"Negotiate a Space for Fans in Cyberspace"—The Cultural Politics of Online Chinese Fandom of Western TV drama

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Introduction

"ABC's popular drama *Desperate Housewives* returned to the American screen in its sixth season at Sunday night, September 17th, 2009 (Eastern Standard Time) while I was still in sound sleep in my dorm. I got up at 10 am, went to class after lunch, returned to my dorm in late afternoon. The first thing I did was to hook my

computer up, logged on to Emule, and clicked the download button. Half an hour later, after a hot bath and a snack treat, I was sitting in front of my wide screen computer, watching the latest episode of my favorite American show with Chinese subtitles! Can you believe this?!" A friend of mine bragged to me while sipping Cappuccino in Starbucks during my last visit to China. His experience typifies the everyday life of many Chinese youngsters today—the juxtaposition of latest Western cultural images with mundane lives in communist China. And one key force behind such accelerating trend of cultural globalization and penetration is neither the ambitious transnational entertainment corporations nor the developmentalist Chinese communist party, but a group of nameless mouse-clicking young people in front of their computers.

The Chinese television industry has undergone profound changes since 1980s and is becoming increasingly market-oriented. The year 2007 saw the production of 12,000 episodes of TV drama domestically (Bai, 2005). However, since the initiation of the reform and opening-up policy, increasing amount of transnational cultural texts has been flown into the Chinese market, especially in the last decade or so in which China's entry into WTO has accelerated its pace of globalization (Fung, 2008). Despite the booming domestic market, a rising nation aspiring to modernity is demonstrating insatiable appetites for foreign-produced entertainment programming, such as Hollywood movies, or American, Korean and Japanese TV dramas. Such demand can never be met through domestic broadcasters, largely due to the combined effect of Chinese government's restriction on the import of foreign content and transnational media corporation's negligence of Chinese market (Meng, 2009).

Nevertheless, following the latest foreign TV dramas with Chinese subtitles downloaded from the Internet has become an essential part of daily life for many Chinese youngsters today. The congestion of official channel of drama import only fuels the prosperity of the underground fandom of Western TV drama on the Internet.

In the last decade or so, new networked digital technologies have endowed Chinese audiences with unprecedented control over their cultural life. Fans of Western TV dramas, mainly Internet users in their twenties or early thirties, have formed a loosely-connected online community of peer production that is driving up the popularity of Western TV drama. A *New York Times* journalist, after interviewing key figures in the fan community, marveled at how fansubbers in China make "American popular culture available in near-real time free to Chinese audiences, dodging Chinese censors and American copyright lawyers" (French, 2006).

This digitally-empowered transnational fandom has incorporated features of fan culture with essential characteristics of networked community of peer production. It stands as what Jenkins (2005) described "a prototype or dress rehearsal for the way culture might operate in the future" (p. 134). New cultural and social practices emerge in online transnational fandom that have not only subverted the conventional and commercial channel of transnational cultural flow but also generated new means of indigenizing global culture, organizing and building community, and mobilizing collective actions through networked division of labor. As fans experiment with practices that some have already had real-world cultural, economic and political effects, and some other potentials of facilitating further cultural and social change,

they are locked in constant negotiation with the established power of global capitalism and the Chinese state whose dominant status are maintained through entrenched social and cultural practices. The current case presents a precious opportunity to examine fan-based cultural politics which have implications beyond the cultural realm and the present to the ways in which what Benkler (2006) envisioned as the "networked information economy" or what Castells (1996) conceived the "network-based information society" operate in the future.

Here I use the concept of cultural politics in the Foucauldian sense to refer to "the domain in which meanings are constructed and negotiated, where relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested" (Jackson, 1991, p. 200). Micro-politics is potential in every social context in which power is at work, and politics is not necessarily bound up with the state or a power centre. Rather, power should be analyzed in the details of social practices, at the points at which it produces effects (Nash, 2001). Focusing on the social and cultural practices nurtured in Internet-based fandom through fans' (co)production, distribution and curation of Western TV drama, I examine how fans negotiate a cultural space in-between global capitalism and the Chinese state. And by doing so, I attempt to link the macro political economic background of cultural globalization in China with the micro practices of grassroots fandom. I believe that the emerging networked fan practices will shed some light on the challenges new media and communication technologies present to our current understandings of cultural globalization and state-society relationship in China.

In the following literature review, I first trace the evolution of fandom studies to show how fan culture has evolved from its initial conceptualizations following the active audience literature as an organized audience resistance or "texual poachers" (Jenkins, 1992) to a ubiquitous and global phenomenon in the mediated contemporary world. Then I delineate three types of emerging social and cultural practices of computer-mediated fandom based on studies of online fandom, virtual community and Internet culture to show how Internet-based fan community has become a prototype of how culture is produced and reproduced in the network society. To explore the social and political implications of fan practices, I embed fan studies in the literature of cultural globalization in the specific cultural context of Chinese state. I demonstrate how digital-empowered fan practices have entered into negotiation with both global capitalism and Chinese state as they offer promises for technology-facilitated social and cultural change.

The Cultural Politics of Fandom

Fans are the quintessential "active audience". They are "the most visible and identifiable of audiences" (Lewis, 1992, p. 1). According to Jenkins (1992), one of the first few scholars who made fan culture a "legitimate" topic of academic research, "media fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, spectators who also participate (p. 208). Jenkins identified two essential features of fandom. First, fans are active audiences who not only adopt a distinctive mode of reception but also constitute an "art world" founded upon the production of fan texts based on mainstream media materials. Second, fandom serves as communities—an interpretive

community in which textual meanings are contested and negotiated, and an alternative social community in which the "appropriation of media texts provides a ready body of common references that facilitates communication with others scattered across a broad geographic area" (p. 213).

At the heart of the so-called "first wave" fan scholarship, represented by people like Jenkins, Fiske and Grossberg, is the image of fans as "textual poachers" who creatively appropriate media texts produced by mainstream cultural industry to better serve subordinate or subcultural interests. Therefore, following the stream of active audience theories in media reception literature, fan study was born as "cultural politics" which "constitutes a purposeful political intervention that sided with the tactics of fan audiences in their evasion of dominant ideologies, and that set out to rigorously defended fan communities against their ridicule in the mass media and by non-fans" (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007). While the "second wave" fan studies highlighted the reproduction of social or cultural hierarchies in fandom (*Ibid,* p. 6) as a counterforce to the earlier scholars who perceive popular culture in the realm of emancipation, the "third wave" or contemporary fan scholars reemphasize the micro-macro link in fan culture, and acknowledge that "fans' readings, tastes, and practices are tied to wider social structures, yet extends the conceptual focus beyond questions of hegemony and class to the over-arching social, cultural and economic transformations of our time (*Ibid*, p. 8).

Contemporary fan studies, according to Gray et al., are characterized by two prominent trends. First, the mode of reception and consumption used to describe fans'

relationship with media texts are so ubiquitous in a mediated world that fans, instead of being conceived as members of subcultures, have become an integral part of everyday life. Second, fandom has "grown into a truly global phenomenon" which emerges as "an important interface between the dominant micro and macro forces of our time". As a result, there appears to be a "deep-seated symbiosis between the cultural practice and perspective of being a fan and industrial modernity at large" (p. 9). The ubiquity and universality of fan practices that characterize contemporary society have prompted Jenkins (2007) to ask "who isn't a fan?" and "what doesn't constitute fan culture?" (p. 364). Jenkins believed that the central power behind the expansion of fan behavior is the rise of the Internet. He also observed that many people are being drawn to fandom not because of their affective relationship to media content but because of the pleasure they derive from engaging in creative activities in a networked environment where they can share their work and build up relationships. This kind of digital grassroots creativity, according to Jenkins (2007) was an important engine of cultural transformation:

"The media landscape will be reshaped by the bottom-up energy of media created by amateurs and hobbyists as a matter of course. This bottom up energy will generate enormous creativity, but it will also tear apart some of the categories that organize the lives and world of media makers….a new generation of media makers and viewers are emerging which could lead to a sea change in how media is made and consumed" (p. 360).

This potential subversive power of online fandom has led Jenkins (2007) to announce that "fandom represents the experimental prototype, the testing ground for the way media and culture industries are going to operate in the future" (p. 361). Unlike fans in the old days who are ridiculed or "otherized" by the mainstream culture as irrational fanatics and cultural dupes, contemporary fans exhibit modes of reception

and consumption that typify our everyday experiences with the media. The target of fan consumption is not necessarily entertainment, but has extended to include serious news (Gray, 2007), cultural theory (McKee, 2007) or "high culture" (Tulloch, 2007). Fan consumption is no longer confined by national borders and is increasingly global, be it American fans of East Asian TV dramas (Li, 2009) or European fans of Hong Kong cinema (Chin, 2007). Fans do not have to flock to conventions or camp in rock concert to qualify as fans, instead, they join facebook groups, order their favorite collections from Amazon and follow the latest show on Youtube or Hulu. Building on the broad definition of fandom given by contemporary fan scholars, the current study is one such effort to tap into the grassroots creativity of Internet fans, and to capture the moments of technology-facilitated negotiation between innovative fan practices and resistant structural forces.

Following Li (2009), Hu (2005) and Gray (2007) who all focused on fans of particular media genre instead of a star or a show, the current study attempts to investigate fans of Western TV dramas or English-language TV dramas produced in Western countries, especially in the United States. For one thing, in recent years, Western TV dramas have defeated its Asian or Latin American counterparts to emerge as the most popular TV dramas for consumption among Chinese youngsters. Curiously, only less than a handful of Western dramas have been imported through the official channel, and the majority of the dramas available to Chinese audiences were popularized through the informal channel of Internet-based voluntary fan community. For another, the circulation and consumption of Asian TV dramas in

China have been studied by many scholars (Hu, 2005, 2009; Nakano, 2002 etc.), and the influences of Western TV dramas is a neglected topic in comparison. After an analysis of the political economic context of the rise of online TV drama fan community, I will focus on three levels of fan engagement on the Internet. *Co-production* largely occurs in volunteer-based fansubbing groups that record, search, download, translate and circulate latest Western TV dramas through networked division of labor among Chinese fansubbers around the world. *Circulation* of TV dramas depend not only on organized fansubbing groups but also on the collaboration of individual fans connected through p2p networks, video-sharing sites and social networking services. *Curation* refers to online discursive activities around the circulated TV drama texts like reviews, recaps or spoilers translated or written by fansubbers and individual fans, or discussions and comments generated by fans on TV drama-related websites and blogs.

