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SINGAPORE

**THE VALUE AND POTENTIAL OF FAN FILMS IN RELATION TO
OFFICIAL PRODUCTIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
PARTICIPATORY CULTURE**

ZENG QIUYUE

WEE KIM WEE SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

2024

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WEE KIM WEE SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in partial
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Communication Studies

2024

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, is free of plagiarised materials, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

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I have reviewed the content and presentation style of this thesis and declare it is free of plagiarism and of sufficient grammatical clarity to be examined. To the best of my knowledge, the research and writing are those of the candidate except as acknowledged in the Author Attribution Statement. I confirm that the investigations were conducted in accord with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

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Associate Professor Ian Dixon

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Abstract

New media has greatly expanded convergence culture and transformed participatory culture. Although technology development facilitates more people's cultural participation, cultural consumers still face restrictions due to policies imposed by professional media organizations. For example, the Chinese film and television industry's policies towards fan films still waver between acceptance and rejection. Nevertheless, the emergence of an official TV series in 2023, *An Ancient Love Song*, which was adapted from a fan film of the same name, presents the feasibility for fan filmmakers and official film-television producers to cooperate in production. Through participatory observation of fan films and in-depth interviews with fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers, this study suggests why people create fan films and how fan movies influence their audience. By virtue of the discovery of fan filmmaking and fan film consumption, this article details research on the text poaching practices under participatory culture. Based on the findings about the value and potential of fan films, this thesis also tries to offer some insights into the collaboration between derivative movie creators and official film-television producers. However, as convergence culture evolves and participatory culture grows, the study of fan films needs to consider more stakeholders and technological advancements.

Keywords: fan films; filmmaking; participatory culture; convergence culture

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On April 9, 2021, over 70 Chinese film and television organizations, including industry associations, production companies, and video platforms, made a public commitment to combat copyright infringement (Zhu, 2021a). This proclamation later gained more traction as film and television industry practitioners joined the cause, with support from the country's copyright administration (Zhu, 2021b). The statement emphasized the need to curb the proliferation of unauthorized videos on the Internet, and implied that any content derived from editing, sharing, compiling, or expediting original film and television works would face more strict surveillance by the copyright owners.

The issue at hand pertains to the creation of fan films. It is necessary for those responsible for overseeing video platforms and operating video media accounts to delete any videos that infringe on copyright laws and to prevent future uploads of such content. Following this declaration, fan film creators who previously released videos using footage from original films and television works responded to the voices of industry authorities and professionals in different ways. Some chose to continue the foregoing video style but obtained permission from the copyright holders beforehand. Others remained on the sidelines and stopped updating their videos, while some withdrew from creating such a style of video due to concerns that this advocacy was impeding their creative freedom. This initiative helped to increase awareness of copyright laws and encourage legitimate creation. However, it also limited the availability of materials for secondary creation and increased the cost of producing derivative content.

After almost nine months, the developers of re-creation videos encountered a change in

circumstances. On January 27, 2022, *Tencent TV*, a major distributor of films and TV shows in China, organized a New Year's event. This activity invited users of *Bilibili*, a video-sharing website that began with ACG (animation, comics, and games)-related content, to create new content using designated TV series materials. *Tencent TV* pledged to provide generous rewards for high-quality submissions and safeguard all entries under official copyright during and after the event (Tencent TV, 2022). The partnership between *Tencent TV* and *Bilibili* set the first example for the subsequent four large-scale secondary creation activities of film and television copyright parties and video platforms (Li, 2023). Compared with the April 2021 prohibition, the 2022 cooperation adopted a more moderate approach. Nonetheless, the emphasis remained on secondary creation videos' promotional benefit rather than their other possibilities such as original plot ideas, innovative storyboard designs, and flawless soundtrack dubbing. It was plausible that film and television copyright owners and video platform regulators viewed fan film generators as opinion leaders in publicity, instead of identifying the ingenuity of fan movie creators in the film-television production process. Alternatively, copyright holders recognized the artistic talent of fan film authors but had yet to devise a normative procedure to integrate their aptitude into official production practices (Lerner, 2018).

What broke the above situation was *Bilibili's* TV series *An Ancient Love Song* premiered on June 23, 2023. The TV series garnered high acclaim from viewers, despite being an adaptation of a fan film of the same name (Zeng, 2023). After the broadcast of the TV series *An Ancient Love Song*, the fan film *An Ancient Love Song* was deleted by its author, Three Thousand Fish, from her *Bilibili* account to avoid potential copyright issues. However, audiences can still find the fan film *An Ancient Love Song* online, which is re-uploaded by

Three Thousand Fish's dedicated fans from other *Bilibili* accounts. The brief biography published by Three Thousand Fish further illustrates the influence of the fan film *An Ancient Love Song*. Three Thousand Fish, a fan film creator, turned inspiration into a complete story and selected appropriate characters and corresponding film and television materials. She then edited these video fragments into a logically coherent film, dubbed it in accordance with the plot, and finally posted the whole work on *Bilibili*. This fan film quickly spread, receiving rave reviews, and caught the attention of Cai Yuchao, a professional film and television producer. He understood its uniqueness and invited the author to work together, resulting in the creation of the TV series *An Ancient Love Song* - a more refined and marketable product (Three Thousand Fish, 2023).

The above transformation from the self-entertainment of an amateur fan film generator to the official production of a professional film and television company demonstrates the artistic ability of fan filmmakers and the possibility of teamwork between fans and industry insiders. Although the triumph of the TV series *An Ancient Love Song* underscores this prospect, it cannot guarantee that all official producers will embrace the creative originality of fan works or that the film and television industry has established the mechanism of such collaborations.

The objective of this thesis is to delve into the value of fan films and suggest some thoughts for negotiation between producers of fan films and official film and television. In particular, this thesis plans to address three research questions:

1. How do producers of fan films reinterpret official film and television narratives through their own experience and media consumption?

2. How do audiences become interested in and receptive to official film and television

works through fan film consumption?

3. How do producers of fan films cooperate with official film and television to attract and retain audiences' attention?

To achieve the objective of this thesis, I will utilize the concept of convergence culture to elucidate the societal milieu of fan films and the theoretical framework of participatory culture to clarify the generating logic of fan films (Jenkins, 2006, 2013). In virtue of participant observation and in-depth interviews, I will analyze the cultural connotations and developmental trajectories of fan films. Furthermore, this research will contribute to the academic arena by expanding the exploration of participatory culture subcategories, providing another concrete research perspective for participatory culture, and bridging the knowledge divide between the grassroots and corporate entities within participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). Specifically, this study aims to enhance the research of fan films within the fan video category, investigate how fan films achieve the fusion of creation and promotion, and propose a scheme to reach the symbiotic relationship between amateurs and professionals. Regarding practical applications, this article will aid fan films in gaining more recognition from official producers and facilitate more opportunities for friendly communication, such as regular channels for information and ideas sharing, collaborative marketing strategies, and cross-media narratives with co-authors (Stein & Busse, 2009).

This paper is divided into six chapters. The main contents of each chapter in this paper are as follows: Chapter 1 serves as a fundamental introduction to the research's origin and background. Chapter 2 primarily examines previous research about convergence culture and participatory culture. This chapter also analyzes the evolution from fan fiction to fan videos

and fan films and raises the research questions of this paper. Chapter 3 introduces the research methods used in this study, including participatory observation and in-depth interviews, along with interview outlines and lists of interviewees. Chapter 4 aims to address the research questions and presents the research findings of fan filmmakers, fan filmgoers, and potential collaboration mechanisms between fan films and official productions. Chapter 5 discusses the shortcomings of this research and suggests directions for future research development. Chapter 6 provides a summary of all the preceding chapters and the contents of this paper.

Chapter 2

Literature review

The existing research on fan films is incomplete as it has predominantly concentrated on studying the distinctive artistic manner of fan films while ignoring their potential integration into official film and television productions (see Phillips, 2012). Additionally, some scholars have erroneously confused fan films with fan videos, failing to acknowledge fan films' exceptional creativity and innovation compared to ordinary fan videos. Moreover, these investigators have considered fan films as unpaid digital labor and accentuated their advertising potential instead of understanding the production process and atmosphere of fan films (see Russo, 2009). In short, current research rarely contextualizes fan films within the participatory culture and the convergence culture.

This literature review aims to delve into the roots and evolution of fan films. The investigation will commence with an examination of convergence culture as the primary media background for fan creations, followed by an analysis of participatory culture as the interactive platform that fosters the production and dissemination of fan works. The next focus will be on fan fiction, which was the original form of participatory culture and the earliest type of fan creation. Fan videos emerged as a result of convergence culture and were based on fan fiction. Within fan videos, fan films preserve the fundamental characteristics of fan fiction and can be thought of as video fan fiction. Examining the history from fan fiction to fan videos and fan films also exposes some conflicts that have consistently arisen in the evolution of fan creation. These contradictions and dilemmas of fan creation often occur in participatory culture as convergence culture develops, necessitating a comprehensive study of fan films.

Convergence Culture: The Interaction of Two Seemingly Opposite Sides

Convergence occurs when the media landscape changes. Henry Jenkins (2006), who created the concept of convergence culture, pointed out that as technology evolves, new and old forms of media collide, and the traditional relationship between producers and consumers has transformed in terms of culture and commerce. *Web 2.0*, the abbreviation of the second generation of network technology, is the media background within which convergence culture was proposed (Gan et al., 2023). *Web 2.0* can support users to realize the change from information receivers to information senders, breaking the monopoly situation of portal websites such as Yahoo, and ushering in media platforms such as Facebook where everyone can produce and distribute content (Nath & Iswary, 2015). The ubiquitous user-generated content facilitated by *Web 2.0* substantiates the assumption of arbitrary identity exchange from consumers to producers. These contents also function as attempts by individuals or small groups to challenge the dominant cultural discourse, such as narrative frameworks and methods of interpretation, which are elements of the discursive power that media conglomerates once controlled and used to establish their own cultural hegemony (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). For example, fan film producers and game players who are passionate about *Star Wars* use their own ways to rewrite the original story for suiting their personal preferences (Jenkins, 2006).

Meanwhile, media corporations increasingly consider consumers' opinions during the production process (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). From a political economy perspective, media companies harness grassroots engagement like audience comments and user-generated content, which contains the organized thinking of the masses or the "collective intelligence", to drive

market growth and boost profits (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008, p. 6). A case in point is *American Idol*. This television program features audience participation in selecting future stars from a pool of gifted yet unheralded individuals. Its goal is to captivate viewers, eliciting an emotional response that attracts advertisers and generates revenue through product placements. The promotion approach of *American Idol* is a typical manifestation of “affective economics”, a new marketing theory in which media companies leverage consumers’ emotional labor to influence the decision-making about purchasing cultural products, with the ultimate goal of increasing sales and achieving a higher return on investment (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 61-64). Therefore, convergence can be read structurally as a double helix process with a user-driven bottom-up mechanism and a company-driven top-down production mechanism (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008).

Convergence culture refers to such a situation, that is, in the context of the collision of new and old media, the relationship between media production and consumption is changing, and the two seemingly contradictory ends interact through the progress of media (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). In other words, all cultural products generated and circulated under convergence culture are the crystallization of joint creation by media amateurs and professionals and result from synergetic promotion by grassroots entities and enterprises in various media channels (Jenkins, 2006).

However, not everyone fully accepts the elaboration of convergence culture. Hay and Couldry (2011) raised their questions about the excessive use of the buzzwords *convergence culture* and awaited a clearer articulation of its concept. Besides, they teased out the historical linkage between cultural studies and media studies and wondered how convergence culture is

logically related to this connection. Based on this, these two scholars called for clarification about whether convergence culture is a series of subsidiary questions for media studies and/or a new outlet of cultural studies.

