruments and singing. He attended the second Shanzhai gala. The interview was conducted on May 31, 2010 in person.

**Informant No. 9:** A journalist in another metropolitan newspaper in Beijing which is one competitor of the newspaper Informant No.4 worked for. She covered Lao Meng's Shanzhai gala as well as other Shanzhai sensations for two years. The interview was conducted on May 30, 2010 via telephone.

**Informant No. 10:** The CCTV producer who worked on the *Lecture Show* that Han Jiangxue imitated. By the time I interviewed him, he had moved to another show and assumed more administrative work in that channel. This interview was conducted on June 11 2010 in person.

**Informant No. 11:** Chen Weishi's sister. She didn't give me her real name even though she's widely famous in news coverage and the Shanzhai *Red Mansions* videos. She is in high school in Luzhou city, Sichuan province. The interview was conducted on June 15, 2010 via telephone.

**Informant No. 12:** Lao Meng. Lao Meng is the casual way people call Shi Mengqi. He agreed to use both Shi Mengqi and Lao Meng in my study. He moved from Wanzhou city, Sichuan province in 2005 and worked as a wedding cameraman. He later started his own business doing wedding recording and wedding host/hostess training. He initiated and led the two Shanzhai *Spring Festival Gala*. I conducted two interviews in person with him on May 28 and June 20, 2010.

**Informant No. 13:** Han Jiangxue, the producer of the Shanzhai *Lecture Show*. He agreed to use his real name in this study. I interviewed him twice in person on May 31 and June 16, 2010.

**Informant No. 14:** A producer from the satellite channel of Guizhou television station. He personally involved in the cooperation with the planning of coproduction of the first Shanzhai gala which was later banned by SARFT. The interview was conducted through June 7, 2010 via telephone.

**Informant No. 15:** A television director of Phoenix TV. She produced one episode of a talk show in which Shanzhai was discussed. Lao Meng, Han Jiangxue, as well as some intellectuals were invited to discuss Shanzhai culture. The interview was conducted on June 12, 2010 in person.

## APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL I (WITH SHANZHAI PRODUCERS)

**Preview:**

(I will introduce myself here first)

Thank you for agreeing to assist me in understanding the experiences and meanings of Shanzhai production of online video in the Internet in China. The purpose of this interview is to explore how you think about Shanzhai and what you have done in the process of Shanzhai video production and circulation. The information you share will be used in a study of the relationships among all the players in the Shanzhai phenomenon as revealed in the dialogues of meanings and interactions in the actions. You are selected because your Shanzhai videos have been widely circulated online, and you have received much attention from online viewers, news press, sponsors, government administrators, etc.

**Procedures:**

Please note that your identity will be revealed in this research. Readers will be able to identify you according to the description of your identity or that of your video products. Meanwhile, some of your statements in the interview will appear in the research as direct quotes or paraphrases, and some of them will be linked to you. You may refuse to answer any question at any time without explanation. Your experiences and insights are important, and I appreciate your willingness to share them. Our conversation will last one to one and a half hour. I would like to audio-record our conversation, so that I can recall what you've said with accuracy, and so I can concentrate on listening to you without needing to take notes. Later, this recording of our conversation will be transcribed into writing for my analysis. Is this okay with you? (If not, I will not record and instead jot notes in between the conversation, while paying close attention to the interviewee, then write in much detail when the interview is over). Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Questions:**

- 1.) Could you describe your personal background, including education, hobbies, family, career, etc.
- 2.) Can you describe your opinions about popular culture and Internet uses?
  - Possible probe questions:
    - How do you like online videos sharing?

- What kind of popular cultural products do you consume or are you a fan of?
- What gives you the ability to make online videos (education, job training, self-taught)?

3.) Please describe the whole process of your video production, from the motivation of the idea, to the actual production, to gaining popularity, getting intervened, and sponsored, and so on.

Possible probe questions:

- I will ask for details about what exactly happened when necessary.
- What are the struggles you felt and the tactics you took in face of government intervention, commercial sponsoring, news reports, etc.
- What compromises did you make when you dealt with other parties in the whole process?
- What and how did you purposefully violate other parties' expectations or requirements? Why?
- What do you think you would do if you were not reported by news presses, or intervened by the governmental administrators, or provided sponsorship?

4.) What does Shanzhai production mean to you, and have it changed in the process, and how?