Internet and fan practices---the politics of networked cultural production

As we have already discussed, scholars of popular culture have always seen in fandom and fan culture potentials of cultural politics and have linked fan practices with democracy, resistance and identity politics, which is largely due to the fact that fans and fan communities are epitome of active audience. According to MacDonald (1998) that the computer-mediated communication and media fandom have recently become "hot topics" in the academy for very similar reasons, i.e., both of them offer the promise of a more democratic communication. Then what happens when fandom goes online? What new social and cultural practices will emerge when active audience

agencies are bolstered and empowered by networked digital technologies? Macdonald (1998) proposed a threefold significance of research on online fandom, arguing that "studying how a fan group moves to computer-mediated spaces allows for a concentrated look at the potentialities and problems of both CMC and media fandom….and provide a unique opportunity to explore how CMC may change our popular culture and our pleasure time activities and gain insights into how a particular group integrates the possibilities of CMC" (p. 132).

The current study stands as one of such efforts that seize the opportunities offered by both fandom and networked media technologies in reexamining how cultural and social practices nurtured through digitally-empowered cultural communities reflect and resist dominant social norms. To fully grasp the relatively new cultural phenomenon of online Western TV drama fans that stands in the overlapping areas between fandom and Internet community, but falls comfortably into neither category, we may have to experiment and mash up theories and concepts from both fields so as to "invent" and develop new ideas while building on existing literature.

Online Participatory culture

One of the central features of digitally-empowered fan culture is enhanced participation of individual fans and accelerated production practices. The blurring of the line between consumers and producers in digital age is well-documented and well-discussed in scholarly works. Cover (2004) described how digital technologies are transforming traditional author-text-audience relationship, arguing that the

increased interactivity of cyberspace has encouraged audience to seek co-participation in authorship. Andrejevic (2004) pointed out the "promise of the interactive digital revolution" as dis-alienating consumers from the means of production through enhancing participation in content-production (p. 23). Fans have been active producers of cultural products who "rereads and rewrites" fictive texts long before the Internet becomes prevalent (Jenkins, 1991, p. 170). How have networked new media and communication technologies transformed fan cultural production? The majority of academic literature celebrated the empowering and democratizing effects of such increasingly participatory culture (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2008; Hartley, 2009; Jenkins, 2005, 2006).

One of the most enthusiastic advocates of fan participatory culture is Jenkins. In his 2005 book *Fans, Bloggers and Games, Exploring Participatory Culture*, he delineated the ways in which the Internet has accelerated fan cultural production. He acknowledged that fans were early adopters of digital technologies. Online fan practices can be traced back to the embryonic days of the Internet in scientific and military institutions where slang and social practices employed on the early bulletin boards were often directly modeled on science fiction fandom. In many ways, "cyberspace is fandom writ large" (p. 138). By "transplanting its practices to the digital environment", fan community has increased its speed of cultural production, altered the scope of its communication, become much more effective as a platform for consumer activism, and enabled new forms of fan cultural production like photoshop collage, fan-generated music (filk), re-edited video footage and mash-up videos. He

gave the example of how anime fans regularly translate and post schedules of Japanese television so that "international fans can identify and negotiate access to interesting programs" (p. 149). Those participatory behaviors, according to Jenkins, pose challenges to corporate commodity culture, especially its legal structure. It remains to see if television producers in the digital age come to see fans "less as copyright infringers and more as active associates and niche marketers" (*Ibid)*.

Jenkins' book is especially relevant to our current study in three aspects. First, he noted how the Internet has greatly expanded the scope of fan community to make transnational fandom easier and more ubiquitous. Second, fans of Western TV drama in our study have demonstrated similar features of participatory cultural production. Apart from downloading, subtitling and distributing transnational TV drama, fans organize radio stations, write reviews, recaps, primes and translate entertainment news related to their favorite shows and characters. In extreme cases, when SARFT ordered that P2P websites be shut down, fans made photoshoped pictures and mash-up videos, wrote satirical poems and long essays in their campaign against SARFT's censorship and regulation, which coincides with the third aspect Jenkins mentioned about how fan practices challenge dominant culture and its legal structure. Furthermore, TV drama fans engage in p2p-based diffusion and distribution of copyrighted cultural products, which stand as a threat to current copyright system of global media corporation.

The idea that digitally-empowered fan cultural production has made the boundary between consumers and producers increasingly blurred was captured by

Bruns (2008) as well. He also elaborated on how fan cultural production has disrupted the legal and cultural control system of capitalist interest. Building on Toffler's (1970, 1980, 1990) idea of "prosumer", Bruns (2008) coined the notion of "produser" to describe the creative and collaborative participation in today's social networking and peer-to-peer social production sites like Wikipedia, blog or facebook. As users participate in content creation and form communities based on mutual interest, their roles as consumer and producer become inextricably interwoven to the extent that they take up a new hybrid role as produser. In relation to fan produsage, he discussed how fan fiction writers on the Internet form fan communities where they not only share their works and receive feedback from fellow enthusiasts, but also move beyond individual authorship to seek collaborative authoring projects. This type of collaborative and collective extension of copyrighted properties constitutes a creative commons where ideas and content can be shared and developed freely. Nevertheless, fans creative co-production sometimes clashes with the interest of copyright holders. Therefore, Bruns (2008) advocated a more flexible copyright law that could variously accommodate amateur activities, and he believes that a heavy-handed and generic enforcement of existing copyright to the detriment of fan fiction communities is counterproductive for commercial copyright holders as it alienates their most enthusiastic consumers. He also noted how fan's collective produsage has rendered the line between amateur and professional work less visible (p. 233-234).

One major difference should be noted between say Harry Potter fan fiction writers or American TV viewers, and Chinese fans of Western TV drama. While the

former are target consumers of publishing house and TV networks whom the companies depend on for revenues, the Chinese fans hardly ever enter TV producers' list of target market. If anything, they are "neglected" or "ignored" viewers either because that Western TV networks see little profit in the Chinese market or because of Chinese government stringent cultural censorship and convoluted policies on cultural import, or a combined effect of both. In any case, the Internet and P2P networks appear to be the only channel through which the Chinese fans can access their favorite shows, which to a certain extent, makes their downloading practices more acceptable.

If we go beyond the literature on online fandom to search for similar accounts of this new practices of "amateur" cultural production in the digital era, we are likely to be embraced by a wealth of stories run the gamut from the cultural politics of Youtube (Gurgess & Green, 2009), to the amateur expert of Wikipedia (Bruns, 2008), from digital story-telling and "vernacular activities" by ordinary people (Burgess, 2006), to constructing virtual lives and alternative identities in video games (Turkle, 1994). The social significances and political potentials of this digital participatory culture are well summarized by Benkler (2006) in his book *The Wealth of Networks*. According to Benkler: "the declining price of computation, communication and storage has placed the material means of information and cultural production in the hands of a significant fraction of the world's population" (p. 3), as a result, we are witnessing the emergence of a new popular culture, which is "produced on the folk-culture model and inhabited actively, rather than passively consumed by the

masses" (p. 275). Compared to "the highly choreographed cultural production system of the industrial information economy", the new folk culture boasts two characteristics—transparency and participation. People become more sophisticated users of cultural materials and are getting more self-conscious, critical about the daily social conversation and statements that pervades life. This offers new avenues for greater freedom because individuals now come to possess a "greater capacity to recognize, challenge, and change what they find oppressive", and "to articulate, exchange and adopt what they find enabling" (p. 299). However, it is precisely at this moment of change do tensions between "the industrial model of cultural production" and "the networked information economy" become visible. As cultural beings occupying a set of common symbols and stories based on the outputs of the industrial period, we cannot make new culture out of nowhere. Therefore, only by cutting, pasting and remixing the culture of the present are we able to build a new platform for the culture of tomorrow. And as far as Benkler is concerned, it is "precisely this freedom that most directly challenges the laws written for the twentieth-century technology, economy, and cultural practice" (p. 330).

In this light, as a good example of digital participatory culture, the community of Chinese Western TV drama fans offers insights into the new cultural and social practices of this "new type of popular culture", and the languages and currencies of this "networked information economy" envisioned by Benkler. A reexamination in the digital age of fans and fandom, who are embodiment of active audiences and media producers/consumer in all times, allows us to reconsider people's relationship

with media, culture and society in general.

Networking power

Apart from fan cultural production, a more fascinating change brought by the Internet to fan community lies in how the network has linked atomic individuals in front of the computer together in pursuit of collective goals. By coordinating the creative efforts of individuals to form a creative commons, network technologies have aggregated and magnified individual power. Here, again, Jenkins offered insights into this networked power of the Internet in fan community. Building on Levy's (1997) concept of "collective intelligence", Jenkins (2005) conceptaulized the social dimensions of fan community "not in terms of resistance but as a prototype or dress rehearsal for the way culture might operate in the future". He came up with the term "knowledge culture", an opposite of corporate-dominated "commodity culture", to describe fandom as "one of those spaces where people are learning how to live and collaborate within a knowledge community". He envisioned that "we are trying out through play patterns of interaction that will soon penetrate every other aspect of our lives" and concluded that the "knowledge culture" gives us "a model for a fan-based politics" (p. 134).

In his more recent book on "Convergence culture", Jenkins (2006) elaborated on how "spoiler" fans of the American reality TV show *Survivor* garner "collective intelligence"—"the ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members"—to form a "knowledge community". Based on the collective expertise of the fan community, fans dug out the "behind-the-scene" information

through online collaboration, and gathered knowledge supposed to be controlled only by producers. In doing so, fans come to "exert a greater aggregate power in their negotiations with media producers". The fans are experimenting with new kinds of knowledge arising in cyberspace. And out of this new knowledge "political power will emerge which will operate alongside and sometimes directly challenge the hegemony of the nation-state or the economic might of corporate capitalism" (p. 28-29). Jenkins also tapped into the reasons behind the emergence of such "knowledge community" and commented that "the new knowledge culture has arisen as our ties to older forms of social community are breaking down, our rooting in physical geography is diminished, our bonds to the extended and even the nuclear family are disintegrating, and our allegiances to nation-states are being redefined" (p. 27). This type of "voluntary, temporary and tactical affiliations" in effect has "interfered with or reshaped the informational economy" around the entertainment program and has "threatened the producer's ability to control public response" (p.57-58).

The concept of "knowledge community" and "knowledge culture" shed some light on our study of TV drama fans. With the help of social networking services, fan-established BBS sites, p2p networks and other Internet-based communication technologies, Chinese fans from all over the globe have gone beyond the confines of geographical boundaries to form "communities of knowledge" based on common interest. The Internet has made it possible for fans of diverse expertise, some speak fluent English, some are video-editing guru, some have access to Western TV drama

resources, other simply love celebrity news and entertainment gossip, to collaborate

and to build a common community in pursuit of similar interests. While at the same

time, their seemingly "selfish" pursuit of pleasure has put them in negotiation with

forces of state censorship and cultural control system of global media corporations.

The Chinese online TV drama fan community is a prototype of what Levy (1997)

envisioned "a world where grassroots communication is not a momentary disruption

of the corporate signal but the routine way that the new media system operates". (p.

44).