In response to Hay and Couldry's critique and inquiry, Jenkins (2014) issued an essay to provide a shared foundation of meaning for subsequent debates among relevant theoretical contributors. In this essay, he expounded on the implications of convergence culture through participatory culture and employed political economy to bridge the relationship of convergence culture with cultural studies and media studies. Cultural studies need to embrace possibilities with an open mind rather than use a discourse of inevitability to determine the direction of research (Jenkins, 2014). For example, Jenkins (2014) urged scholars to be more concerned about the continuous strong influence of institutional power structures in the new technological environment rather than trust in technological determinism, suggesting that new media must bring about cultural democratization, or consumer capitalism, claiming that any kind of civilian resistance can be documented and brought to public attention through various forms of media use.

While the discussion of convergence culture continues to advance, the media environment has also undergone more profound changes. Compared with *Web 2.0*, which is an interactive network configuration allowing users not only to consume but also to produce content online, *Web 3.0* is the abbreviation of the third generation of network technology and supports personalized customization (Nath & Iswary, 2015). The decentralized architecture of *Web 3.0*, blurring the difference between professionals, semi-professionals, and amateurs, makes an online environment a system suitable for collaboration or cooperative labor (Fuchs et al., 2010;

Nath & Iswary, 2015). *Web 3.0* has come to dominate the media sphere, and user-generated content has accumulated more and more followers, which increasingly challenges the authority of professional media organizations (Gan et al., 2023).

Confronting such a variation, convergence culture needs more in-depth research, which echoes the requirement to revisit the definition of convergence culture put forward by Jenkins (2018). He indicated that we have entered a more central phase of media change, where technology has disrupted platform infrastructure, revolutionary media experiments have appeared, civic organizations are gaining strength, communities are becoming more engaged online, and social media and video streaming are more significantly affecting our habits and mindsets. These arguments of Jenkins are more evident when considering how fan films and their authors are included into official film and television production processes, such as the creation of the TV series *An Ancient Love Song*. In this way, the intervention of fan movies and their originators into commercial media breaks the traditional film and television production structure dominated by authority and brings innovation to official media product creation. Fan films and their producers are mainly developed in participatory culture. Therefore, to understand the changes in convergence culture caused by technological progress, it will be necessary to explore participatory culture.

Participatory Culture: The Integration of Transmitters and Receivers

Participatory Culture, a popular phrase coined by Jenkins, is defined as a culture where common people can both create and share their own works, and the threshold for delivering creative ideas and getting involved in the community is comparatively low (Jenkins, 2013;

Fuchs, 2014). In theoretical construction, participatory culture is closely connected to Michel de Certeau's theory of the practice of everyday life. According to De Certeau (1984), despite being oppressed by the dominant powers, people's lives do not become monotonous. They find subtle ways to oppose the imposed societal structure and demonstrate resistance, maintaining a state of being under the repressive discipline while still being able to escape it (De Certeau, 1984; Lian, 2003). In the process of expressing resistance, people have developed various tactics, such as *poaching*, *bricolage*, *cross-cuts*, *fragments*, and so on (De Certeau, 1984; Wu, 2009). In the capitalized cultural industry, consumers employ these tactics to modify, restructure, and combine the products manufactured by the dominant powers, thereby achieving their own needs and desires and creating their own space (De Certeau, 1984; Lian, 2003; Wu, 2009). Participatory culture, as a specific culture field, illustrates the practices of consumers' resistance to cultural hegemony. However, participatory culture serves other important purposes beyond resisting cultural hegemony. For example, in participatory culture, people can always meet like-minded enthusiasts and win endorsement from others even for very niche hobbies, and sometimes there is unexpectedly a transfer of knowledge from the experts to the beginners (Jenkins, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). Such a cultural atmosphere consolidates participants' willingness to interact with each other, thus forming a strong sense of identity and belonging so that everyone believes that he/she is an indispensable contributor to collaborative wisdom (Jenkins, 2009a). In simple terms, memberships, communications, united problem-solving, and information flows are four aspects of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009a).

When it comes to the representative application of participatory culture, it is related to fan culture. The development of media technology in convergence culture has enabled the

collaboration between enterprises and ordinary people, allowing fan culture with grassroots attributes to gradually enter the mainstream (Busse, 2015). In contrast to the subtle resistance to cultural hegemony made by most marginalized groups in de Certeau's theory (De Certeau, 1984), fan groups are more visible, and their struggle for their own demands in fan culture is sometimes easy to detect. De Certeau's theory partly inherited the ideas of the Situationist International (Wu, 2009), so the study of fan culture should be traced back to the theory and practices of the Situationist International in history to seek new inspiration and breakthroughs. The Situationist International refers to the European avant-garde group founded in 1957 and disbanded in 1972, whose development went through an artistic period and a political period (Lepper, 2012). The Situationist International was revolutionary in that it retained the central Marxist and the Frankfurt School concepts and explicitly opposed capitalist cultural production (Elias, 2010). It developed practical strategies, such as *dérive* (drifting in a certain space) and *détournement* (rearranging pre-existing materials in a new ensemble), to subvert the modern consumer society constructed by capitalist cultural production, thereby creating new living and working spaces with human subjectivity (Barnard, 2004). The pursuits of the Situationist International in space have some significant correspondences with cyberspace constructed by *Web 2.0* (Elias, 2010). *Web 2.0* is the media background within which convergence culture was put forward (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008; Gan et al., 2023), and the popularity of convergence culture made fan culture receive more attention (Busse, 2015). Therefore, the practices in fan culture may reflect some propositions of the Situationist International. As media technology has evolved to *Web 3.0* and the further stage, the practices in fan culture have also changed.

One of the practices in fan culture that has been heavily influenced by the advancement

of media technology is fan creation. Fan creation is a kind of practice involving the interaction and integration of various media, which is known by more people in academia and industry after the change in the media environment (Liao, 2021). From the operational dimension, fans use available media and materials to reshape their new understanding of original works based on previous media consumption and personal experience (Jenkins, 2009a). The forms of fan creation include but are not limited to fiction, paintings, and videos (Jenkins, 2009a). The identities of fans have concurrently reversed from readers to authors, appreciators to painters, and audiences to producers through their derivative creation, which is the transition from receivers to transmitters in the course of classic communication (Jenkins, 2009a). During the creation process, these devotees demonstrate certain cultural competencies crucial for engaging in participatory culture, encompassing both individual production techniques and qualities necessary for teamwork, such as *appropriation*, *transmedia navigation*, *networking*, *negotiation* (Jenkins, 2009a). These media literacy skills logically integrate the tactics of people's resistance in everyday life in de Certeau's theory with the strategies of the Situationist International to subvert cultural hegemony (Jenkins, 2009a; Wu, 2009).

Taking appropriation as a pivot, it is beneficial to figure out more profoundly how the fan creation culture accomplishes the identity transformation of fans and the integration of their multiple identities. Appropriation, in essence, is the *poaching* characterized by Michel de Certeau (1984). Poaching is a proactive reading behavior in that readers purposely grab snippets or entireties of copyrighted literary works to satisfy their emotional and practical requirements. Fan fiction is the result of poaching existing texts to fulfill fans' desires. The metaphor of poaching implies a continuing struggle between readers and authors over the

ownership of the text and the command of the interpretation of meanings. Before poaching, the consumption of cultural goods was a scriptural economy, where official text-makers and institutionally-approved interpreters occupied a dominant position (Jenkins, 2013). Such an economy would limit the diversity of unofficial voices for stipulating the construction and distribution of meanings. This control of discourse is a sign of the cultural hegemony and class power of rulers in the media ecology. By contrast, readers who poach original canons, namely textual poachers, not only undermine the dominance of cultural authorities, but also create a new financial formation within the readership. This new fiscal type is named the “gift economy”, which treats borrowed cultural products with the personal attributes of derivative creation authors as gifts (Hellekson, 2009, p. 144). These function as reciprocal exchanges among readers to promote social relationships and information sharing (Hellekson, 2009). This reciprocity, with the addition of individual labor and devoid of commercial interests, is often chosen freely and equally to fulfill the needs of readers or fans for pleasure instead of monetary gains.

In the film and television area, poaching often involves fans saving their favorite video clips (early fans used VCRs to record TV episodes, and later fans can download videos directly from the Internet) and mixing these video materials to tell a new story according to their own relishes or reinterpret original stories of TV series from other unique perspectives. For instance, the fan video “Can’t Keep from Loving You” selected partial content of *Alien Nation* and reorganized Sykes’ plots to create a different narrative frame (Jenkins, 2013, p. 239). In fact, fan video creation embodies the audience’s enhanced sense of ownership and independent thinking of text interpretation, which indicates that proactive viewers no longer fully accept the

views of professional producers and specialized critics in film and television (Jenkins, 2013). *Television Without Pity*, a website where television viewers can publish their comments, indeed provided a democratic space for amateur criticism to some extent and challenged traditional professional interpretive supremacy. Although *Television Without Pity* gradually moved away from its original purpose and eventually terminated its operation due to the intervention of a commercial sponsor, the website was also a useful foray into the fight against cultural authorities (Falero, 2016). Fans spread multiple voices through various forms of creation and expression to compete for the discourse power in the field of cultural production and media consumption so that they can break and reshape the unequal power hierarchy.

Technological upgrading has allowed media modality to evolve from TV to the Internet, and now people are in *Web 3.0* where they can build a media world centered around themselves, replacing the hierarchy originally established by professionals and media organizations (Gan et al., 2023). *Web 3.0* also widens the growing space and the training grounds for participatory culture. The original video-sharing website *YouTube*, also seen as a social media platform, makes participatory culture flourish because the website allows its users to gather, cooperate, create, and distribute their self-made media content (Chau, 2010), which is also a concrete symbol of the decentralization of *Web 3.0*. Furthermore, society is even marching toward *Web 4.0*, the abbreviation of the fourth generation of network technology, although still in the process of building its technological infrastructure (Nath & Iswary, 2015). *Web 4.0* will enable computers to analyze problems and propose solutions independently from human beings, reaching a symbiosis between humans and machines (Nath & Iswary, 2015). *Web 4.0* signifies that machines assisted by artificial intelligence will also be participants in content production

and distribution (Nath & Iswary, 2015).

The democratic nature of participatory culture is evident in the accessibility enabled by technology, as well as in gender representation. The male-dominated cultural hegemony has influenced the participation of women in cultural production (Przybylowicz, 1989). In response, some women in participatory culture have created derivative works, such as fan fiction, to voice their dissatisfaction with content censorship or prevailing film-television narratives (Scodari, 2003; Zheng, 2023). Although these female fans have made compromises and deviations in their resistance, they have offered insights into strategies for challenging the predominance of men in cultural production through space creation and rhetorical expression (Scodari, 2003; Zheng, 2023). Technological advancements have reduced gender inequality in technology availability (Bhandari, 2019). Female fans in participatory culture can now directly create fan videos to subvert the male-dominated film-television stories and themes, reshape characters, and redefine the relationship between characters and audiences (Coppa, 2017). The development of media technology in convergence culture also provides opportunities for ordinary people and enterprises to cooperate and share benefits (Busse, 2015). However, when grassroots creators and businesses share the benefits of their collaboration, women who help grow companies through participatory culture often are underpaid or unpaid for their work (Busse, 2015). Participatory culture facilitates people to express their resistance in different ways but encounters new issues when dealing with the changes brought by convergence culture.