Possible probe questions:

- How does the whole process influence how you understand yourself and Shanzhai?
- How do you understand the other parties' reactions to you?
- How did other parties' actions and attitudes change to you and your video?
- Are there moments when you feel your understanding of Shanzhai conflicts with others', and how?
- When do you feel weak and when do you feel empowered?
- How do you think about other Shanzhai products, including Shanzhai cell phones, other forms of Shanzhai products, and other Shanzhai producers?
- What do you think Shanzhai means to China, to the government, to the online viewers, and to commercial sponsors, etc.?
- What is your future plan as a famous Shanzhai video producer, and ultimate goal?

5.) Is there any additional information that you'd like to share that we did not already discuss in this interview?

**Closing:**

Our interview is now over. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my research project and speak with me about your insights on this particular topic. Your personal perspective is important to me in reaching a better understanding about Shanzhai as a cultural phenomenon in China. I will send you the drafts of my research that contains references of or quotes from you, and we can discuss the uses of those data. If you have any questions regarding my research, please feel free to contact me. My contact information is listed on the consent form you have. Thanks again for your valuable insights! Have a nice day.

## APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL II (WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, WEBSITE  
ADMINISTRATORS, COMMERCIAL SPONSORS, TELEVISION STATIONS,  
METROPOLITAN NEWSPAPER JOURNALISTS, etc.)

**Preview:**

(I will introduce myself here first)

Thank you for agreeing to assist me in understanding the experiences and meanings you have regarding Shanzhai production of online video in the Internet in China. The purpose of this interview is to explore how people understand and what people do in the process of Shanzhai video production and circulation. The information you share will be used in a study of the relationships among all the players in the Shanzhai phenomenon as revealed in the dialogues of meanings and interactions in the activities. You are selected because you involved in the actions taken by the organization you affiliated to in the process of Shanzhai production and circulation.

**Procedures:**

Please note that your identity will not be revealed in this research. However, readers will be able to identify the organization that you work for. Meanwhile, some of your statements in the interview will appear in the research as direct quotes or paraphrases, but none of them will be linked to you. You may also refuse to answer any question at any time without explanation. Your experiences and insights are important, and I appreciate your willingness to share them. Our conversation will last one to one and a half hour. I would like to audio-record our conversation, so that I can recall what you've said with accuracy, and so I can concentrate on listening to you without needing to take notes. Later, this recording of our conversation will be transcribed into writing for my analysis. Is this okay with you? (If not, I will not record and instead jot notes in between the conversation, while paying close attention to the interviewee, then write in much detail when the interview is over). Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Questions:**

1.) Could you describe the general decision-making process in your organization?

Possible probe questions:

- Who propose an idea and where does the ideal usually come from?
- Is there usually debate involved in the decision-making process and how is it decided, and by whom?
- Based on what consideration, are the decisions usually made?

2.) Please describe the whole story of the decisions made and actions taken by your organization in the case of Shanzhai video production.

Possible probe questions:

- Who proposed this idea and how did Shanzhai draw your attention?
- Is there any debate on different opinions or alternative plans in the decision-making process?
- Based on what consideration, is this specific decision made?
- What is the purpose of this decision?
- Was the plan changed/compromised in the process of implementation in face of other forces (such as government intervention, news coverage, sponsorship, etc.)
- What were the reactions from other parties toward your decision and actions, such as viewers, journalists, sponsors, government administrations, etc?
- What is the biggest difficulty in the implementation of your plan?

3.) What does Shanzhai production mean to you and your organization, and have it changed in the process, and how?

Possible probe questions:

- What stance does your organization take toward Shanzhai online video?
- Is your organization aware of other parties' opinions, and were they taken into account in the decision-making process?
- Were there moments when your organization feels weak or empowered?
- What do you think Shanzhai means to China, to the government, to the online viewers, and to commercial sponsors, etc.?
- What is your organization's plan to similar Shanzhai products in the future, and ultimate goal?

4.) Is there any additional information that you'd like to share that we did not already discuss in this interview?

### **Closing:**

Our interview is now over. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my research project and speak with me about your insights on this particular topic. Your personal perspective is important to me in reaching a better understanding about Shanzhai as a cultural phenomenon in China. I will send you the drafts of my research that contains references of or quotes from you, and we can discuss the uses of those data. If you have any questions regarding my research, please feel free to contact me. My contact information is listed on the consent form you have. Thanks again for your valuable insights! Have a nice day.



## VITA

Xi Cui received his Bachelor of Arts in broadcasting from the Beijing Broadcasting Institute in 2002. He entered the linguistics and applied linguistics program at the Communication University of China in September 2005 and received his Master of Arts in May 2007 and received his Ph.D. in communication from Texas A&M University in 2011. His research interests include media convergence, new media in China, television and radio broadcasting.

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