Non-commercial peer-to-peer sharing

A defining characteristic of networked online fan communities is voluntarism or

non-commercial peer sharing. If the "collective intelligence" and "knowledge culture"

formed through networked fan practices often enter into "skirmishes" with dominant

power when their interests clash, the non-commercial, or anti-commercial "cultural

economy" of organized online fan practices stand as an alternative to the commodity

culture of capitalist production and commerce, and a tangible and constant challenge

to its monetary-based commodity exchange mechanism. Rooted in Anthropology

literature (Veale. 2003), the concept of "gift economy" best captures the essence of

this non-commercial, voluntary-based cultural economy of online fandom.

The gift economy, initially conceptualized by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss

(1954), was used to describe a culture distinct from the "market economy" where

goods and services are offered and reciprocated without explicit agreement on

immediate reward. Since the emergence of the Internet, many scholars have found in

the Internet, attributes of the gift economy (Barbrook, 1998; Hellekson, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Scott, 2009; Veale, 2003). In one of the earliest articles on Internet gift culture, Barbrook (1998) described that the Internet, though originally being invented for military purpose, was constructed around the gift economy where free exchange of information has been firmly embedded within the technologies and social mores of the cyberspace. This is echoed by Jenkins (2009) who argued that values of gift economy were built into the infrastructure of the web "which was designed to facilitate the collaboration of scientists and researchers rather than to enable to metered access excepted within a commodity culture". The interactive, decentralized and networked nature of the Internet stood in opposition to the control system of intellectual property right from the very beginning, and even today, when the commodification of information has fundamentally transformed the landscape of the cyberspace, struggles between government regulators and corporate commercial interests, and the so-called "digital pirates", hackers and even ordinary users of the net who operate under the logic of the "gift economy" in their practices of free-sharing, illegal downloading and peer production are constant and increasingly intensified.

Lewis Hype (1983) in his book *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* discussed how gift economy differs from commodity culture, which might help us understand the alternative "cultural economy" in online fan communities and how it challenges the norms of mainstream capitalist commodity exchange. While in commodity culture, goods are exchanged based on monetary remuneration or cash transaction, gifts circulate based on acts of generosity and reciprocity, and altruistic

motivations. Whereas materialistic desires propel capitalist production and commerce, non-material rewards like "status", "prestige" or "esteem" drive cultural production and social transaction in a gift economy. As a result, the "bonding power of the gift" has replaced the "detached nature of commodity exchange" to be a defining feature of the culture of communities (p. 86). While "a clean trade within a commodity culture leaves people unconnected", the circulation of goods help to constitute and nurture the symbolic relations between participants of a gift economy. According to Jenkins (2009), the gift economy in online communities "helps to break down boundaries between participants, reflecting a commitment to good relations and mutual welfare".

In relation to online fan community, Hellekson (2009) talked about "the fannished field of value of the online fan gift culture" in terms of a gendered space. The gift culture constructed in the online fan community through fans' "labor of love" and dialogical feedback loops of gift exchange constitute a "female" space of social cohesion and connection, which directly repudiates the "male-gendered" capitalist monetary model or the so-called "commodity culture". Activities usually associated with female pastime, like "hand made" artifacts or exchange of gifts invested with emotions and efforts, occupy a central place in online fan community. This valorization of "female" values in a gift culture that are "designed to create and cement a social structure" stands as an alternative and a challenge to the patriarchal model of society that glorifies competition, freedom and individual material gains.

Though the "gift economy" of online fandom is defined in contrast to the "commodity culture" of venture capitalism, they are not separated. If anything, at

least at the current stage of social development, gift economy and commodity culture live in symbiosis with each other and undergo constant confrontations and negotiations. With regard to online fan culture, on the one hand, in an attempt to "regift" and "repackage" grassroots culture, commodity culture begins selectively appropriating the gift economy's ethos for its own economic gain (Scott, 2009). This act has triggered mixed responses from both fans and scholars of fandom as it yielded mixed results (Hellekson, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Scott, 2009). On the other hand, grassroots production in online fandom is inspired by and based on the consumption of commercial media texts. The material basis of fan gift economy is still the dominant economy of commodity culture, though networked new technologies have allowed fans to remix and mash up commercial cultural texts to serve their personal expression and to re-circulate the "gift commodities" under the dictates of community values. What is more, as Scott (2009) correctly noted, the definition of fandom as a non-commercial gift economy is socially and legally strategic. The strictly anti-commercial nature of online fan community shields against accusations of copyright violation while helping to preserve autonomy and solidarity of the communities. What is clear is that "media fandom is rapidly being constructed as a fertile battleground where the territory between online gift economies and commodity culture will be negotiated" (Scott, 2009).

Apart from the idea of the "gift economy", similar accounts of the emerging networked online community proliferate in recent years. For instance, Jenkins (1992, 2009b) appropriated E.P. Thompson's concept of "moral economy" to describe the

relations between contemporary media producers and consumers. Fan fiction writers and Internet users engaged in illegal file sharing alike legitimate their appropriation and justify their "fair use" of copyrighted materials not in accordance to the legal terms of mainstream copyright laws, but to the perceived moral and social values of those transactions supported by the wider consensus of the community. Another example would be the term "digital goods" coined by Peter Kollock (1999) who transformed the notion of "public goods" to the virtual environment. He observed that the network of digital information based on which online communities were built heralds significant changes in not only the costs of producing public goods, the value of public goods, but also the production function of a public good. These all point to potentially profound transformations not only in the practices of how business is conducted, or the manner in which culture products are consumed, but also in the way human society organizes and evolves.

The Internet-based Western TV drama fans in China operates under the logic of the gift economy where commercial TV drama texts are reproduced and repackaged to circulate as non-commercial "gifts" in a peer-sharing platform. This voluntary nature of the fan community sets it apart from profit-oriented piracy production and distribution system, and distinguished it from the underground business of pirated DVDs and CDs. Therefore, instead of being conceived as an illegal business managed by greedy pirates who feed on the growing appetite for cultural consumption of a developing nation, the online community of TV drama fans is an exemplar of the emerging Internet-based gift economy that questions and threatens the dominant

capitalist commodity culture. At the same time, the case of Western TV drama fans also complicates the current model of Internet gift economy for it is not your typical fan community. The complicated and organized volunteer-based division of labor inside the community both resembles and differs from that of the capitalist ventures. So it gives us an opportunity to go beyond the dichotomy of "gift economy" versus "commodity culture" to explore the set of rules and organizational routines in the community as well as the motivations and driving forces behind the "gift economy" of online fandom, which will afford us insights into the promises of cultural and social changes brought by the networked new communication technologies.

The politics of networked community of peer production

What makes online fandom essentially different from offline fan group is that the Internet and other new media and communication technologies have provided platforms and technological means for individuals with similar interests to form a "society of their own", and the scale, speed and sophistication of which are unprecedented. Therefore, the cultural politics of Internet-based transnational fandom lie precisely in its power of networked non-commercial peer production, which challenges the dominant capitalist or state-centered (in the case of China) society in both tangible and intangible ways. On the one hand, their co-production and consumption of transnational texts directly defy the cultural and commercial control systems of both global capitalism and the Chinese state. On the other hand, the embryonic interest-based non-commercial practices of social organization proffer an alternative, and many believe a superior model of social production and organization,

to the current capitalist or state-centered form. We have already examined the new social and cultural practices emerged in online fandom and other similar online communities from three angles, namely cultural production, network and non-commercial free sharing. We will devote the last part of this section to a more comprehensive discussion of the politics of such networked community of peer production as conceptualized by scholars of p2p culture, network production and popular culture.

Michel Bauwens, one of the best known advocates of peer-to-peer production, described the "p2p relational dynamic" as "the premise of the next civilizational stage". According to Bauwens (2005), commons-based peer production serves as the "third mode of production" after free-market based capitalism and the now defunct model of a centrally-planned state-owned economy. He summarized the importance of the "transcending" factors of commons-based peer production in four aspects:

> "1) it is based on free cooperation, not on the selling of one's labour in exchange of a wage, nor motivated primarily by profit or for the exchange value of the resulting product; 2) it not managed by a traditional hierarchy; 3) it does not need a manufacturer; 4) it's an innovative application of copyright which creates an information commons and transcends the limitations attached to the property form."

From an individual point of view, Citing Pekka Himanen, Bauwens (2005) argued that "hacker ethics", which characterize the individual motivations of such peer production, usher in a new culture of work and being that represent a new, opposing ethos for the information age. Work is passionate, freely rhythmed and collaborative, more like play than the protestant ethics of work:

> "Time is not rigidly separated into work and non-work; intensive work periods are followed by extensive leave taking, the latter necessary for intellectual and creative renewal; there is a logic of self-unfolding at work, workers look for projects at which

they feel energized and that expands their learning and experience in desired directions; participation is voluntary; learning is informal and continuous; the value of pleasure and play are crucial; the project has to have social value and be of use to a wider community; there is total transparency, no secrets; there is an ethic that values activity and caring; creativity, the continuous surpassing of oneself in solving problems and creating new use value, is paramount"

From a macro perspective, he believes that p2p networks can bring about a de-monopolization of power. Power in networks takes the form of reputation and influence, which is given by the community, and is "time-bound to the participation of the individual. So in the case of monopolization, participants can simply leave or "create a forking of the project" to avoid the power grab. And the "key conflict" at this stage of development for p2p network revolves around the opposing forces of de-monopolization of the network and monopolization by the corporate, that is, "the freedom to construct the information commons vs. the private appropriation of knowledge by for-profit firms". He used the example of p2p music distribution platform to illustrate this point. Despite the fact that p2p websites like Napster is inherently more efficient, productive, versatile and user-friendly than the older system of physically distributing CDs, the industry still intents to destroy p2p technologies and to criminalize sharing because it is in conflict with their current profit and production model. This struggle between two forces is echoed by Jenkins (2005) and Uricchio (2004) who used the concept of bottom-up grassroots convergence and top-down corporate convergence to describe this confrontation of power, a point on which we shall elaborate in the next section.

The fan community under study is a case in point of the transformations ushered in by new commons-based p2p production. The values of "work as play" is central to

the participating members of the fan production activities who, because of the voluntary nature of their work, treasure creativity, pleasure, self-learning, mutual support and interaction inside the community more than anything else, though competition and evaluation of performance are part of the work routines. The friendly, dynamic and productive environment of the fan community stands in sharp contrast to the fierce, monotonous and exploitive working conditions that many older fans experience at work in real life, and the competitive and non-inspiring school life some younger college-age fans are living on a daily basis. At the same time, the p2p-based co-production and distribution of Western TV drama prove to be a more efficient model of transnational flow of cultural products when being compared with the top-down corporate-initiated model of cultural globalization. By bypassing the intricate gate-keeping mechanism of the Chinese government, the fan community has revolutionized the old model of transnational cultural flow through networked collaboration and work-as-play.