Although participatory culture has democratic characteristics, it provides a channel for industrial capitalists to transform consumers into cheap outsourced labor to produce surplus value, which causes exploitation. After critically thinking about Jenkins' observations, Fuchs

(2014) pointed out an omission in Jenkins' work. Although Jenkins detailed the constitutive elements and organizational logic of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2013), and listed the media literacy and skills required for participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009a), he ignored the inequality of ownership between the grassroots entities and corporates. Additionally, Fuchs (2014) observed that Jenkins treated class and capitalism as an immutable and established existence. In reality, users of content-sharing websites are complete outsiders in economic decision-making, and their right to resist oppressive structures is also broad and unfocused (Fuchs, 2014). On the problem of grassroots voices not being heard, Jenkins' answer was equivocal, hoping for corporate responsibility and greater diversity of opinion (Jenkins, 2008, as cited in Fuchs, 2014).

In the face of technological leaps and the critical analysis of participatory culture from the perspective of political economy, Jenkins et al. (2016) conducted a series of dialogues based on the background of their respective projects. These conversations revolved around youth practices, participatory culture, and digital and networked technology, designed to discover what has changed and what remains stable in an ever-changing media ecosystem and in the ever-shifting debate over digital media policy. Fan fiction (to be clearly defined in the next section) is a form of participatory culture developed by youth groups using digital media in a networked community environment (Aragon & Davis, 2019). With the expansion of media practices fueled by technology innovations, fan fiction, which serves as the earliest derivative works based on the source texts in media fandom (Coppa, 2006; Brown, 2022), has met numerous disputes between copyright protection and creative freedom in the execution of regulations (Lipton, 2014). At the same time, however, fan fiction has received increasing

recognition from academia and industry (Yeloshyna, 2021). Under such conditions, fan fiction becomes a window into the dynamics and axioms of convergence culture and participatory culture. As a literary genre gaining gradual familiarity among the public through the rise of *Web 2.0*, and as one of the first attempts at textual poaching, fan fiction has its bumpy ride. Comprehending the situation of fan fiction will contribute to addressing similar obstacles faced by fan films, which are essentially video fan fiction.

Fan Fiction: Initial Practices of Text Poachers

Fan fiction refers to fan-created narratives derived from original works, often inheriting the source texts' background universes, scene settings, or character personalities (Thomas, 2011). These fan-made stories usually transform the source material in a new direction, either similar or opposite to the original narrative (Hills, 2015). In this sense, creators of fan fiction can be regarded as the collaborators or challengers of the source texts (Costello & Moore, 2007). Furthermore, fan fiction is a creative practice where mostly female fans express their ideas and opinions through text (Coppa, 2006). This practice originated in science fiction media fandoms during the late 1960s, which built upon the 1926 Magazine *Amazing Stories* by Hugo Gernsback including letters and comments from readers (Coppa, 2006). Writing fan fiction is a process where original narratives are broken up and integrated into unique personal styles. This process creates a cultural collage that reassembles existing stories in an individual and original way, aiming to find the limited gaps in the source texts to convey one's social experience (De Certeau, 1984). In essence, cultural collage in popular reading is an act of poaching, whose performers, usually fan readers, are called textual poachers (Jenkins, 2013).

Due to its poaching nature, fan fiction has encountered many controversies.

The debates surrounding fan fiction center on protecting original works' copyrights and monetizing fan fiction (Lipton, 2014). Regarding intellectual property protection, some fan fiction suffers rejection from original authors because of unauthorized use and questionable quality, such as the degree of duplicating and reforming source narratives. Completely copying other people's texts without individual innovation, such as Cassandra Claire's reproduction of Pamela Dean's writing, is strongly condemned by fandom (Romanenkova, 2014). According to George R. R. Martin (who wrote *The Game of Thrones*), partially appropriating original works' settings is uncreative and should be avoided in fiction writing (Jamar & Glenn, 2014). Using source narratives in a satirical manner can sometimes result in legal consequences. For instance, Alice Randall was sued for writing a parody of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* called *The Wind Done Gone* and for misinterpreting the intent of the original (Jamar & Glenn, 2014). In addition, Alice Randall was prosecuted for profiting from publishing her fan fiction, *The Wind Done Gone*. Profiting from publishing fan fiction also explains why *The Fellowship of the King's* author, Demetrious Polychron, and *The Juvenile Here's* author, Jiang Nan, lost in copyright infringement lawsuits (Safi, 2023; Yuan, 2017). If derivative elements are not removed, earning money from fan fiction is unfair competition in law (Romanenkova, 2014). This is because the authors of original works do not receive any remuneration for fan fiction based on their works, even though the source texts created by these writers are the primary components of fan fiction.

To address the issue of fan fiction, "fair use" is a legal principle that is often invoked (Crews, 2001, p. 239). This principle allows people to use parts of copyrighted content in

certain circumstances without seeking copyright owners' permission (Crews, 2001). This defense attempts to balance the interests of copyright owners and the public when derivative creators do not use their secondary creations for commercial purposes (Crews, 2001). Under fair use, while once acknowledging that fan fiction infringed on original works' copyright, the website *The Organization for Transformative Works* actively advocates for fan fiction authors' freedom of expression and creation (Chatelain, 2012). Adherence to this doctrine proves that fan fiction exists recognized contributions. On the one hand, fan fiction has literary value, including but not limited to new character perspectives for meaning-making (Vinney & Dill-Shackleford, 2018), novel narratological methods and objectives to improve readers' acceptance (Thomas, 2011), and innovative logic of cross-media storytelling in the digital age (Hills, 2015). On the other hand, fan fiction displays fans' emotions, such as helplessness and indignation towards dominant class narratives (Costello & Moore, 2007), psychological compensation for the original story characters' regretful endings (Vinney & Dill-Shackleford, 2018), and the pursuit of personal well-being and self-valorization (Lin & Fung, 2019). The benefits of fan fiction in literature make it a training ground for amateurs to become professional writers (Evans et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2009a). The psychological impacts of fan fiction provide a constructive way to understand and adjust fans' cognitions and attitudes (McCloskey et al., 2022). These literary and psychological effects have contributed to fan fiction's enduring presence and popularity in the fandom (Thomas, 2011).

Seeing the unique roles of fan fiction, many official producers or professional writers have increasingly incorporated fan fiction into their creative process. Fan fiction itself can directly become the raw material of novel writing, for example, the novel *The Morning Star of Lingao*

is an organized collection of fan fiction around the same theme (Lin & Fung, 2019). When adapting classic novels into TV series, screenwriters may use fan fiction techniques such as reconstructing the timeline and adding original characters. For instance, *Hannibal*'s serialized narratives on *NBC* rearranged the sequence of events from the original work *Red Dragon* (Kajánková, 2021); *BBC*'s *Sherlock* included Molly Hooper as an indispensable character, but she has no counterpart in the source text *A Study in Scarlet* (Poore, 2013; Brubaker, 2016). Coincidentally, at the birth of the media fandom, when fan fiction began to spread widely, most professional screenwriters of the television series *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* were originally science fiction fans and brought many customs and practices of science fiction into their official scriptwriting (Coppa, 2006). As for developing future cultural works and franchises, fan fiction also serves as the source of ideas for official production, which is exactly what *Warner Media* is dealing with in the *Fantastic Beasts* films (Yeloshyna, 2021).

Fan fiction, which is considered a derivative or paratext of original works (Hill & Pecoskie, 2014), has a huge potential for promotion and attracts professional writers or official producers. Some authors, like Orson Scott Card (who wrote the *Ender's Game* series) and Joss Whedon (who created *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), welcome fan fiction because it is free advertising that keeps fans exposed and connected to the original characters and stories (Jamar & Glenn, 2014). The boom in fan fiction sometimes even boosts sales of the original. For example, the popularity of *Star Trek* series novels has been fueled by fan fiction (Lee, 2013). In other words, fan fiction can partially be agents who persuade consumers to purchase original works (Einwachter, 2014), supplementing media companies' marketing strategies for cultural products (De Kosnik et al., 2015). A fan fiction creation contest organized by *SM Entertainment*

(a Korean media company) to enhance the fame of idols also reflects the recognition and versatility of fan fiction in marketing from the side (Kwon, 2015).

Fan fiction embodies many qualities of convergence culture and participatory culture. Judging from the collaboration between official works and fan fiction in creation and publicity, the boundary between professionals and amateurs is becoming obscured (Jenkins, 2006). In the growing media practices, fan fiction writers have gained more rights to speak thanks to technological advances and changed their inferior positions to professional authors (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). The improved discursive power of derivative creators mirrors the ambiguity of producers and consumers at the heart of convergence culture, resulting in the flourishing of participatory culture within fandoms. Increasingly collaborating with the industry solidifies fan fiction writers' transformation from mere enthusiasts to creators and distributors in the fandom (Jenkins, 2009a). This shift in identities is the key to participatory culture, which also manifests in the acquisition and inheritance of media literacy and skills. Initially, fan fiction writers are inexperienced devotees who receive guidance from veteran members of the fandom (Jenkins, 2009a). Over time, through gradual collaboration with official productions, these fan fiction creators have transitioned into professionals who actively share expertise with new-coming amateurs in the fandom (Jenkins, 2009a). According to Jenkins (2013), this fan-based approach to learning and teaching departs from the traditional method of cultivating and training professional authors in institutions, who prefer gatekeeping their knowledge to assert cultural authority.

In participatory culture, the free labor done by fan fiction writers is consistent with the concept of reciprocal pleasure in the gift economy. However, when it comes to the affective

economics in convergence culture, media organizations' profiting from the labor of fan fiction creators constitutes a form of economic exploitation (Stanfill & Condis, 2014). With the evolution of *Web 2.0* to *Web 3.0* and even *Web 4.0*, fan fiction has derived many variants, one of which is fan videos. Labor in fan videos involves more complex and diverse media practices than fan fiction dealing only with texts. The discussion on the economic exploitation of fan videos' labor may further reveal opportunities and challenges confronted by convergence culture and participatory culture in the development process.

Fan Videos: Extended Text Poaching

Fan videos are a type of fan fiction in video format that has been nurtured by enriched technology functions and diversified display forms under the context of user-generated content (Coppa, 2006; Brown, 2022). Some social media platforms like *YouTube* provide the video hosting infrastructure for user-produced content, which in turn serves as *YouTube's* means of marketing to monetize people's attention (Russo, 2009). Among user-penetrated content, fan videos are created by fans grabbing and re-editing footage from official film and television works to express their own emotions or stories, which is an advertising strategy and value-enhancing labor for professional film and television producers (Andrejevic, 2008). Yet, most fan videos are uploaded to user-generated content platforms that prioritize interactivity and creativity, rather than websites exclusively dedicated to providing publicity or feedback for official films and TV shows (Bury, 2018). As a result, the film-television industry cannot directly supervise or utilize these fan videos and can only request that video platforms enforce regulations (Russo, 2009).

Video platforms, as an intermediary between professionals in the film-television industry and fans who create derivative videos, try to construct negotiations and compromise through relatively ambiguous policy initiatives (Russo, 2009). In these institutional measures, fair use is often employed, but cannot eliminate the hidden worries of professional film and television production companies. For example, fan videos that decontextualize the source texts indeed help viewers selectively define and diversely understand, but the content created by these fans can still potentially lead to misinterpretation of the source texts and ideological enlightenment diverging from the intended connotations (Russo, 2009). This potential cognitive and conscious influence during distribution is beyond the control of individual fans who lack sufficient economic and legal resources compared with professional film and television companies (Russo, 2009).