What Bauwens (2005) defined as the political economy of p2p culture, Benkler (2007) conceptualized to be the "networked information economy" which is characterized by new and important cooperative and coordinate actions carried out through radically distributed, non-market mechanism that do not depend on proprietary strategies. Two features stand at the heart of this networked information economy and distinguish it from its industrial counterpart, firstly, non-proprietary and non-market production and secondly, the rise of effective, large-scale cooperative effort in the peer production of information, knowledge and culture (p. 7). According

to him:

> "What we are seeing now is the emergence of more effective collective action practices that are decentralized but do not rely on either the price system or a managerial structure for coordination...The networked environment not only provides a more effective platform for action to nonprofit organizations that organize action like firms or to hobbyists who merely coexist coordinately. It also provides a platform for new mechanisms for widely dispersed agents to adopt radically decentralized cooperation strategies other than by using proprietary and contractual claims to elicit prices or impose managerial commands…What we see in the networked information economy is a dramatic increase in the importance and the centrality of information produced in this way" (p. 63).

Benkler (2007) linked the emergence of the networked information economy with the basic tenets of liberal and democratic societies, arguing that the diversity of ways of organizing information production and use in the new economy opens a range of possibilities for pursing core political values of liberal societies, including individual freedom, a more genuinely participatory political system and a critical culture and social justice (p. 7-8).

The linkage between a new political culture and the social and cultural practices in peer production communities is also echoed by Uricchio (2004) who coined the concept of "cultural citizenship in the age of p2p networks". "Cultural citizenship", according to Uricchio (2004), is based on "a set of common values" whose aim is to establish a material basis for societal membership, and is different from economic citizenship and political citizenship. This form of "cultural citizenship", some occur face-to-face within the confines of the territorial nation-state, and others occur virtually in technologically facilitated networked communities, possess radical potential vis a vis the nation state as "a means of expanding rights or creating new meanings" (p. 7-8).

In the above section, I have synthesized existing literature on online fandom, network community and digital peer production to situate the current study of online fandom in China in a broad theoretical framework of the networked community of peer production. I have highlighted three distinctive characteristics of the networked community of peer production. First, digital technologies have rendered the culture industry more participatory for fans to the extent that the old dichotomy of consumer and producer is losing its currency. Second, the networking powers of the Internet has coordinated and aggregated the individual power of fans to form a "knowledge culture". Third, the non-commercial "gift economy" of online fannish peer production presents an alternative to the dominant commodity culture. As a result, the cultural politics of networked community of peer production have destabilized the dominant capitalist industrial model of cultural production. In the next section of the literature review, I embed the emerging social and cultural practices of digital fandom in the context of cultural globalization and the specific cultural setting of China to capture the ongoing negotiations between the bottom-up energies of networked digital production and the top-down forces of commercial and state control.

Internet-based Transnational Fandom and Cultural Globalization

Transnational cultural flow: indigenization and imagination

Globalization, a concept too widely-cited and frequently-abused by both academic and popular discourses, seems to defy any exhaustive definition. Generally speaking, it involves the economic, social, cultural and technological integration of the world directly resulted from progress in transportation and networking

technologies. Giddens (1990), one of the leading theorists of globalization, describes globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (p.64). Smith has identified three basic dimensions of the socio-cultural process of globalization, i.e. economic globalization, political globalization and cultural globalization. He defined cultural globalization as "global flow of information, signs and symbols as well as the resulting socio-cultural transformations" (p. 308).

The debates on cultural globalization have been operating along the continuum of cultural imperialism and cultural pluralism (Kraidy, 2005). The cultural imperialism thesis, rooted in the critical political economy of international communication and reached the height of its popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, laments the destruction of cultural identities by the "homogenized, westernized consumer culture" (Tomlinson, 2000; p. 269), and thus treating "cultural globalization" as an extension of western cultural colonialism. Globalization is equated to a process of homogenization or "McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2002). The late 1990s also witnessed "an upsurge in reassertion of the media imperialism thesis" that coincides with a rising trend of mergers and acquisitions among transnational media companies. This time, the arguments revolve around the central question of "who is served by globalization (Featherston, 1990), and the focus has shifted to the "new international division of cultural labor" of capitalist media corporations, especially the Hollywood (Miller et al., 2001).

On the other end of the continuum situate rival arguments of cultural pluralism. Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars begin to question the homogenizing power of the "one-way flow" thesis of cultural imperialism and to call for greater sensitivity to cultural specificity. The cultural pluralist camp stresses the indigenization of global culture by the "locals" (Hopper, 2007). Robertson's (1995) concept of "glocalization" very well capsulates the theme of cultural pluralism which perceives globalization as an ongoing interaction between the global and the local. There are mainly two approaches under the umbrella of cultural pluralism, one is concerned with "the structures of the economy" emphasizing economic or policy strategies of local cultural production and the "practices of circulation" of transnational cultural products, and the other with "structures of meaning" and "material properties" of cultural products, underlining textual localization, audience agency and resistance (*Ibid*).

From a macro political economic angle, Chan and Ma (1996) pinpointed two paths of indigenization in Asian countries. First, Asian governments have been proactive in "undoing the imbalance in communication flow from the West to the East" through setting quotas for imported programs or providing direct and indirect support for domestic television programs (p. 51). While at the same time, more and more Asian countries begin to follow the rules of market competition through which the "technical quality" and "entertainment values" of domestic television production improved in response to competition from Western cultural products made increasingly available for local consumption (p. 51-52). In an earlier study, Lee (1991)

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questioned the simplicity of the cultural imperialism thesis and "its assumption of deleterious effects in the unbalanced pattern of international communication" by examining the "absorption and interpretation of foreign cultures by the receiving party" through a case study of Hong Kong culture (p. 52-53). In critique of the cultural homogenization argument, he came up with four patterns of cultural indigenization, namely parrot, amoeba, coral and butterfly patterns (p. 64-65).

Another stream of cultural pluralist scholarship which is grounded in the active audience stream of reception and cultural studies emphasized the agency of audiences in shaping and transforming imported transnational cultural texts (Ang, 1985; Fung & Ma, 2002 etc.). Instead of focusing on official "strategies" of cultural indigenization initiated by the government, they talked about "tactics" and textual polysemy. For instance, Naficy's (1996) study of Iranian dubbing of American films showed how the "combination of personal agency and iconic textual polysemy give audiences significant autonomy in constructing meaning" (p. 5). The Iranian translators who are hired by theaters to give simultaneous translation for American films alter the original dialogues and narrations by giving them strong Iranian flavors and twists. To a certain extent, the translators and movie-goers are not passive recipients of American culture, but active "co-producers" of the meaning of the movie. Based on De Certeau's1984) idea of "tactics" versus "strategies", he introduced different types of tactics and strategies employed by grassroots audiences in less-developed cultures, and argued that the narratology of global media texts give the subaltern a choice between becoming loyal consumers or poachers who co-opt media use for their own

purposes—indigenous identity can be generated through a tactical and playful engagement with global media texts.

One major theme running through audience cultural indigenization literature is the issue of "identity" and how local audiences, through appropriation of foreign media texts, construct a hybrid identity. In the context of Thailand, Siriyuvasak (2004) inquired into the role of global, especially Japanese culture, in formation of Thai youth identity. She approached Thai youngsters' reception of transnational cultural products as mainly a consumption behavior and acknowledged that some young people consume transnational popular culture as a means to articulate their deep-seated frustrations against their repressive and patronizing society. However, she was suspicious of how such identity politics can be turned into a counter-culture and how such symbolic power can transform the power structure of the real world. She pointed out the difference between "active audience" and "powerful audience" and came to the conclusion that "the imagined may be subversive but without the organization of social, physical, and material forces it would not lead to the power for real resistance" (p. 197). Similar accounts of how global culture contributes to the construction of indigenous identity can be found in Havens's (2001) study of the appropriation of African American TV drama by Kuwait youth. He proposed the interesting question of how have global TV and film flows altered or retrenched traditional processes of identity formation? Through interviews with young audiences of the show The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, he found that instead of whole-hearted embrace of American values and identities, Kuwait youth are constructing and

negotiating their ethnic and gender identities based on representation of "blackness" and "whiteness".

The case of Chinese online fans of Western TV drama has complicated the above-delineated model of cultural globalization and indigenization since the bottom-up forces of networked community of active cultural co/producers have disrupted the conventional route of transnational cultural flow and transformed the ways Western cultural products are translated, distributed, consumed and appropriated. The three types of emerging social and cultural practices of the Internet-based transnational fandom we introduced in the last section, namely active cultural production, networked community and peer-to-peer non-commercial sharing stand as technological ruptures not only in the process of consumption of foreign cultural products but also in the distribution and appropriation of transnational media texts. On the one hand, communities of networked fans empowered by digital technologies have rendered governmental indigenizing strategies of protectionism and consumerism in vain. On the other hand, new technologies and community practices have revolutionized the volume, speed and means of fannish media consumption and production. The ways or "tactics" at the disposal of networked fans through which they "play" with or "poach" media texts have vastly expanded and become increasingly more flexible. Harrington and Denise (2007), in talking about the approaches of studying cultural globalization, observed a recent trend in global media reception theory that tries to bridge the gap between the micro, i.e. "the effects of imported texts on national and cultural identities", with the macro, i.e. "the central

questions of culture, power, and ideology more typically associated with a political economic approach" (p. 180). The current study gives us a good opportunity to link micro practices of media reception with macro issues of power and ideology as new technologies have blurred the boundary between media consumers and producers.

Acknowledging the challenges we face in conceptualizing cultural globalization, networked technologies being one, Appadurai (1996) observed that the new global cultural economy is such a complex, overlapping and disjunctive order that can no longer be fully tackled through the existing models of center-periphery, push-and-pull, surpluses-and-deficits, or consumers vs. producers. Instead, "the complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics" (p. 33). What is "critical and new" in global cultural processes is "the imagination as a social practice":

> "the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practices), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individual) and globally defined fields of possibility…the imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (p. 31).

He proposed an alternative model of global cultural flows which "occur in and through the growing disjunctions" among five dimensions of "ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes" (p. 33). These landscapes are "building blocks" of contemporary "imagined worlds" in which resides individuals who construct multiple sites of belonging and collective communities through the practices of imagination that might "subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them" (p.33).

The TV drama fan community is one node in the complex network of global

cultural flows where transformations in "technoscapes", i.e. the growing capacities of individual digital production and participation in networked communities, have led to growing disjunctions in the landscapes of transnational cultural flows. The "imagined world" or community constructed by fan members has summoned the "social practices of the imagination" both on individual and collective levels to enter into negotiations with both local and global forces. Despite Appadurai's rather poetic but abstract rendering of the idea of "imagination" and "disjunctions in global cultural flows", a more grounded observation of how the "social practices of imagination" are carried out and substantiated in a community will certainly shed lights on the increasingly intricate process of cultural globalization.

The politics of Internet-based transnational fandom

How does the introduction of the Internet and other network technologies transform the landscape of transnational fandom and its role in cultural globalization? To what extent do digitally-empowered community practices change the way transnational cultural texts are received, distributed, indigenized and appropriated? Are the new social and cultural practices emerged in online fan community, with all its promises of a new non-commodity culture and economic order, and all its linkages to democratic participation and political emancipation, present new challenges to the established global power relationships? We are able to get some hints of the cultural and social implications of Internet-based transnational fandom from existent literature.

Internet-based fans of transnational media products are first and foremost active

audiences of global cultural products. However, new media and communication technologies provide new strategies and resources of indigenizing global culture to suit local needs, which offer new opportunities for identity construction and building "imagined world". Moreover, online Chinese fans of Western TV drama are also differentiated from casual audiences of Western media by their participation in the community-based co/production, distribution and curation/consumption process. They do not simply vote with their consuming power, waiting for the signals to be transmitted through official networks or sustaining the underground market of piracy through illegal purchases. They have largely bypassed the official distribution and censorship channels via forming an Internet-based community of mutual help and support. This has two profound implications for the dominant model of cultural globalization. First, fan activities have subverted the conventional transnational cultural flows based on top-down corporate commercial channel. Though inside the community, fans are distinguished by their different levels of engagement—some assume leadership roles and are major contributors of subtitles, reviews or other peripheral information; others are simply downloaders, silent audiences who occasionally post comments or exchange ideas about certain shows on BBS sites—their collective activities as a whole nurture and facilitate the expansion and maturation of the community and constitute a powerful "grass-route intermediary" of Western TV drama. Second, a non-commercial culture of peer-production based on the logics of free-sharing, mutual support and interpersonal bonds is gradually formulated in online fandom that stands as a more desirable model of social

organization. It constitutes an alternative to the model advocated by global capitalism that valorizes competition and maximization of profits.

Subverting conventional flow

Despite the fact that network technologies play a key role in the formation of fan community and in facilitating the flow of transnational media products, transnational fandom was active even in the pre-Internet age, and are connected by fan conventions, international phone calls and snail mails exchange between fan pen pals (Leonard, 2005). Leonard (2005), in an article titled "Progress against the law: Anime and fandom, with the key to the globalization of culture", gave a detailed account of how the early development of Japanese Anime or even Japanese culture in the US were driven by a large community of persistent fans and illegal distribution of "fansubbed" tapes. He proposed some interesting concepts to understand the phenomenon of bottom-up fans-propelled cultural globalization, which might help us to grasp the significance of Internet fan community in cultural globalization. For example, "Cultural sink" is "a void that forms in a culture as a result of intracultural or transcultural flows", which refers to the American popular demand for Japanese anime generated by inflow of Japanese anime on the grassroots level after the Cold War, and fueled by a lack of sophisticated animated or comic cultural in domestic market (p. 283). A "proselytization commons" designates the grassroots fan community that functions as "spaces where media and ideas could be freely exchanged to advance a directed cause", which in this case refers to the cause of advancing the popularity of Japanese anime in the US.

According to Leonard (2005), fansubbing is essential in attracting a larger population that is not familiar with Japanese language to consume anime and manga. The proselytization commons, which sustains voluntary activities like fansubbing, anime conventions and production of fan zines, offered a world of creativity and difference to those who had access to it. When talking about anime piracy, Leonard (2005) classified into three categories the responses a copyright holder can take towards knowingly infringement: uniformed ignorance is taken up when the right holder has no idea what is going on; deliberate or strategic ignorance, a strategic position taken by the right holder to advance his product a market where licensing is not possible; and dismissive ignorance is adopted when the requestor is considered a lost cause or waste of company money (p. 287-288).

Moving to the digital age, as we have already reviewed, network technologies have endowed consumers with extraordinary capacities of cultural production and distribution. To map out the social ramifications of digital empowerment in the context of cultural globalization, Hu (2005) explored the online fansubbing community of Japanese TV drama based in Taiwan. She found that the network technologies associated with the distribution of TV dramas by Internet fans have broken down the "geographical borders that once restrained cultural imports and exports according to the decisions of media controllers" (p. 182). She believed that the Chinese fans' online practices are less one of straight exploitation and domination and are not concerned with Japan's imperialistic exertion of cultural influence in Asia, rather they are merely "the resistance of online Chinese fans to the hierarchic

stagnation and exclusion dictated by Japan's apathetic overseas distribution system"
(p. 173).

In the context of the United States, Jenkins (2006) used the term "pop cosmopolitanism" to refer to "the ways that the transcultural flows of popular culture inspire new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency" (p. 117). Pop cosmopolitans are people who consciously seek and consume avidly cultural products beyond national boundaries, whose "embrace of global popular media represents an escape route out of the parochialism of her local community" (2006, p. 152). According to Jenkins, the emergence of pop cosmopolitans is a direct result of the interplay between the forces of "corporate convergence" and "grassroots convergence". Whereas "corporate convergence" refers to "the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a smaller and smaller number of multinational conglomerates who thus have a vested interest in insuring the flow of media content across different platforms and national borders", "Grassroots convergence" delineates "the increasingly central roles that digitally empowered consumers play in shaping the production, distribution, and reception of media content" (p. 155).

The top-down push of transnational media conglomerates and the bottom-up pull of digitally empowered consumers unit in their efforts to facilitate the multidirectional flow of transnational media products. He rejected the "cultural empiricism" argument by first, emphasizing the agency of the cultural recipients and how they actively appropriate cultural products to suit their local needs rather than the interests of media producers; and second, citing the multidirectional and low-cost characteristics of

networked computing which, according to him, will "insure that more non-Western goods make it into the West" and enable consumers to trace cultural goods back to their source to learn more about the originating culture (*Ibid*, p.117).

Like J-drama fans in Taiwan and pop cosmopolitans in the US, digitally-empowered Chinese fans of Western TV drama have dodged Western copyright lawyers and Chinese censorship to make available to a national audience on the Internet timely and unlimited flow of Western TV dramas. They are the epitome of what Jenkins (2007) described "the bottom-up energy of media created by amateurs and hobbyists" and the "grassroots creativity" which serves as "an important engine of cultural transformation" (p. 360). However, there exists a school of thoughts that consider such grassroots initiatives "Hollywood's accidental public diplomacy for the US" (Sigismondi, 2009) that help pry open the market of an authoritarian regime through diffusion of cultural values embedded in entertainment. Though it is no denying that fans of Western TV dramas facilitate the flow of transnational culture, to equate such efforts with passive reception of global culture is to deny fans agency in indigenizing Western cultural texts and to turn a blind eye to fans' investment in the community building beyond activities of media consumption. A comparison between VCD piracy and Internet fandom, two informal channels of transnational media flow, might help illuminate the ingenuity of fan culture.

VCD piracy Vis-à-vis transnational fandom

While technology is instrumental in propelling corporate-led media globalization or the state-initiated project of modernization, it is equally conducive to the expansion

of the so-called "illegitimate" means of cultural globalization through the underground business of VCD, CD and DVD piracy. Movie piracy existed even before the invention of the VHS and VCR in 1975, however, it was not until the early 1990s with the invention of VCD and DVD, did movie piracy become "one of the most important underground cultural mediators between the Asian people, who desire modernity, and the United States, which creates, displays, and exports modernity" (Pang, p. 81-82). Even within the Asian region, VCD and DVD piracy has facilitated the flow of media products from regional centre, i.e. Japan to the rest as consumption of so-called "post-trendy Japanese drama" in Asian countries like Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Chinese mainland and Korea etc. has fueled the rise of Japanese popular culture.

The story of J-drama VCD piracy in Asia is worth citing since it teaches the lesson that "technology is neither a sole determinant of change nor merely a neutral instrument through which social needs and protocols are articulated and developed" (Li, 2009, p. 37). Rather, technologies not only shape social, cultural and political development but are in turn shaped by historical, social and cultural specificities. Technological transformation is "a process of social change in which technology is an element that is inseparable from social, economic, cultural and political trends (Castell, 2001, p. 23). As Appadurai argued, transnational cultural flows occur in and through the disjunctions of intertwining forces. Apart from the availability of VCD piracy technologies, Nakano delineated four contextual reasons that fostered the rampant piracy of J-drama. First, the Japanese media industry was content with a

strong and rapidly growing domestic market and thus had no incentive for overseas expansion. Second, Two of the four Asian Tigers, Taiwan and Korea, had official bans on Japanese popular culture for economic and political reasons. Third, distribution in Asian countries of many different languages and practices was labor intensive but not so lucrative. Fourth, the dominant American market was considered more attractive than Asian ones for Japanese distributors.

These imbalances in global distribution of media content were echoed by Wang (2003) who observed that DVD's region-locking technologies prevent movies sold in one region to be played on hardwares in other regions, thus allowing Hollywood studios to continue its established practices of "windowing strategies and sequencing sales to different territories" (p. 2). Piracy, in this light, is sometimes seen as a "challenge to the Western model of media/cultural imperialism" (Hu, 2002). In talking about the relationship between piracy and global capitalism, Pang (2006) argued that "if we consider today's global capitalism an extremely potent mechanism that would remove any obstacles to its capacity to serve the interests of property owners and shareholders, piracy can be seen as both the obstacle and the means to destroy obstacles." (p. 97). In the above accounts of media piracy, the "illegitimate" means of cultural globalization made possible by new technologies are examined beyond the confines of the legal discourses relentlessly advocated by global capitalist interests to be taken as a counterforce to the unequal flow of media content and hegemonic forces of global capitalist expansion.

The case of Western TV drama fan community under study resembles that of

VCD piracy in two aspects. On the one hand, like VCD piracy, a series of local and global conditions apart from the rise of p2p technologies have shaped its emergence and expansion. While the Internet has made it increasingly easier to access foreign media content, the immense popularity of transnational programs in the late 1990s led the Chinese government to impose quotas on foreign dramas and cartoons in 2000 (Nakano, 2002), a point to which we shall return. At the same time, American and other producers of English-speaking TV drama have never made China a major target of export, partly due to the barrier of entry into the Chinese market under censorship and complicated import policies, and partly because of lucrative domestic markets already sustained by advertising income and cable subscription. On the other hand, both VCD technology and p2p networking technologies are what Davis and Yeh termed "programmatic technology". The use-value of a programmatic technology is defined primarily by content, and facilitated secondarily by technology. And programmatic technology differs from reproductive technology because it presents "threats of disruption to existing media economies", "promotes new viewing, exchange and community practices", and "differentiates modes of consumption by tapping into new audience formations and structuring novel experiences" (p. 230-231). In this sense, pirated VCDs can be seen as the predecessor of p2p fan community since it first made available transnational content formerly inaccessible to Chinese audiences.