The standoff between fan creators and production companies is reminiscent of what happened with the *Star Wars* franchise and *Lucasfilm*. Lucas, the creator of the *Star Wars* franchise, hoped to inspire creativity through filmmaking and believed in everyone's potential to be a filmmaker, so he welcomed *Star Wars* fans' re-creation content as long as enthusiasts would not profit from their self-made videos (Phillips, 2012). However, in the reality of that situation, *Lucasfilm*, the publication company of the *Star Wars* franchise, claimed that duplicating and distributing *Star Wars* materials was a copyright infringement involving commercial interests and that *Lucasfilm* should be the only legitimate narrative authority on *Star Wars* without tolerance for poaching (Phillips, 2012). This separation of original creators from copyright owners makes fan videos more complicated than fan fiction in terms of economic and legal disputes. However, it also offers more flexible solutions, such as the

creators' alliance with fans to influence the copyright owner's production and distribution (Navar-Gill, 2018). This recognition of fan influence also echoes why Lucas and *Lucasfilm*, despite their different opinions on fan videos, acknowledged the significance of fans acting as editors who neutrally reviewed original narratives and revamped source texts while preserving fundamental storylines (Phillips, 2012).

Apart from editors, when it comes to source texts' origin for derivative videos, fans can also become adapters to change novels into film and television works. The retention of stories' scope and remarkable plots, the adherence to intertextual and intermedia exchange, the interpretive and creative reading of source texts, and the reference to previous adaptation cases are all principal considerations when fan video creators and professional screenwriters adapt literature works (Louttit, 2013). The popularity of fan videos like the clip "Bella and Edward: Scenes from the book *Twilight*" on YouTube shows that fan videos can provide reference schemes for the adaptation of novels into official film and television works (Einwachter, 2014, p. 182). In skills and knowledge for adapting, fans are not substantially different from professionals (Louttit, 2013), but the hard work of fan video creators adapting original content is likely to be exploited by official producers without compensation.

Except for the adaptation from text into video, fans are converted into producers through the creation of derivative videos. For example, enthusiasts of *Tosh.0*, a website featuring comedian Daniel Tosh's show and related materials, change into co-producers because their submitted self-made videos become a source of content for Daniel Tosh's show (Helens-Hart, 2014). The case of hobbyists joining the official production groups also occurred in the fan video creator Three Thousand Fish. According to the spin-off video author Three Thousand

Fish (2023), she originally was a devotee of *Bilibili* and crafted numerous derivative videos inspired by official films and television works. By virtue of her fan video script for *An Ancient Love Song*, Three Thousand Fish was noticed by a production company, ultimately bringing her an invitation to join the official playwrighting team for *Bilibili*'s TV series adaptation of the same name. This unique opportunity presented her with an opening to establish herself as a qualified screenwriter. The involvement of fans in official creation exhibits the trend of decentralization (Hills, 2015), which aligns with the characteristics of *Web 3.0* as professionals are no longer the sole contributors to production. The permission for amateurs to enter the production field breaks the production structure monopolized by professionals and illustrates the improvement of fans' status. This development highlights the increasing value placed on the ideas and opinions of fans, and shows the enhanced impact of what fans say (Johnson, 2007).

The alteration in the ability of ordinary people to voice their appeals, known as discursive power, manifests not only in identity, but also extends to gender. The intensified influence of fan discussions on gender issues elucidates why enthusiasts may become advocates of social movements or activists by creating subsidiary videos. For example, the history of fandom has seen female fans fighting against gender inequality. During the late 1960s, media fandom was predominantly comprised of women, who primarily focused on producing textual stories like fan fiction (Coppa, 2006). These female fans either depicted homoerotic tales or portrayed women as heroes in their narratives, all with the intention of dismantling gender hierarchies by subverting traditional storytelling structures (Coppa, 2006; Stevens, 2020). However, the impact of this literary strategy employed by female fans was somewhat limited, particularly

compared to the widespread reach of television as a mass communication tool. By contrast, male fan creators adhered to the long-standing narrative model dominated by men and mainly explored multimedia forms such as visual arts (Coppa, 2006). As technology advances, the gender gap in technology availability has significantly decreased (Bhandari, 2019). This progress has brought greater visibility of female-authored fan fiction that aims to eliminate gender injustice, and has even facilitated women's domination in creating fan videos, a type of multimedia art (Coppa, 2009; Rosenblatt & Tushnet, 2015). The novel perspective of female narratives, coupled with the extensive use of video media underscores the purpose of female fan video creators to resist gender discrimination. In this sense, fans are transformed into advocates for gender politics.

Fan videos are the extended products of convergence culture and participatory culture enabled by the progression of media technology, expanding the range of poaching from simple texts to more complex information forms such as image, video, and audio content. Furthermore, fan videos have shifted from purely repeating the highlights of film and television to more abstract narrative reconstruction, such as adapting classic novels, providing original materials, and discussing societal issues. Accordingly, the identities of fans who create derivative videos are no longer a unitary alteration from consumers to producers but enriched into editors, adapters, and activists. Even though fan videos have flowing linkages with convergence culture and participatory culture, the definition of fan videos is comparatively stable. Fan videos are fan-made videos consisting of segmented visual materials arranged with various audio, which mainly focus on characters' interior experiences, and are typically featured in female productions (Stevens, 2020; Phillips, 2012; Louttit, 2013; Russo, 2009). Besides the obvious

dependencies and re-creations, fan videos are non-profit and imaginative (Wang, 2012). These four attributes can distinguish fan videos from commercial music videos. In terms of dependencies, fan videos rely on original narrative meanings, while commercial music videos tend to create various emblematic symbols (Jenkins, 2013). With regard to re-creations, fan videos extend storylines or characters' mental journeys from source texts, whereas commercial music videos emphasize scattered feelings and emotional impact (Jenkins, 2013). When it comes to profits, fan videos express fans' love and homage without generating income, in contrast to commercial music videos that capitalize on the commercial value of artists (Jenkins, 2013). Regarding the boundary of imagination, fan videos allow the audience to have multiple understandings, but commercial music videos often promote official or authoritative interpretations (Jenkins, 2013).

As convergence culture and participatory culture evolve, the distinct qualities between fan videos and commercial music videos are clouding. This vagueness is not only due to the broad coverage of fan videos like "character study, constructed reality, multifandom, and recruiter" and other numerous branches (Stevens, 2020, p. 18), but also the frequent appearance of the co-creation between fans and film-television official production teams (Liang & Shen, 2016). In this case, only by detailing fan videos at the fan film level, can we detect the development trend of convergence culture and participatory culture.

Fan Films: Storytelling of Versatile Poachers

Fan films, as the core part of fan videos, have experienced a long evolution. The earliest prototypes of fan films can be traceable to a homemade black-and-white clip in 1936, which

lasted 12 minutes and represented a 16-year-old amateur filmmaker, Robbins Barstow's obsession with the popular characters in *Tarzan and the Rocky Gorge* (Young, 2008). As time changes, convergence culture brings further comprehensive technology support and richer approaches to online participation, resulting in more efficient instruments and methods for the production and distribution of current fan films. *Damnatus*, a derivative film made by devotees of the *Warhammer 40,000* tabletop battle game (Walliss, 2010), and *Axanar*, a long narrative video created by enthusiasts of the television series *Star Trek* (Lerner, 2018), are examples on *YouTube* that highlight the wide scope of media forms involved in making fan films. In general, fan films are fan-produced films constituted by visual-audio materials that are self-made or collected from official film and television works, which last over ten minutes and have specific storylines that centralize scenarios and roles of the original narratives to show fans' veneration (Lerner, 2018; Li, 2015; Young, 2008; Walliss, 2010).

Fan films are a kind of fan video that significantly differs from other categories of fan videos. Fan videos can be divided into various types including: compilations of video clips featuring stars to show the appearance and personality of celebrities; works that change the background music of official films and TV dramas to highlight music preferences; edits that use videos as materials to demonstrate the mastery of scene transitions, and so on (Stevens, 2020). In contrast with the above three types of fan videos, fan films are the kind of fan video with strong narrative features. Fan films have clear and original storylines, aiming to efficiently tell complete and innovative stories to audiences. Moreover, fan films represent storytelling of mostly female fans who are amateurs but progressively experienced in numerous professional film and television production techniques, such as script conception, storyboard design, and

video editing (Rosenblatt & Tushnet, 2015). Due to innovations in media technology, fan films help grassroots creators to further fulfill the unification of consumers and producers of cultural products (Rosenblatt & Tushnet, 2015).

Meanwhile, fan films encounter challenges similar to those faced by fan fiction, but more complicated. Concerning intellectual property ownership, despite official recognition for the efforts of fan films, such as that received by *Damnatus*, copyright holders may still restrict fan film creation due to legal requirements (Walliss, 2010). Regarding money circulation, some enthusiasts believe that the financial exchanges involved in making and sharing fan films should be considered as a form of gift-giving, while the industry views these transactions as business deals that affect their legitimate economic interests (Lerner, 2018). Disputes over the fiscal aspects of creating derivative works have been highlighted by crowdfunding campaigns for the fan film, *Axanar* (Lerner, 2018). Although film and television copyright owners usually confine the creation of fan films to protect their intellectual property and economic benefit, they also utilize such video works to reach new audiences without compensation for these hobbyists' labor. When fan filmmakers protest this exploitation, copyright parties often justify their actions by claiming to cater to fans' aesthetic tastes and gift-giving habits, thus avoiding criticism (Stanfill & Condis, 2014). In this scenario, producers of fan films are left with little autonomy as the control of their works falls entirely into the hands of official media companies.

The quandary about fan film creators thrown into passivity highlights the failure of fair use as an economic and legal framework to reconcile the demands of fan creators and official entities. It rekindles the debate about whether fan films constitute plagiarism in law or appropriation in art (Lerner, 2018), and the controversy surrounding whether official

companies using fan films is labor exploitation or reciprocal exchange (Stanfill & Condis, 2014). The disagreements between enthusiasts and authorities over spin-off creations have become even trickier with the evolution of technology. For example, the increasing professionalism of fan film production powered by *Web 3.0* has blurred the distinction between fan films and independent films (Lerner, 2018). Moreover, the growth of *Web 4.0* will cause an ambiguous boundary between human and computer creation (Nath & Iswary, 2015), which may raise more anxiety in the film and television industry and urgency to solve the predicament of fan films.

The gradual deepening of fan participation in official productions under convergence culture indicates how fan practices in participatory culture are broadening. To meet fans' preferences and promote more consumption for profits, some commercial movies intentionally favor the popularity of celebrities rather than the suitability of characters in the casting (Yang, 2022). The involvement of fans goes far beyond casting as fan ideas can become the basis of filmmaking directly. For instance, *The Rise of Skywalker* is a film adapted from *Star Wars* fans' conceptions on *YouTube* (Yeloshyna, 2021). Fan preferences and thoughts can be epitomized in the derivative writings they create, reshaping the official production of the film and television industry. The web series *A Finger Slip*, adapted from the fan-authored novel of *BBC's Sherlock* (Brubaker, 2016), and the film series *Fifty Shades*, adapted from the fan fiction series of *Twilight Saga* (Einwachter, 2014), have successfully strengthened the feasibility and rationality of fans joining the official creation. Warner Media even established a specialized department to collect literary works made by fans and implement these fan proposals in the production of the *Fantastic Beasts* films (Yeloshyna, 2021). While the collaboration between

official productions and fan fiction is increasingly normalized, there are few studies on the cooperation between the film-television industry and fan films. Fan films, as a refined category of fan videos, have a similar experience to fan fiction and should be closely investigated alongside official productions in the development of fan creation.