Despite these interlocking social, cultural and political conditions that make VCD piracy comparable to the practices of the fan community, fan production and

consumption, because of certain innate characteristics of the Internet and p2p technologies, are in nature different from VCD piracy. As we have already reviewed intensively in the last section, the rise of the Internet has not only enabled consumers to participate in the process of content creation, remixing and distribution on a global scale, but also make it easier for people of similar cultural tastes and interests to form communities and to engage in community-based activities. Therefore, by just looking at online fan communities as "grassroutes intermediaries", we risk missing the dynamic network-based culture that fans create inside the community. The diverse social and cultural practices emerged in the non-commercial culture of networked peer production has the potential not only to challenge the way transnational cultural texts are distributed, but more importantly the commercial values embedded in the products and the capitalist practices of social organization. This point can be substantiated by the difference between fan community and VCD piracy since the latter "operates under the industrial market logic in which revenue is the central motivation" (Li, 2009, p. 54). In contrast, online fan practices "come out of a system in which the accessibility and low cost of production frees content, production and distribution from the drive for profit" (*Ibid*). The "gift economy" of online fandom has made it more than an "illegitimate" access to content. It not only offers new strategies and resources for indigenizing global culture based on peer production, but also signifies the emergence of community-based social practices in a network society.

Indigenizing

How does the Internet alter the ways in which global culture is indigenized in online fandom? Baym's (1998) study of the online interpretive community of Usenet soap opera fans, though mainly focused on reception of domestic media, may shed light on the discursive practices of online fandom. Through long-term ethnographic research, she found four distinctive types of practices formed around the discussion of soap opera in the fan community, namely informing, speculating, criticizing and reworking. She argued that by engaging in those practices, fans attempt to enhance their interpretive resources, to create a performance space with the potential status and recognition that entails, and more importantly, to engage in public discussion of normally private socio-emotional issues.

Two points she raised were especially related to our study of TV drama fandom. First, she noted the accumulation of cultural capitals inside the fan community based on "genre competency" and "performative skill". Second, she delineated how fan discussions of soaps open private realms for public discussion, offering "a safe terrain on which people can discuss their own and vicarious experiences with a broader range of people, comparing, refining, and negotiating understandings of their socio-emotional environment" (p. 127). In the current study, fan community members also develop a unique set of social and cultural capitals through their engagement with Western TV drama texts and socialize inside the group under the dictates of the established capitals. This particular cultural practice might inform us of fans' perception and relationship with the Western cultural values carried by the cultural products and the meanings that they assign to their co-production, distribution and

curation activities. At the same time, it would be interesting to examine how their different levels of engagement with those cultural texts help create a space in which they can discuss socio-emotional issues, i.e. how they use the drama as "emotional representatives" to articulate their private concerns and how they render their practices a form of "resistant pleasure" in negotiation and discussion of social issues. This might have broader implications for the social and political functions of online fan interpretive community.

Specifically about Internet-based transnational fandom, Jenkins (2006), through two case studies, "Desi", community of Bollywood films and Bhangra music fans organized by South Asians in diaspora, and "Otaku", Japanese manga fan community in the West, described the ways in which Internet fan communities "open consumers to alternative cultural perspectives and the possibility of feeling 'semiotic solidarity' with others in the world who share their tastes and interests" (p. 156). He also cautions us not to "underestimate the impact of fan grassroots intermediaries" by looking them solely as markets or marketers, for "they also play a central role in shaping the reception of those media products" (p. 162). Examining American Anime fan base from a different angle, Rush (2009) also investigated the formation of "Otaku" fansubbing community in the US and explores the motivating factors that bring fans to the table. He argues that for fans, the community serves as an alternative media and generates empowerment as fans participate in the creation of "a new media form" to suit their own needs.

In a study of American fans of Japanese and Korean drama on the Internet, Li

(2009) focused on the encounters between online fan practices and diasporic "audienceship". She found that compared to the market-driven model of TV drama, circulation and (re)production systems in fan community are "fluid, responsive, and accretive" and "more options and more targeted niche can always be added" (p. 59). By participating in co-production and discussion of TV drama, fans are not only consuming content, but are also creating content, helping to shape and structure a discursive social space around drama viewing (p. 73).She argued that the emergence of audience practices and collaborations within "networked audienceships" are increasingly public, which constitute what she called an "audience public" who inhabit the "collaborative imaginaries" of selection, (re)production, and circulation of texts and images (p.118).

Focusing on the curation activities of priming, reviewing, recapping and tagging, Li contended that fans curatorial and filtering endeavors "not only help determine who watches and what they are watching but are also "integral to shaping how people watch and what they are watching for in dramas" (p. 73). This is achieved by directing viewers' attention to certain characteristics of dramas, like particular types of character dynamics or humor, through community-based discursive practices. These efforts, according to Li, "work to activate and often extend the meanings of primary texts by proposing alternative readings of dramas and legitimizing shared interpretations brought in from different fan experiences" and ultimately "help shape how and why the content is engaged with and valued" (*Ibid*). In talking about the implications of such interpretive and discursive practices for diaspora community and

cultural globalization in general, she commented:

> "What results instead is a mash of hybrids that, rather than signaling a sort of unproblematic fusion, maintains the productive tensions and contentions, creating more amorphous, conflicted, complex systems of identity and community formation that I would suggest even more radically displaces the role of the nation as the organizer of collective sentiment and mediated publics, creating far more complex and entangled cultural encounters between the global and the local, between the fans and diasporic audiences…"(p. 77).

There is a perceived scarcity of research on the impact that the Internet exerts over practices of cultural indigenization. As Hu (2005) argued, "studies of the way in which digital technologies are incorporated into the fan cultures and generate new transnational practices of digital consumption are still ongoing projects, which call for yet more research investment" (p. 143), the current research on online fans of Western TV dramas is one such attempt to delineate the ways in which online fan community indigenize global culture to serve local needs.

Social practices

To say that fan engagement and interaction in fandom are social practices is to go beyond the realm of the textual objects of fandom to explore the socio-psychological motivations of fan activities from the perspectives of individual fans and fan communities. Fandom has always been more than a special relationship between fans and media texts, even in the pre-Internet age when communication among fans are mainly maintained through physical contacts, snail mails, fanzines and telephone calls. For instance, Jenkins (1992) identified an important function of fandom as "an alternative social community" whose "social structures" are "more accepting of individual difference, more accommodating of particular interest, and more democratic and communal in their operation"(p. 213). One of the reasons he

gave for the rise of fan community is the "collapse of traditional forms of cultural solidarity and community within an increasingly atomistic society" (Ibid). Fiske (1992) who coined the term of "unofficial culture capitals" to describe the "shadow economy of fandom" also depicted fandom as a community of distinctive interpersonal codes. The fact that fandom has replaced conventional social hierarchies based on race, gender or class with level of participation in community activities and knowledge for particular texts or genre, is especially empowering for fans.

As we enter the digital age, online interaction and communication become so simple and so embedded into our lives that virtual communities come to play increasingly important roles in human society. Fan communities, some of the most active groups on the Internet, thrive on the social and psychological benefits it offer to participants. Based on the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Jenkins (2007) observed that many young people today "are being drawn towards fan communities not because of their passionate and affectionate relationship to media content but because those communities offer them the best network to get what they have made in front of a larger public" (P. 360).

This social benefit of peer production network can also be found in Hu's (2005) study of Taiwan-based fansubbing groups. Chinese fans of J-drama have formed an online community of self-help, collaboration and free sharing. They are promoters and inventors of an alternative subculture which integrate fan culture with digital culture, and transnational links with the spirit of autonomous production. The fan community as such signifies that "the capitalist production-based modes of capitalism

should be re-examined" (p. 183). The case testifies "that the expansion of space and the yearning for simultaneity/mobility in globalization are not the privileges restricted to capitalist forms of production, but are also turning into the ways for audiences/consumers to empower themselves" (*Ibid*). She concluded that though the fan community does not constitute a clearly organized body with a single stable and collective identity, "they are guerrilla fighters in the network and autonomy politics of geography, time, fan practice and digital technology in the uncertain age of late modernity" (p. 184).

Baym and Burnett (2009) studied Internet-based fans of Swedish independent music in diaspora who help to spread the music's popularity beyond national border. Through interviews with fans, they found that the rewards fans get from participating in online community activities are mostly intangible—forming relationship with artists, helping build audiences for artists and making meaningful contributions to a cultural domain that brings them pleasure. Three stances are taken up by fans towards the industry that they promote, namely positioning themselves as enthusiasts who are not entitled to any economic reward; considering themselves as musicians' peers rather than fans; and viewing their labor as investment towards future career.

In her study of American fans of East Asian TV dramas, Li (2009) conceived "fansubbing" as a "social practice" through which practitioners primarily labor for social and personal gain. Her informants reported their motivations for fansubbing as personal interests in improving Japanese language and technical skills, "a desire to supply better quality content to fans after their frustrating experiences with poor

quality TV rips…", attempts to reciprocate and return favors offered by other fans, an no so "altruistic" purposes to be worshipped by fans, to get people's attention and to feel important (p. 54-55). Those various motivations nevertheless come out of "a sense of social embeddedness, an awareness of and involvement with the very audience that the subtitled videos are being produced for" and a desire to "promote greater diversity in content" (p. 55). According to Li (2009), "the practices and cultural spaces being created by audiences online confront the tensions between structural power and individual agency not only in terms of the power relations between media owners and audiences, but within these active audiences as well" (p. 29). What makes fan practices online distinct from the active audiences being described by Ang and Fiske is their reliance on the digital networked communication technologies which "makes possible the creation of ever more complex and effective(affective) systems of peer-production and distribution that rival and, in many ways surpass, broadcast models" (*Ibid*).

What the above-reviewed literature of online transnational fandom seems to point at is a different vision of the roles fan community plays in cultural globalization, as well as a changing model of theorizing technology-facilitated transnational cultural flow. First, the speed and ease of fan production and distribution in the age of networked technologies make it increasingly difficult for global media corporations to maintain power domination or to police guerrilla transgressions and tactical insurgences of the grassroots. Second, networked communities offer new possibilities of indigenizing transnational cultural texts when fansubbers actively adapting foreign

texts to indigenous tastes, or when audiences eagerly constructing the online discursive space around media texts and shaping the ways texts are received. Third, the social practices of fandom—the effective systems of non-commercial peer production under the networked division of labor, and the affective pleasure fans derive from forming personal relationships and providing mutual support inside the fan community—seem to be more important to fans than the content of media texts or the activities of consumption. However, the social and cultural practices that fans adopt to initiate the flow of transnational culture, to indigenize global culture and to form communities of mutual help, when examined in the specific cultural setting of transitional China, come to have greater implications for its precarious state-society relationships than in liberal democratic countries.