Despite the differences in legal enforcement between China and the Western tradition (Jia, 2016), the progression of fan creation is essentially the same both outside and inside China. Fan creation in China also started with fan fiction and has since evolved into fan videos. Transmedia fiction which provides the training ground for amateur writers and enables instant interaction with readers on the Internet, early blended enterprises and grassroots entities in convergence culture, and transformed consumers into producers in participatory culture in China (Xu et al., 2022). Likewise, fan fiction, a prevalent genre in Chinese transmedia fiction, has received legal and economic warnings from professional writers, as experienced by *The Juvenile Here* (Yuan, 2017). Nevertheless, there are also instances of Chinese fan fiction, such as *The Morning Star of Lingao*, that have attained acknowledgment from literary experts (Lin & Fung, 2019). Convergence culture and participatory culture are more representative in the growth of Chinese fandom with the deep integration of television and the Internet. In response, *Tencent TV and iQIYI*, the two largest online film and television video viewing platforms in China, respectively set up *Doki* and *Paopao* as sub-platforms where dedicated fans create derivative content based on their favorite celebrities' videos, to acquire deeper interaction (Fung, 2019). Yet again, the April 2021 prohibition announced by Chinese film and television organizations (Zhu, 2021b), and the 2022 cooperation initiated by film-television copyright parties and video platforms (Li, 2023) expose the dilemmas of fan videos.

A history of the Chinese online film and television industry before 2021 may help to illuminate the reasons behind professionals' uncertain stance toward fan videos in China. In 2018, advertising was the main source of revenue for the Chinese online film and television industry, leading online video platforms to explore product placement and the fan economy (NCAC, 2019). During this period, *Doki* and *Paopao* experienced rapid growth (Fung, 2019). By contrast, subscription memberships, which involved paying for premium content, contributed less to the industry's revenue (NCAC, 2019). In 2019, there was an increase in the willingness of online audiences to pay for high-quality content, prompting online video platforms to invest more in such content (NCAC, 2020). In 2020, the price of high-quality official film-television content increased, and viewers' willingness to pay for this content varied across different cities, causing industry practitioners to experiment with short video format production (NCAC, 2021). In 2021, both the number of audiences watching official films and TV series online in China and the advertising revenue of the Chinese online film and television industry decreased, which impacted the profits of online video platforms (NCAC, 2022). To protect their interests, the industry investigated the decline in viewership. Fan videos, which use official film and television works as source materials to create derivative content, were considered a potential factor. Fan films, as the kind of fan video with strong narrative traits, gained popularity due to their innovative storytelling, raising more concern for industry practitioners who resisted them. However, fan productions also helped to promote official works (De Kosnik, 2012). Consequently, following the bans in 2021, the Chinese film and television industry extended invitations to derivative creators in 2022. Given the fluctuating industry policies, fan films appear to be in a state of uncertainty at this time.

Therefore, when examining fan films - the comprehensive and complex form of fan creation - focusing on China as a specific area of study may offer valuable suggestions. These suggestions will contribute to solving the problems that derivative creators encounter in convergence culture, and dealing with the issues that the film and television industry face in the escalating participatory culture practices.

Based on the practical difficulties faced in the introduction, together with the proposed concept definition and the mentioned research deficiencies in the above literature review, it is worth revisiting the research questions I raised:

1. How do producers of fan films reinterpret official film and television narratives through their own experience and media consumption?
2. How do audiences become interested in and receptive to official film and television works through fan film consumption?
3. How do producers of fan films cooperate with official film and television to attract and retain audiences' attention?

Chapter 3

Methodology

In my extensive involvement with fan films, I have identified several challenges that fan films often encounter. Drawing on these insights, I have conducted a comprehensive review of existing literature to gain a foundational understanding and develop some conjectures about fan films. After organizing my inquiries of fan films into three research questions, I believe it is essential to scrutinize fan films more thoroughly, particularly as a fan film viewer with some knowledge and skills in fan movie production. Based on a trawl of library materials and online resources, the general overview of fan films from the literature review and the inferences about fan films from observation should be further verified and explored by in-depth interviews with fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers.

Therefore, this study utilized participant observation and in-depth interviews to provide a detailed understanding of the operational procedures of fan films. The research focused on the practices and thoughts of fan film producers and audiences. By analyzing the data obtained from these methods, the article provided some suggestions to integrate fan films with official film and television productions.

Participant Observation

In view of the distribution ratio of fan films in videos and the different video platform preferences of fan films' distribution, this study conducted participant observation mainly in *Bilibili*, a Chinese medium- and long-duration online video-sharing website that is primarily user-generated content, where the culture of fan creation is relatively strong. Additionally,

Lofter served as a supplementary field for conducting this study's participant observation. It is a multi-purpose social media application designed specifically for devotees of fan creation culture, where they can read fan fiction and watch fan videos, buy official franchise derivative products, and even participate in official fan creation competitions.

In-depth Interviews

Considering the nature of convergence culture and participatory culture, as well as that fan films are primarily the interaction between fan creators and their audiences, this study conducted in-depth interviews with the originators and viewers of fan films. As a kind of cultural product, fan films have their producers and consumers who are respectively called fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers. According to Guest and his colleagues (2006), the diversity of information one hopes to achieve may be fully explored after around 12 in-depth interviews on a particular topic. As a result, a total of 24 participants - 12 being fan filmmakers and 12 being fan filmgoers - should suffice for the study.

Most of the participants in this study are female due to the following reasons. The first is because fan fiction, the foundation of fan films, has historically been created by female fans since its origins in science fandom (Coppa, 2006). The second is because the fan films examined in this study are a kind of fan video, and fan videos are mostly crafted by women (Coppa, 2009). The third is because women nowadays have become the majority of participants in fan-film as technology has advanced (Rosenblatt & Tushnet, 2015).

This study has strict requirements on the identity characteristics of the interviewees and the scope of their activities. The research aims to explore the potential and value of fan films

from the perspective of Chinese participatory culture. In China, compared with other mainstream media platforms, the platforms that advocate participatory culture and support the uploading of fan movies are limited, and their user scale is small. Representative platforms are *Bilibili* and *Lofter* (Yin & Fung, 2017; Zheng, 2019). In *Bilibili*, fan films make up a small proportion of the total number of videos. *Lofter* is mainly focused on fan fiction and fan communications, with fan movies being more of a niche interest. Therefore, interviewees should be users who create or watch fan films on *Bilibili* or *Lofter*.

In view of the small population of interviewees, the selection of interview subjects used convenience sampling, where participants who met the interviewee requirements were chosen from nearby sources (Robinson, 2014). In order to conduct participant observation, I joined the fan film communities of *Bilibili* and *Lofter*. Therefore, when conducting convenience sampling, interviewed fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers were selected from the networks that I built in the fan film communities. To clearly tease out the possible influence of fan film production and consumption on official film and television, fan filmmakers are those who have posted many fan film works on *Bilibili* or *Lofter* and still updated their derivative works in the past six months at the time of the interview, while fan filmgoers are those who have not posted any fan film works on the Internet but would like to see fan films and actively search for them.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and all the interviews were semi-structured and documented via audio recording. Interview outlines for fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers are provided below, along with lists of basic information about the interviewees.

For fan filmmakers:

Hello, I am a research master from the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and

Information at Nanyang Technological University. I am conducting a research study on fan films and would like to collect the activities and viewpoints of fan filmmakers. This research aims to develop a strategy that combines fan-made films with official film and television.

1. *What is your process of making fan films?*
2. *What makes you want to produce fan films?*
3. *What is your favorite genre or theme for creating fan films, and why?*
4. *How do you define yourself as a fan filmmaker?*
5. *What do you think of people who like seeing fan films?*
6. *What do you think of the official film and television?*
7. *How do you define the relationship between fan films and official film and television?*
8. *How do you expect fan films to develop in the future?*

Table 3.1: List of fan filmmakers

No.	Gender	Number of followers (Approximate value)	Types of source texts	Remark
1	Female	39,000	Television series; Fiction	
2	Female	24,000	Television series; Fiction	Mainly adapted novels
3	Female	14,000	Television series; Fiction	
4	Female	11,000	Television series; Fiction	
5	Female	3,000	Television series; Fiction	Mainly adapted novels

6	Female	18,000	Television series; Fiction	
7	Female	4,000	Television series; Fiction	Mainly adapted novels
8	Female	10,000	Television series; Fiction	Mainly adapted novels
9	Female	78,000	Television series; Fiction	
10	Male	1,000	Films; Comics	
11	Male	10,000	Game; Fiction	
12	Male	1,000	Television series; Films	

For fan filmgoers:

Hello, I am a research master from the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University. I am conducting a research study on fan films and would like to collect the activities and viewpoints of fan filmgoers. This research aims to develop a strategy for combining fan-made films with official film and television.

1. *How do you prefer to watch fan films?*
2. *What makes you want to watch fan films?*
3. *What is your favorite genre or theme for watching fan films, and why?*
4. *How do you define yourself as a fan filmgoer?*
5. *What do you think of people who like producing fan films?*
6. *What do you think of the official film and television?*
7. *How do you define the relationship between fan films and official film and television?*

8. *How do you expect fan films to develop in the future?***Table 3.2: List of fan filmgoers**

No.	Gender	Types of source texts in the fan films they like
A	Female	Television series
B	Female	Television series
C	Female	Television series
D	Female	Television series; Fiction
E	Female	Television series
F	Female	Television series
G	Female	Television series; Fiction
H	Female	Television series
I	Female	Television series
J	Male	Films; Comics; Animation; Game
K	Male	Television series; Fiction; Animation
L	Male	Game; Animation

Chapter 4

Findings

After observing fan films posted on *Bilibili* and *Lofter*, as well as reading fan filmmakers' notes on creating these derivative works and audiences' comments during viewing, this research has identified certain characteristics of fan movies and reasons for their appeal to audiences. In-depth interviews with fan-film creators and viewers have not only validated previously summarized features of spin-off videos and rationales for their attraction, but also further explored motivations and the underlying logic for producing and watching fan films. These findings provide a better understanding of how participatory culture drives the entire process of fan-film creation and distribution.

By combining the insights of major theorists in the literature review with the findings from participant observation and in-depth interviews, this chapter addresses the study's three research questions. The first is the relationship between fan-film producers and official film and television productions. In participatory culture, fans often express their love and regret toward official works through textual poaching (Jenkins, 2013). This emotional experience also applies to fan filmmakers, who channel their affection and dissatisfaction into creating derivative movies. The storyline, characters, and other audio-visual elements of fan films not only demonstrate fan filmmakers' feelings, but also offer fresh interpretations of the original film and television works. The second is the relationship between fan-film audiences and official film and television works. Fan filmgoers often engage in tracing and comparing behaviors when watching fan films. Fan creations have the power to captivate audiences and shape their perspectives (Einwachter, 2014; Louttit, 2013). By reimagining storylines and

characters, fan films can boost viewers' interest in keeping track of corresponding source productions. Furthermore, the comparison between fan films and the originals can help audiences develop a more nuanced appreciation for the official productions. The third is the relationship between fan film producers and official film and television production teams. Understanding and compromise form the foundation for the cooperation between the two parties. Official teams should recognize that fan filmmakers create derivative works out of love and regret for original materials. Furthermore, official teams should realize that fan filmgoers may trace source texts and compare official productions with fan films. Meanwhile, fan filmmakers should also grasp the concerns of official film and television production teams. These concerns include the potential profit from derivative creations, the impact of fan films on the audience for official works, and possible misunderstandings caused by fan films. Through mutual understanding, both parties can make concessions regarding the production and distribution of fan films, ultimately capturing the audience's attention more effectively.