The Global-local nexus—transnational fandom and Chinese state

The specter of globalization has long been haunting the sovereignty of the nation state, especially for the Chinese state which is still in transition from an authoritarian communist regime to a more open modern nation. While some scholars perceived the transnational cultural flow in the age of globalization mainly as a threat to authoritarian power (Ma & Fung, 2002; Ma & Chan, 1996), others emphasized the proactive and transformative strategies that the party-state take to manage and cushion the risk or even to turn risks into new opportunities for renewed control (Fung, 2006; Zhao, 2008; Zheng, 2004). It is beyond the scope of this literature review to linger over the complicated relations between globalization and Chinese nation-state. Suffice to say here that cultural globalization, especially Internet-facilitated transnational

cultural flow, has destabilized the dominant power of the Chinese state in controlling the minds of its people. It is fair to argue that Internet-based fan community of Western TV drama is in constant negotiation with the Chinese government who always "stays vigilant about the domino effect of the liberalizing potential" of global culture and the mobilizing power of online communities. Therefore, to fully grasp the relationship between online fan community of Western TV drama and the Chinese state, we have to understand it as both a grassroots intermediary of transnational cultural flow with new possibilities of indigenization, and a digitally-networked community of active cultural producers.

Transnational cultural flow as a challenge to the state

The authoritarian nature of the Chinese state often complicates the encounter between China and global culture. Hopper (2007) underlined the liberating effect of such encounter and commented:

> "Political elites will find it harder to construct and control national cultures in a globalizing era, a change reinforced by the decline in deference, greater individualism, and more critical media. All of this will ensure that any attempt by a government to shape the national culture will be greeted with a mixture of suspicion, cynicism and derision" (p.132).

He observed that the development of transnational media poses notable challenges to the authoritarian control of Chinese state and the monopoly of Chinese media. As a result, the Chinese society is increasingly being permeated by external cultural forces not only from western culture but also from its neighboring state. This liberating potential of international culture was echoed by Bhabha (1994) who proposed the concept of a "third space" where a fixed and state-bounded national identity and unified Chinese culture is disrupted by the "intervention of the beyond"

that "captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world…" (p. 9).

In another study of transnational media flow and the state, Yang (2002) explored how the media-initiated cosmopolitanism in Shanghai and the emerging transnational subjectivity harbor potentials for liberation from hegemonic nationalism and statism. Quoting Friedland (1994), she argued that "with postmodernity, increasing transnational electronic linkages all presage a delocalized, potentially nomadic future which can offer postmodern challenges to state modernity" (p. 326). She also commented on the gradual formation of "trans-spatial and trans-temporal imaginaries" which "dissolve the fixity and boundedness of historical nationhood and state territorial imperatives". This "imaginaries" arise from "a more complex variegated process of eager accommodation, appropriation, and resistance to foreign cultures" (*Ibid*). Nevertheless, she cautioned against an over-optimistic view of global culture's influence on Chinese society as China is facing the dual-danger of state centralized power and the power of global capitalism. The further development of the latter might lead to another form of hegemony since "liberation is always a prelude to a new insertion into another mode of power" (p. 323).

Focusing on the transborder media flow between Hong Kong and the coastal provinces of China, Ma and Fung (2002) probed into the mechanism of indigenization by Chinese audiences and the possible impacts of Hong Kong popular culture on Chinese society in general. According the authors, the presence of Hong Kong media lures audience away from Chinese media, changes their frame of reference when

evaluation local media, and thus exerts strong pressures on the institutional practices of costal media organization. Though popular media, soap operas and weekend consumer reports are apolitical in content, they carry with them values of individualism, consumerism and skepticism of authority. This "cultural intermediaries", they believed, "have opened a modest, albeit tentative, space outside the power of the state, where audiences can explore their dreams and aspirations" (p. 76). They used the term "satellite modernity" to refer to the process of relaying the "high modernities" of Hong Kong to China's coastal region of relative low modernities: "the lagging domestic socioscape is motivated by the imagined modernity proposed through the transborder mediascape", and "the local consumption of this imagined modernity is a creative hybridization and contextualization of the mediascape and socioscape by active audiences", which have resulted in "the push and pull of the imaginary and the practical (p.77). Through interviews with Chinese audiences, they discovered four modes of indigenization: pragmatic mode, modernized mode, conspicuous mode and vicarious mode, and they contended that this process of indigenized modernity harbors opportunities for expanding collective deliberation, responsibility of mitigating inequality, values of freedom and human rights in the long term (*Ibid*).

However, in face of the challenges presented by global culture, the Chinese government is far from powerless. The government has taken proactive measures to restrain, censor and channel the inflow of transnational culture.[1] In terms of

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[1] A detailed account of government attitudes and policies toward transnational TV drama will be given in the first part of my thesis, so here is only a brief overview to show the state's position on

regulating transnational TV drama, three measures were regularly employed. First, quotas were imposed upon "outside border" cultural materials that can be broadcast on television (Chin, 2003). For instance, according to a regulation issued by the State Administration of Radio, Film and TV (SARFT), foreign drama should not take more than 15 percent of porgamming during the "golden hours" of 6 to 10pm, while foreign cartoons were cut back to less than 20 percent of all cartoon programs broadcast in China. Second, the government has institutionalized a formal and intricate process of TV drama censorship, and only dramas which have been granted a "television drama distribution permit" by SARRF can be aired (*Ibid*). Third, the coupled effects of huge domestic demand for programmes and government's restriction on import have resulted in the rise of co-production between China and "outside border" companies, mainly within the greater China and Asian region. Nevertheless, in order to protect national interest and local media industry, stringent rules and regulations were imposed by the government (Chin, 2003; Fung, 2008). These sanctions are issued to "maintain social order", to "help and promote national dramas to prosper" and to "establish spiritual civilization based on socialism" (Nakano, 2002).

The government's control and management of transnational cultural flow despite of the international pressure to globalize has led some scholars to adopt a more pessimistic view of the emancipating prospect of transnational culture. For sample, Fung (2008) depicted the happy marriage between the aesthetic value of the "global-grafted-local" popular culture, and the market logic of the culture industry,

the issue.

which had given birth to an apolitical and uncritical "pop citizenship", i.e. the Habermasian notion that people identify themselves as consumers in marketplace rather than civic agents in public sphere. He asserted that "even when globalization prevails in China, the Chinese youth are not really inculcated with the deep-seated ideology of global culture. Instead, they are temporarily fed with the superficial and decontextualized fantasy of the global culture (p. 164).

Nonetheless, the rise of online fan community of Western TV drama presents a new challenge to state power in controlling transnational cultural flow and its possible impacts on society. On the one hand, fan-based non-commercial production, distribution and curation of Western TV drama have largely bypassed the official top-down channel of drama distribution to allow unlimited and timely inflow of TV drama from all over the world. More significantly, the online discursive space shaped by fans in collaboration nurtured new practices of interpreting, indigenizing and appropriating media texts, which is to a large extent free from government control and censorship. On the other hand, the networked community of peer production possesses potentials for youth mobilization and collective actions of which the government is constant weary and fearful.

Online fan community and the politics of immaterial labor

With the exponential growth of Internet in China and the surge of user-generated content and grassroots cultural production on blogs, wikis, video sharing and social networking sites, many scholars have started to shift their attention to the impact of the "participatory cultural turn" on Chinese state-citizen relationships (Tai, 2006;

Yang, 2003, 2007; Zhou, 2006; Zhou, 2008). A copycat idol show *Super Girl*, which borrowed the format and voting mechanism of ITV's *pop Idol* (UK) and FOX's *American Idol* (USA) has generated a stormy debate about the democratizing potential of fan culture and the Western values of individualism and anti-authority embedded in the format.

In a discussion of the cultural specificities of *Super Girl*, De Kloet and Van Zonnen (2007) explained why the voting system adopted by the show is of particular relevance in the Chinese context, because "it offers a fundamentally democratic model and potential to subvert an authoritative political regime" (p.332). In a similar vain, Keane, Fung and Moran (2007) underlined the show's quasi-democratic voting mechanism through SMS and how it tapped into the widely-held anti-authority and anti-power attitudes in Chinese society. While the "hedonistic fun-seeking and gamesmanship" promoted by the mass participation show "undermine the solemn models of cultural development once espoused by the Ministry of Culture" and "destabilizes the hegemony of elite cultural forms" (p. 132), the overt expressions of Western-style individualism and the outright celebration of the "ordinary" and "common" against the power and elite have pushed the boundary of state tolerance. This finally triggered criticism from the government and led to restriction of the show by SARFT (Qiang, 2006; Yadley, 2005).

If *Super Girl* exemplifies the democratizing potentials of networked transnational or "global-grafted-local" fandom, Fung's (2009) study of the fan community of Taiwanese pop singer Jay Chou in mainland China demonstrates how

collective fandom can be both hegemonic and empowering. He identified two modes

of cultural production by fan communities: material labor refers to fans' consumption

activities such as purchasing idol's music albums or movies starred by the idol,

attending the idol's concert despite the high price of tickets, and consuming

commercial products endorsed by the idol etc.; immaterial labor is generated when

fans engage in activities that produce "cultural forms of commodity" (p.291), e.g.

forming communities in both the cyberspace and offline world with other fans,

developing overt individualism and asserting desires and emotions, and mobilizing

mass activities in support of their idol. He argued that while fan's material labor suits

the state's interest as it contributes to the development of the state-led consumer

society and divert youth's attention away from "critical discourse of civic engagement

that could undermine state legitimacy" (p. 290), their immaterial labor of "bottom-up

populism" constitutes "a civic space to challenge the authoritarian rule" and "turns out

to be powerful force accelerating the pace of social reform" (p. 300). Since the 1989

Tiananmen event, the Chinese communist party has long been fearful of youth

organizations and mobilization of any form. The reason that the state takes a back seat

to fan club has something to do with its ambivalent position on popular culture. As

Fung explains:

> "On the one hand, continuing to ply rebellious youngsters with idolatry and the
> apolitical popular culture could maintain their unchallenged status. Thus, even though it
> is illegal to have youth associations crystallizing around fan clubs of fan society, it is an
> open secret that the state allows the implicit existence of these clubs without formal
> registration, and refrains from making any public denunciation toward their activities. In
> the eyes of the youth and fans, fan clubs represent a dual avenue for fulfilling their
> desires of consumption and enhancing psychological ties with the artists" (p. 160-161).

Apart from the state's stance of "deliberate ignorance", online fan community

thrives even under state's periodical censorship and shut-down, largely due to the anonymity, flexibility and resilience of online community that can dismiss and rebound quickly. This "politics of immaterial labor" is echoed in Zhong and Wang's (2006, as cited by Keane et al., 2007) analysis of fan mobilization and identification in the *super girl* contest. The fans' self-identification with tasty food[2], which connotes the meaning of "spiritual food" in Chinese culture rather than passive masses, is evidence of both agency and audience segmentation (p. 139).

The seemingly irresolvable tensions between the Internet's decentralizing power and the Chinese state's authoritarian control have sparked a large amount of research in recent years on the democratizing potentials of the Internet in China. However, the majority of scholarly attention has been fixed around the government's building of technological infrastructure, issuing and operation of regulation and censorship, or the empowering opportunities for political deliberation, and seldom do the cultural dimensions of technological influences enter the discussion (Meng, 2009). As we have discussed in the above section, digitally-empowered grassroots fandom has challenged state's domination in controlling the flow and indigenization of transnational culture. While at the same time the immaterial labor of fan communities harbor potentials beyond the realm of popular culture and consumption to a new model of social organization and collective action. So by focusing on the cultural aspect of the diffusion and use of the network communication technologies in China, the current study attempts to bridge the gap in existing literature.

[2] names given by fans to their fan communities took up the form of food names like corn or vermicelli

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

So far, I have mapped out the theoretical frames of the current research. First, digital technologies have enhanced the participation of individual fans in the process of cultural production. Second, the networking power of technologies has aggregated the power of individual fans by linking them together in pursuit of collective interests and goals. Third, networked digital technologies have provided the material means for fans to form a non-commercial and non-proprietary community of peer-production that is essentially different from the capitalist model of social organization. As a result, new cultural and social practices emerge in the Internet-based transnational fandom that present challenges to the cultural domination of both transnational media corporations and the Chinese state.

On the one hand, fans have disputed the argument of cultural imperialism by subverting the conventional and commercial channel of transnational cultural flow with a non-commercial community of volunteer-based peer production. New practices of digital production have provided fans with new means of indigenizing and localizing global culture to articulate their needs and to serve their interests. On the other hand, the unlimited and uncensored inflow of global culture stands as an alternative to the official culture sanctioned and "purified" by the state. Fan community's potential in mobilizing youth into collective actions poses challenge to state monopoly. As an embodiment of the technology-facilitated social and cultural changes, the Chinese online fandom of Western TV drama has entered into ongoing negotiations with the authoritarian power of the state and the domination of global

capitalist forces.

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework
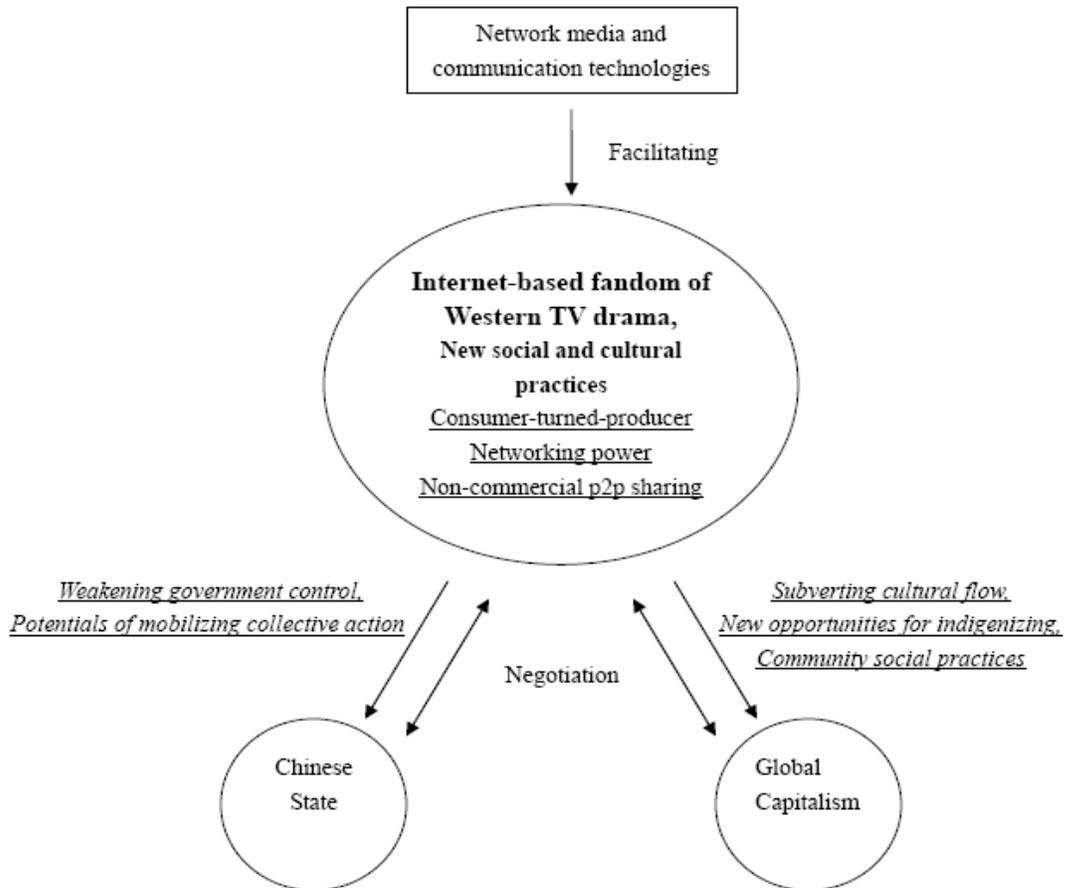
However, "domination is not total, and resistance is never complete" (Wang, 2001). The set of Internet-based cultural and social practices formed in the daily interactions of fans help them maneuver through the power maze and to negotiate a cultural space in-between the Chinese state and global capitalist market. In order to explore the intricate cultural politics of digital fan practices, I want to ask:

RQ1: How do fans of Western TV drama negotiate a cultural space in-between global

capitalism and the Chinese state by developing a set of community-based

cultural and social practices on the Internet in their co/production, distribution,

and curation/consumption of western TV drama?

This question is designed to connect the macro issues of new technologies, globalization and state policy with the micro practices of online fandom. First, I will contextualize my empirical analysis in a sociopolitical context by exploring:

a. *How do the contextual factors, such as the rise of networked communication technologies, Western transnational media conglomerates' ambivalent attitudes towards the Chinese market, and Chinese government's regulatory policies on transnational cultural flow, shape the formation and expansion of the fan community?*

Then I will move on to analyze the specific practices in fan community and the motivations behind:

b. *How do members of online fan community gradually develop a set of new cultural and social practices through their co/production, distribution, and curation/consumption of western TV drama? What are the unique elements or characteristics of these emerging social and cultural practices? What are the individual and collective motivations behind those cultural and social practices?*

To link the macro analysis and micro observation, I ask:

c. *How do the emerging online practices developed in transnational fandom destabilize the established power structures that determine fans' relationships with both global capitalism and the Chinese state?*

Finally, as we already discussed in the literature review, I want to see how the case of Internet fandom inform us of the challenges technologies present to our current

understandings of cultural globalization and sate-society relationships in China:

RQ2: How do the emerging networked fan practices inform us of the challenges new

media and communication technologies present to our current understandings of

cultural globalization and state-society relationships in China?

Methods and Time Schedule

The main methodology that I will employ in this study is ethnography, both

online and offline, complemented by a variety of other methods like document studies,

in-depth interviews and content/textual analysis. In response to the doubts that people

have about studies trying to connect local audience consumption with global

hegemonic power, Murphy and Kraidy (2003) argued that ethnography is key in

navigating through the maze of global-local encounters.

> "An ethnographic approach to international communication theory, although laden
> with necessary detours and hazardous initiatives, is a heuristic trail toward a better
> understanding of the dynamics between global forces and local specificities.
> Ethnographic inquiry, with its basis in local practices and the performative features of
> culture, offers both an epistemological opportunity and the empirical material to bridge
> the gap between meaning and structure without losing sight of the complexity, context,
> and power imbalances inherent in cultural consumption. In fact, this complexity and these
> imbalances are central to ethnography's purpose and form as they are ethnographically
> registerable (Murphy & Kraidy, 2003).

To accomplish this, fieldwork needs to be constantly informed by the dialogues

between "biography and history" and between "manifestations of local life and

hegemonic culture" (p. 318). Linking local practices with global structures does not

mean that we have to "rely on 'canned' visions of what the world historical system is

like", but rather it denotes that we should take "the appropriately ethnographic view

that macro system of analysis should be radically rethought from the ground up

(Marcus, as cited in Murphy and Kraidy, 2003, p. 318). However, it is necessary that

we get out of our comfort zone of a micro-focus on audience practices and "risk making some broader claims about the relationship between ideology and experience' (*Ibid*). The current study straddles the global and the local, as well as the mediated and the offline world as it attempts to use ethnography as a methodological intermediary to link practices observed in online Chinese fan communities with external forces of technology, state power and global transformation.

I will start with offline fieldwork, gathering information about the external structural forces shaping the formation and expansion of the online fandom by studying available news report, government documents, trade journals, industry white papers etc. This is complemented by in-depth interviews with IT journalists, government regulators, and if possible representatives of global TV networks. At the same time, as I have been doing in the past three months, I will continue with my participant observation in online fan sites, collecting data for content/discourse analysis, and when time is ripe, I will conduct in-depth interviews with key figures in the fan community.

The focus of online fieldwork will be divided among the three levels of fan engagement that I introduced in the literature review—(co)production, distribution and curation. (Co)production and distribution mostly happen inside "fansubbing" communities that involves volunteer-based activities like "video and transcript acquisition", "synching" or "re-synching", "translation" and "adaptation", "revision" and "publishing" (Barra, 2009). To study (co)production and distribution, I will make two major Chinese Fansubbing sites, 100fr and YYets my site for participant

observation and later on in-depth interviews. To study curation activities, including user-generated or user-translated comments, reviews, blog entries, spoilers, previews, recaps etc., I will analyze a broad range of websites, for instance, interest-based social networking site Douban.com, the "curation" section of fansubbing sites, comments left on p2p platforms Emule.com and video sharing sites like Tudou.com and Yuku. com. I might also run a survey on each site to get a sense of the demographics, level of engagement and behavioral patterns of Internet fans.

Figure 2 Major Fansubbing Site YYets

Figure 3 Major Curation Site Douban

Figure 4 Major p2p Distribution Platform Emule

I will specifically focus on one case study—the shutting down of major peer-to-peer downloading sites and fansubbing sites by SARFT at the end of 2009 in its effort to curb the uncontrolled growth of illegal downloading in China (Song, 2009). Many p2p and fansubbing sites were closed down by its maintainers or blocked by government regulators during the height of the campaign. However, the majority of the sites gradually recovered from the debacle and is back into operation by now in May 2010. I want to see how online fandom comes to recover so quickly from the shutdown, and what strategies or tactics they used to negotiate a space at real moments of power confrontation.

Figure 5 Pictures Made by Fans In Condolence of Emule When It Was Temporarily Shut Down

I plan to continue with my participant observation and collection of data on the Internet for content and textual analysis during the summer of 2010. While at the same time, I will conduct offline fieldwork, collecting documents for analysis and interviewing industry and governmental informants in major cities in mainland China and Hong Kong. I will start interviewing fans I befriended during participant observation in the fall of 2010 while analyzing documents and data collected. If things go as planed, I will start writing up my thesis from January 2011 and hopefully finish the thesis before the summer of 2011.

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