Fan Filmmakers: Love and Regret

Fans of television and film works are a complex group. Judging from the nature of fans, they must have a strong love for movies and TV dramas (Jenkins, 2013). However, the official works in the market have not adequately catered to fans' passion for films and TV series or fulfilled their desire for certain appealing traits of movies and TV series (Jenkins, 2013). In addition, the production and promotion of film and television works are dominated by media conglomerates (Feigenbaum, 2007). When dealing with cultural hegemony, secondary production is a common tactic adopted by consumers of cultural products to show their

resistance (De Certeau, 1984; Wu, 2009). Consequently, enthusiastic audiences use derivative creations to address their dissatisfaction with official film and television productions (Jenkins, 2013). In other words, despite the affection for the originals, fans have some regret about the existing film and television series, so some enthusiasts create derivative works to express their opinions to authoritative producers and make self-cognitive adjustments (Falero, 2016; Vinney & Dill-Shackleford, 2018; Lin & Fung, 2019). According to the results of participant observation and in-depth interviews, fan filmmakers create fan movies also because they have both adoration and discontent with the official productions. As interviewee 10 mentioned, “The characters we adore from the Batman Family comic series were not portrayed by real actors in the official film adaptations, so we collaborated on creating this fan film.” The complex mental process of these fan filmmakers is reflected in every link of their creative process, which meanwhile helps them re-examine official film-television stories.

Storylines are often re-created by fans in various ways to illustrate their fondness or dissatisfaction with official film and television works. Creating and adjusting time and space outside established principles are practical strategies that people develop to demonstrate their attitudes toward the dominant powers (De Certeau, 1984). These strategies also apply to the derivative creation of official narratives. For example, some fan creators add their own imaginary follow-ups after the original stories end to show their affection for source texts (Aquila, 2007). Placing characters in alternative universes is another popular technique in derivative creations (Jenkins, 2013), which offers a fresh perspective for interpretation (Vinney & Dill-Shackleford, 2018). Fans can also share their opinions by reorganizing the original storylines or enlarging the details concealed in the source texts (Thomas, 2011). The

interviewed fan filmmakers use similar approaches as the methods mentioned above in rearranging the original narrative time and space. In interviews, fan filmmakers who are completely satisfied with the narratives of original films and TV series, extend the timeline of source texts to fulfill their imaginations and passion. For instance, fan movies created by Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 5 expanded on the protagonists' previous experiences and subsequent adventures beyond the original content of the official TV series. By contrast, Interviewee 12 explores other possibilities in the parallel universe of source texts to highlight the philosophical value of original works. As for fan filmmakers in interviews who are dissatisfied with some plots of official film-television works, they replace the original parts they dislike with their own subsidiary films to adjust the entire narrative structure and rhythm. These fan filmmakers complained that there are many official film and television works with fascinating beginnings but unpopular endings, or impressive endings but unremarkable beginnings, or illogical progression.

In fan-created derivative works, storylines can be drawn from film and television productions or adapted from other media works. The ability to follow narratives in various media modalities in participatory culture is called transmedia navigation (Jenkins, 2009a; Hills, 2015), allowing fans to express their affection and regret for original works across different media platforms. Individual struggles can coalesce into collective influence through alliances, challenging the authority and impacting the decisions of dominant forces (De Certeau, 1984; Lian, 2003). By sharing their attitudes on various media platforms, fans can connect with like-minded individuals, forming a larger coalition whose opinions significantly influence official film and television productions (Jenkins, 2006; 2009a).

This study's observations and interviews also highlight the creation of cross-media narratives and the impact of fan communities on official productions. Based on the results of participant observation and interviewees' responses, it is common to use literary and artistic works that can be considered intellectual property in law as the narrative basis for film-television adaptations. In interviews, some fan filmmakers who are devotees of adapted novels, animations, or games, indicated that they create fan movies to convey their criticism and expectations towards professionals, due to their discontent with the outcomes of official film-television adaptations. Other interviewed fan filmmakers expressed disappointment that professional film and TV adaptations drastically revised the original storylines of novels, animations, or games and unnecessarily added new characters. As to what causes differences between official adaptations and source texts, the viewpoints of interviewees vary. Interviewee 2 believes that official film-television producers impose excessive subjectivity and do not respect authors of adapted novels, animations, and games, while several fan filmmakers interviewed consider compliance with Chinese censorship policies as the main factor. Despite these varying viewpoints, all interviewed fan filmmakers agree that successful adaptations should mostly follow the development of source narratives, retaining the majority of original storylines. For industry-renowned original fiction, comics, or games that have not yet been adapted into film or television, their followers Interviewees 2, 10, and 11 strive to introduce the charm of these works to more people through self-made fan films. In this sense, fan films have assisted official teams in identifying adaptable works, building early-stage audiences, and offering reference points for film and television adaptations.

In contrast to adaptations, the originality of stories is another aspect where fans can show

their preferences and dissatisfaction with official film and television productions. Capitalist cultural production influences people's activities and consciousness through mass media, which is controlled by the dominant powers, aiming to remove human subjectivity and autonomy (Barnard, 2004). The industrialization of cultural products standardizes the aesthetic experience of consumers, neglecting the uniqueness of human creativity (Benjamin, 2018). This impact of capitalist cultural production on people is also reflected in the film and television industry. For example, misunderstandings and conflicts between lovers are conventional topics in film-television works generated by capitalized production companies (Stevens, 2020). Such narratives can often become tedious for audiences and drive fans to create innovative alternatives (Stevens, 2020).

In interviews, all fan filmmakers argue that there is a shortage of originality overall because too many official movies and TV dramas are perfunctory and stereotyped in their storylines. According to interviewed fan filmmakers' feedback and participant observation, current film and television works predominately feature stories set in unreal backgrounds, such as ancient times, mythos, magic, and science fantasy. Emotional entanglement is the theme commonly used in these official productions. Many interviewees supposed the overwhelming inclination of industry practitioners to adopt the aforementioned setting and theme may lead to homogeneity and result in aesthetic fatigue for viewers. In response to this trend, Interviewees 4 and 12 created innovative narratives based on their favorite films and television series to express their resistance. The fan film crafted by Interviewee 4 challenged school and domestic violence, drawing inspiration from real-life news and statistics. The derivative movie produced by Interviewee 12 explored how adults perceive work and personal growth through the

perspective of their beloved cartoon characters from childhood.

Apart from storylines, characters are crucial elements that show fans' affection toward official film and television works. Fan creators often select appropriate materials from their favorite official productions, such as published novels, film-television clips, and game avatars, to reshape characters in fan-generated derivative works (Jenkins, 2009a; 2013). Retrieving and integrating past experiences and media consumption involves "networking," which is the ability to search for and synthesize information in participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009a, p. 49). In recalling official works that once fascinated them, fans reignite their adoration for these cultural products. The repetition of such a positive feeling may deepen fans' enthusiasm and loyalty toward the source materials (Jenkins, 2009b). Beyond being intermediaries that carry fans' fascination for the originals, characters of source texts can directly become the objects of fan affection. Additionally, identification or self-projection can help audiences foster empathy and fondness toward characters in official narratives (Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

Showing love for source texts through characters and the love for the characters themselves can also be confirmed in interviews. Some interviewed fan filmmakers stated that in the early stages of scriptwriting, they usually use characters as a focus to find suitable footage from official film-television works on the market for subsequent editing. Then during the editing process, these fan filmmakers often prefer to choose video clips from media products that they have previously consumed and feel passionate about. In this way, these derivative creators can strengthen the collected materials' suitability for fan films' characters and improve creation efficiency. Furthermore, this selection preference enables these fan filmmakers to rediscover their obsession with the original works and enhance the understanding of the

characters' personalities and experiences in source texts. By contrast, some interviewed fan filmmakers revealed that their fondness for specific characters stems from the corresponding actors being their favorite stars, for whom they create fan films to show support. Other interviewed fan filmmakers cosplay (the behavior of wearing specific costumes to represent certain characters) as their favorite characters in their fan films, hoping to achieve their own dreams through these characters.

In addition to affection, the adopting of characters can also reflect fans' regret regarding official film and television productions. Fans' adoration for the original characters themselves does not necessarily indicate support for the relationships between different characters in source texts (Jenkins, 2013; Stevens, 2020). Furthermore, for their favorite characters, fans often feel disappointed when official productions fail to meet fans' expectations and passions in the plot arrangement. (Jenkins, 2013). Additionally, discontent among fans can arise when beloved characters are portrayed by actors who seem ill-suited for the roles. This mismatch occurs because official film and television industry practitioners sometimes select actors based on the demands of policymakers and investors rather than the performance of actors (Yang, 2022). Consequently, confronting oppression from cultural hegemony, deconstructing products manufactured by the dominant capital powers, and reorganizing existing materials to create new scenarios can satisfy people's needs and passions (Barnard, 2004). Similarly, facing dissatisfaction brought by film-television production companies, some interviewed fan filmmakers reinvent official works' characters in derivative creations to fulfill their own pleasure. For instance, Interviewee 5 entirely rebuilt character relationships in one of her fan films when the characters she liked and the characters she hated had emotional associations in

the original narratives. Interviewee 1 rewrote a perfect happy ending for her favorite original characters in her own spin-off film, in contrast to the tragic one of the source TV series. As for the actors whose appearance and performances do not match fans' imagination, some interviewed fan filmmakers protest official casting by substituting current performers with other more suitable actors in their derivative films.

Except for storylines and characters, films and television series' unique visual and auditory effects can enrich fans' expression of attitudes. Mastering the use of various media forms and collaboratively solving problems are crucial for expanding engagement in participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009a). These abilities enable interviewed fan filmmakers to present their ideas more exactly, and also make them distinct from others. As Interviewee 3 expressed, "Writing a novel requires consideration of rhetorical skills, and the description in my writing may not accurately convey what I want. Therefore, I believe that using video would more directly reflect my ideas than text." In the presentation of visual details, interviewed fan filmmakers vary due to the difference in past social activities and previous viewing habits. Some interviewed fan filmmakers who attend cosplay conventions often prefer self-made visual materials, such as costumes, makeup, props, and sets. By contrast, Interviewee 11, who enjoys watching action movies, concentrates more on the precision of editing, special effects, color palette, and animation when reorganizing existing footage of the official works. In terms of auditory expression, some interviewed fan filmmakers without relevant skills, may invite amateur dubbing and soundtrack teams to cooperate in their creation of derivative films. Sometimes, to reduce the time and expenses of coordination, these fan movie originators may also capture audio files of lines and theme songs from original films and TV dramas and embed

them into the spin-off works. As for Interviewee 7, who is coincidentally an amateur voice actor, she not only dubs others' fan movies for free, but also creates her own fan movies to show her dubbing talent.

Overall, according to interviews and observation, fan filmmakers may express their love and regret for official film and television works by creating derivative films. This can mainly be achieved through the reconstruction and modification of storylines and characters, along with enhancements to audio-visual elements. Fan filmmakers' passion and frustration with official film and television productions are potentially linked to their personal life experiences and media consumption impressions.

Fan Filmgoers: Trace and Compare

There are various ways for viewers of official film and television works to express their opinions. When confronted with products manufactured by large-scale cultural industries, consumers can resist by using products in different approaches (De Certeau, 1984; Lian, 2003). Their tactics can range from visible reorganization or subversion, such as bricolage or improvisation, to inconspicuous selections or rejections (De Certeau, 1984; Wu, 2009). The strategies developed by the Situationist International for consumers to resist cultural hegemony include not only *détournement* (rearranging pre-existing materials in a new ensemble), but also *dérive* (drifting in a certain space) (Barnard, 2004). Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews, fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers both engage with official films and TV series, but they differ in expressing their emotions and ideas about professional narratives. Interviewed fan filmmakers more obviously share their thoughts and feelings toward official

film-television works, often by uploading their subsidiary creations to video platforms or social media. Conversely, interviewed fan filmgoers tend to convey their views and perceptions of authoritative films and television dramas in a relatively secretive manner, often through intentional watching.

The cognition and attitudes of film and television audiences are changeable. Through different methods of expressing resistance, people construct new situations that give innovative meanings to traditional production and consumption (Barnard, 2004). The hierarchical production and consumption of modern commodity society are reinterpreted as creation and sharing in participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006; Fuchs, 2014), where identity transformation is unrestricted (Jenkins, 2009a). Psychogeography suggests that the environment can influence people's emotions and behavior (Elias, 2010). The space shaped by participatory culture affects the thoughts and feelings of those involved. In media fandom, fan creation can subtly have a persuasive effect (Einwachter, 2014). Interviewed fan filmgoers revealed that the unique presentation in fan films often prompts them to trace the original stories, or to compare the storytelling of fan movies with that of official productions.

Storylines play a key role in drawing viewers to the originals. In participatory culture, fans can create derivative works based on existing materials and share their spin-off productions (Jenkins, 2009a). This fan labor serves as a potential promotional strategy to generate audiences' interest in the source texts (Andrejevic, 2008; Einwachter, 2014). Fan labor's unique nature makes it more effective than official marketing in capturing consumers' attention (Einwachter, 2014; De Kosnik et al., 2015). Many interviewed fan filmgoers emphasized that the focus of their fan-film viewing was the storylines. Having experienced original narratives prior to

engaging with derivative works, these viewers sought fresh and intriguing elements in fan-film storylines, which often inspired them to revisit source texts. Even Interviewees I, H, and E, who had not watched the source film-television works before seeing fan movies, also indicated that fan films are akin to the corresponding official movies and TV dramas since all these works, in their eyes, are new stories presented in video form. If fan-movie storylines are captivating enough, Interviewees I, H, and E will actively seek out the original content. According to the reliance on source texts and the level of creativity, interviewed fan filmgoers have identified three types of storylines in fan movies. The first type involves expanding alternative narratives of characters or settings from the source materials, piquing fan filmgoers' curiosity about what truly happened in the original works. The second type adapts storylines from novels, sparking fan filmgoers' interest in exploring the original fiction and seeking corresponding official film-television adaptations to meet their expectations for the sequels of these fan films, which have not been entirely updated. The third type features completely original storylines created by amateurs, using audio-visual materials from official films and TV dramas to present, which also prompts interviewed fan filmgoers to trace related original film and television works.

Characters also help to bring audiences back to the originals. Some professionals in the film and television industry prioritize economic benefits over artistic expression, causing certain actors' performance to lose their intended appeal in official productions (Yang, 2022). Fan creation can provide a fresh perspective that expands the attention on specific characters or celebrities (Kwon, 2015). Through re-editing and reinterpreting the original materials, fans can offer new viewing experiences and discoveries to the audience (Phillips, 2012). Some interviewed fan filmgoers believe that when making casting decisions, fan film producers

prioritize performers' suitability with characters over financial returns. Interviewees A and B also noted that some fan films enhanced the actor's performance in a particular role, resulting in a better fit between the actor and the character. This made the character's motives more convincing and the character more appealing, which ignited the desire of Interviewees A and B to see more of the character in source film-television productions. According to the results of interviews, some fan filmgoers not only found the characters in the fan film fascinating, but also observed the actors' acting abilities in portraying these roles. This new perspective arouses the interest of these interviewed fan filmgoers in the actors' potential to play other characters, leading them to trace the official film and television projects in which the actors have previously appeared.

In addition to attracting viewers to the originals to satisfy their interest in storylines and characters, contrasting storylines and characters with the originals can change audiences' attitudes. Derivative creation allows fans to act as communication intermediaries between producers and consumers of cultural products, playing a role in persuasion (Einwächter, 2014). Derivative creators can persuade audiences through various methods (Thomas, 2011). For example, altering the sequence of original storylines and changing the behavior of characters from the source texts, are common techniques employed by fans in their spin-off works (Kajánková, 2021). Intentionally selecting or modifying certain plots in the original works, as well as eliminating or adjusting any characters that behave illogically in the official productions, can highlight the brilliance of source narratives (Louttit, 2013). The source film-television narratives have been polished by fan creations, improving the audiences' existing impression of the official productions (Phillips, 2012). When it comes to creating contrast, fan creations

not only optimize storylines and characters of existing official film and television productions, but also offer a benchmark for audiences to express their thoughts and feelings about official productions more effectively. For literary and artistic creations like fiction, comics, and games, which have the potential to be adapted into film-television productions, fan works provide a reference for comparison with the official film-television adaptations (Louttit, 2013; Einwachter, 2014).

Fan creations can persuade viewers by drawing comparisons with originals, which is also validated in the interviews with fan filmgoers. Before viewing fan films, some interviewed fan filmgoers had a negative impression of certain official film and television productions. For instance, Interviewee C was initially dissatisfied with the performances of specific actors at the start of some official television dramas and as a result, chose not to watch subsequent episodes. Interviewee F also complained, “I am dissatisfied with the poor character development and illogical event arrangement in this official drama. If professionals want audiences to empathize with a particular character, then the character’s motives and actions must be convincing.” After watching some fan movies, these interviewed fan filmgoers expressed that their dislike towards some official productions decreased, and their opinions about the source texts seemed to change. When asked about the reasons for the shift in mindset, they speculated that it may be because fan films replace actors, rearrange logical order, and supplement event details, providing a kind of contrast to the originals. Additionally, some interviewed fan filmgoers mentioned that by refining previous official film-television materials, fan films helped them revisit the core events of the original works they had previously consumed, strengthening their impression and passion for source texts. Furthermore, Interviewee K used the fan film *The Three-Body*

Problem in Minecraft as the baseline to compare the official adaptations of the science fiction novel *The Three-Body Problem*. He concluded that the official television adaption produced by *Netflix* (a US-based subscription streaming media platform) excelled in special effects but lacked in storytelling, while the adaption produced by *Tencent TV* succeeded in storytelling but failed in special effects.

Audiences of official films and TV dramas have the ability to adopt different identities. Consumers of cultural goods express their attitudes through various methods, and individual consumers unite in resisting the dominant powers (De Certeau, 1984; Lian, 2003). In this way, coalitions of consumers of media products carve out their own spaces (De Certeau, 1984; Barnard, 2004). Participatory culture is a space with low barriers to entry, allowing anyone to engage in creating and sharing (Jenkins, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). Through communication and information exchange, participatory culture facilitates connections between consumers of cultural products and like-minded people (Jenkins, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). Within participatory culture, there are opinion leaders who can influence others' attitudes through their derivative creations (Einwachter, 2014). Sometimes, those with shared interests in participatory culture can establish informal mentorship to impart knowledge and skills, thereby empowering consumers to become producers (Jenkins, 2006; Fuchs, 2014). Moving among multiple identities is also a skill required for greater creativity and discoveries in participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009a).

The fluidity of identity is supported by participant observation and in-depth interviews. Both fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers who were interviewed, are the consumers of official film-television productions. There is a significant overlap between these fan filmgoers'

consumption preferences for official film-television works and fan films. By watching fan films, fan filmgoers build connections with fan filmmakers, and often share their ideas in the comments sections of certain fan movies. As Interviewee D stated, being an enthusiast of the *Harry Potter* series, she actively seeks spin-off films to continue her passions and leaves comments under these derivative creations. In addition, some interviewed fan filmgoers indicated that continuous exposure to and long-term immersion in fan movies gradually cultivated their enthusiasm and loyalty to the original movies and TV dramas, transforming them from normal audiences into fans. After becoming devotees, these fan filmgoers indicated that they might also create subsidiary video works, thus transitioning into fan filmmakers. Interviewee J, a student majoring in animation, revealed that despite being a fan filmgoer, he also has an idea for making a fan film. Identity shifts also occurred in some interviewed fan filmmakers. For example, with the encouragement of an experienced fan-movie creator, Interviewee 9 went from being a fan filmgoer to a fan filmmaker. Additionally, Interviewee 8 disclosed that she once worked as an official film-television producer and now creates fan films in her spare time. In this context, identity transformation can not only happen within the fan-film realm but also at the intersection between the fan-film field and other domains.

In general, based on participant observation and in-depth interviews, fan films have persuasive effects on fan filmgoers. After watching fan movies, fan filmgoers are likely to trace the corresponding official productions and compare the fan films with the source texts. During the process of tracing and comparing, fan filmgoers' previous judgment about original works will be changed. More specifically speaking, through different storylines and captivating characters, fan movies may capture the interest of viewers and motivate them to find the

originals. By enhancing storylines and characters, as well as offering reference perspectives for evaluating films and TV dramas, fan films can positively influence audiences' opinions about the original works.

Cooperative Mechanisms: Understanding and Compromise

There are numerous considerations when fans collaborate with industry practitioners. Consumers of cultural products can resist cultural hegemony using various approaches (De Certeau, 1984; Barnard, 2004). The collective actions of repressed consumers may influence the decisions made by cultural authorities (De Certeau, 1984; Lian, 2003). Convergence culture enables collaboration between grassroots entities and enterprises, but the two do not have equal power in cooperation (Fuchs, 2014; Jenkins, 2014). Participatory culture necessitates the ability to negotiate, which involves recognizing and understanding others' needs and developing practical solutions for cooperation (Jenkins, 2009a). However, there are instances where companies may exploit fans' efforts instead of providing them with fair compensation (Stanfill & Condis, 2014; Fuchs, 2014). Based on the analysis of in-depth interviews in the previous two sections, it has been evident that fan filmmakers are dedicated followers of official film and television works. Moreover, exposure to fan movies can potentially influence fan filmgoers to watch and reassess official film and television works. Considering the persuasive impact of fan movies, industry practitioners approached some interviewed fan filmmakers to promote official productions. However, Interviewee 6 shared a disappointing experience, where the video platforms that had initially extended invitations removed her and her friends' fan films under the pretext of copyright protection once their spin-off works no longer boosted the

platforms' viewership. These fan filmmakers did not receive any deserved remuneration and were accused of copyright infringement. Many interviewed fan filmgoers expressed anger and frustration upon hearing similar stories of official producers taking advantage of fan filmmakers. According to the interviewees, to replicate the success of the case *An Ancient Love Song*, and establish long-term mutually beneficial partnerships, understanding and compromise are still needed.

Official film and television producers have two primary concerns regarding fan-generated derivative works (Lerner, 2018; Stanfill & Condis, 2014). The first consideration revolves around the intention behind the creation. There is often apprehension that fan creations are purely driven by profit (Lerner, 2018). For instance, there was a high-budget fan film called *Prelude to Axanar* that launched a crowdfunding campaign for production, but the allocation of the raised funds came into question during the audit (Lerner, 2018). In addition, official practitioners are wary that some derivative works are crafted to convey sarcasm and defamation rather than genuine admiration, leading audiences to form negative opinions about the original works (Jamar & Glenn, 2014). The second consideration pertains to creativity. Some professionals worry about losing the audiences that official productions rightfully deserve because fan creations replicate certain elements of the originals (Romanenkova, 2014). Furthermore, some official creators believe that certain innovative fan creations deviate excessively from the source texts, resulting in audiences' misreading of the original film and television works (Russo, 2009). Interviewees empathized with the concerns of official producers. Some interviewed fan filmmakers admitted that there indeed existed some authors of spin-off works who participated in non-derivative competitions on video platforms to gain

popularity and attract advertisers. When asked why some industry professionals oppose fan films, some interviewed fan filmmakers speculated that, by viewing fan movies that closely mimic the originals, audiences may become familiar with the main events in the official film-television works and subsequently lose curiosity about the source materials.

Fan creators acknowledge the concerns of official producers and also seek understanding from them. Most derivative creators are motivated by deep enthusiasm but maintain objectivity when reworking official works (Jenkins, 2013; Phillips, 2012). When evaluating authoritative film-television works and the perspectives on these official productions, audiences have their own autonomy (Falero, 2016). Any fan creations that simply replicate significant portions of original works without adding creativity will face resistance within the fandom (Romanenkova, 2014). The variations in fan creations from the original texts can be viewed as multiple reinterpretations by audiences of official film and television works, because fan creators are viewers using derivative production to express their attitudes towards official productions (Jenkins, 2013). Additionally, to enhance storytelling, fan producers have strived to gather suitable audio-visual materials from official productions (Jenkins, 2013). Nevertheless, fan creators are still unable to make their derivative narratives strictly consistent with the originals due to the lack of expertise and professional equipment (Fuchs, 2014; Jenkins, 2014).

Fan creators' justifications are substantiated during the interviews. Firstly, with respect to their creative motives, many interviewed fan filmmakers emphasized that they develop derivative works as a way to express their love and regret. These interviewed fan filmmakers have invested significant personal resources in making spin-off movies, despite the limited economic returns and the inability to recoup production costs. Regarding concerns about

whether fan films constitute mockery and slander towards the originals, most interviewed fan filmmakers believe that audiences can form their own judgment by tracing the source texts and comparing fan creations with official productions. Through tracing and comparison, official film and television works can still reach their intended audiences. Secondly, in terms of creativity, interviewed fan filmmakers concur that mechanically copying official productions without substantive creative input, such as merely altering background music or adjusting color grading, should be prohibited. However, interviewed fan filmmakers advocate for the leniency of authorities when fan films diverge from the source narratives, as their subsidiary creations embody the diversity of viewers' opinions. Fan filmgoers, Interviewees C and J, also support the idea that industry practitioners should permit audiences to express attitudes toward official productions by making or watching fan films. Additionally, some interviewed fan filmmakers expressed a hope for audiences and official producers to understand that fan movies sometimes stray from the original texts, not because creators intentionally change them, but due to limited resources during derivative creation.

The collaboration between fan creators and official producers can be mutually beneficial. For industry practitioners, fan creations can help official productions attract and retain audiences (Einwachter, 2014). Considering the influence of fan movies, some film-television copyright parties have launched derivative creation competitions on video-sharing websites or invited fan creators to upload spin-off productions to the official online broadcasting platforms (Tencent TV, 2022; Li, 2023). Moreover, the innovative storylines and unique storytelling of certain fan creations can provide valuable reference schemes for the production of official works (Louttit, 2013; Einwachter, 2014). The participation of fan creators can also bring new

breakthroughs to official film-television creation (Stein & Busse, 2009; Helens-Hart, 2014; Liang & Shen, 2016). For the authors of derivative works, the intersection of participatory culture and convergence culture offers amateurs the opportunity to become professionals (Jenkins, 2009a; Evans et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2022). Numerous examples demonstrate the successful transition from derivative creators to professionals (Coppa, 2006).

Interviewees expressed agreement on the potential benefits of the collaboration between fan creators and official producers. Many interviewed fan filmgoers mentioned that fan films could not only help them discover official films and television series they had not seen before, but also strengthen their passion for the original works. Given the promotional effects of fan films, half of the interviewed fan filmmakers shared that they had received commercial cooperation invitations from some advertising companies, requiring them to craft content for designated official film and television works and offering them remuneration. Furthermore, some interviewed fan filmmakers disclosed that some professional promotion teams bought out media accounts of fan film creators with large followings to produce and distribute official content. Certain interviewed fan filmgoers indicated that they were loyal viewers of some fan filmmakers due to these creators' pioneering ideas and novelty narrative perspectives, which prompted them to revisit corresponding official film and television productions. These fan filmgoers suggested that if authoritative practitioners embraced some creative proposals from spin-off movies, official film-television works stuck in traditional patterns would attract larger audiences beyond their current viewers. Other interviewed fan filmgoers believed that fan filmmakers could become talent reserves for professional film-television production teams by participating in the entire official creation process. Some interviewed fan filmmakers also

expressed their desire to learn more specialized knowledge and skills from professionals, with the goal of transitioning from amateurs to full-time personnel in the film and television industry. However, most interviewed fan filmmakers noted that official teams with cooperative purposes generally sought their help in promoting already released works, but very few approached them for co-creating new film and television stories.

The collaboration between official practitioners and fan creators in film-television production is minimal due to unresolved demands. Some professionals insist that out of respect and risk control, fan creators should seek authorization from the corresponding copyright owners before starting spin-off productions (Walliss, 2010; Zhu, 2021a; Zhu, 2021b). However, there is a growing awareness that the rights and status of derivative creators are unequal compared with official production teams (Fuchs, 2014; Jenkins, 2014). In addition, there are instances where official teams leverage fans' enthusiasm to work for free (Stanfill & Condis, 2014). Interviewees also shared their perspectives on these issues. Many interviewed fan filmmakers disclosed that they often seek authorization from novel writers but seldom do so from film-television copyright owners for authorization when creating derivative films. According to these fan filmmakers, it is easier for them to find and contact fiction authors than official producers. This is because fan filmmakers and novel authors are usually individuals, whereas official producers are affiliated with teams or companies. As a result, negotiating terms of cooperation with novel authors is simpler than with official producers, given the diverse stakeholders involved. When empathizing with official producers, interviewees agree that professionals may face challenges when seeking potential partners in the fan-film field, as verifying the originality of fan-movie originators requires time and discernment. Since fan-film

producers are spread across various platforms, efficiently identifying high-quality fan-movie creators in large numbers is difficult. However, many interviewed fan filmmakers also stated that it is hard for individuals to protect their own interests because of insufficient resources when cooperating with large media teams and companies.

Based on the requirements of official film and television producers and fan film creators, both sides can improve understanding and reach a compromise in the following aspects. Communication and information flows are essential in participatory culture and convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006; 2009a). Many enterprises have also made significant efforts to promote cooperation with fan-creation authors (Helens-Hart, 2014; Fung, 2019; Yeloshyna, 2021; Tencent TV, 2022; Li, 2023). Concerning the limited resources, fan creators need to be protected when interacting with enterprises (Chatelain, 2012). According to participant observation, in-depth interviews, and prior analysis, it is imperative to establish a channel where fan filmmakers can find and contact the authoritative film-television production teams and decision-makers. As Interviewee J suggested, constructing an integrated platform for industry practitioners to discover high-quality fan films and their creators is indispensable. These bridges for acquiring and exchanging information can be jointly built by video-sharing platforms, film and television works copyright holders, and social media supporting video uploading. Three interested parties can open fan film creation columns in their own space and are responsible for obtaining and updating batches of authorization from the copyright owners of official films and TV dramas. Fan films and official productions, whether previously released or newly aired, should be attached with the reliable and effective contact information of their producers, accompanied by application components with instant messaging functions.

When negotiating interests with the authorities, a team that can provide derivative creators with financial, legal, and psychological support should be established to represent fan filmmakers. This team can be an autonomous association of fan-film originators, or a non-profit website management group dedicated to the production and distribution of fan films.

By and large, through participant observation and in-depth interviews, fan filmmakers and official film-television producers could find common ground. Regarding creative intentions and the level of creativity, both sides need to empathize with each other's concerns and rationales, fostering mutual understanding. Considering the impact of distribution and production, both sides might be advised to address unmet needs and be open to making changes for potential benefits, which can lead to mutual compromise. In such a harmonious atmosphere, official film and television productions can effectively attract and retain viewers.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Among the three research questions in this study, the answers presented in the previous chapter to the first two questions are relatively comprehensive, while the responses to the third question are somewhat inadequate. The first two research questions aim to investigate the activity trajectories and behavior logics of fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers, which can be elaborated through the observation of fan films and interviews with fan-movie producers and audiences. However, the third research question is how producers of fan films cooperate with official film and television to attract and retain audiences' attention, which encompasses not only fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers, but also other participants. It is essential to gather constructive insights and cooperation suggestions by studying fan movies and interviewing fan-film creators and viewers. Involving additional stakeholders in this process also needs to be considered.

Lacking exploration of other contributors in the fan film field, particularly official film and television producers, may be addressed through further discussion about convergence culture. Although this study provides a detailed analysis of participatory culture through the production and consumption of fan films, it does not delve deeply enough into convergence culture. The insufficiency of clarifying convergence culture generates some doubts about how grassroots entities and enterprises collaborate in the creation and distribution of derivative movies. With the evolution of technology, these queries will be amplified, and fan films will encounter more opportunities and challenges arising from convergence culture.

This chapter discusses the limitations and implications of this study and proposes some

directions for future research. The limitations mainly stem from the lack of diversity among stakeholders participating in the development of fan films. The implications center on convergence culture influenced by rapid technological advancements, providing inspiration for the future of fan films. Based on the limitations and implications, future research can further explore the Chinese context. Investigating the historical development of Chinese media and copyright, and how they have influenced Chinese fan culture, would enhance this study's analysis. Additionally, conducting case studies on more Chinese fan films would not only complement this qualitative research methodologically, but more clearly demonstrate the significant findings of this study.

Limitations: Limited diversity of stakeholders

The typical drawback of convenience sampling lies in the homogeneity of interviewees (Leiner, 2014). Since the interviewees are selected from my personal networks in the fan film communities of *Bilibili* and *Lofter*, these creators and viewers may resemble me in terms of film and television interests and industry cognition. Although I have attempted to avoid making broad generalizations in presenting findings, similar viewpoints of potentially homogeneous interviewees may cause an overgeneralization of some opinions about fan films. For example, the way fan-film creators express their attitude toward official film-television works, as well as the cognition of fan-film viewers about the relationship between fan filmmakers and official film-television producers, may not be fully explored. This lack of exploration suggests that other subjects of interest deserve to be interviewed, such as the fan filmmakers who are erratic and do not stay in the fan film field for long. Moreover, beyond the scope of the producers and

consumers of fan films, the groups that dominate the production of cultural products and can influence the rulemaking of fan films are also suitable interviewees.

Some fan filmmakers are active for a while and leave the derivative video production field after some time. Some fan-movie creators who left fan creation groups become industry practitioners. This parallels the scenario where science fiction fan authors became screenwriters for official Sci-Fi films and TV series (Coppa, 2006). Interviewee L suggests, “Fan filmmakers may approach some film-television companies, animation companies, or game companies for work. Many fan painters choose to work for well-known animation companies after gaining fame through derivative creations. There are numerous such cases, especially in Japan.” Other fan-film originators do not come back for personal reasons, as mentioned by Interviewee 6. Although there will be newcomers joining, the departure of some experienced fan film creators is still regrettable to many interviewed fan filmgoers. Because producers of subsidiary film-television works come and go, the creation of fan movies seems to remain within a certain range and not expand. This dynamic balance makes fan film creation always a minority and non-mainstream in the views of Interviewee 12. Therefore, as Interviewee G implied, establishing an exclusive and dedicated platform for the creation and distribution of fan films may consolidate existing participants, but may not attract more people from the general public. Interviewing former fan movie producers who have left the spin-off film creation field may provide inspiration for increasing the popularity and recognition of fan films.

The attitude of official movie and television producers concerning the creation of fan films is elusive. Although fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers speculate in interviews about the

thoughts of professional practitioners based on available clues, it is vague whether these assumptions are accurate and comprehensive. In the opinion of interviewees, much remains unknown about the viewpoints of authoritative film and television creators. For instance, they are curious about the professionalism that official film and television practitioners recognize. They also wonder whether creative ideas and professional norms will conflict with each other in the physical practice of the film-television industry. Their inquiries pertain to a central debate: whether the production of movie and television works should cater to existing audiences or should create a new trend for the viewers to follow (Jenkins, 2018; Wang, 2018). In addition, lack of transparency in the official film-television production process, such as how the directors communicate with actors or why editors keep or delete certain footage, has made their audiences lose some trust in the official works and industry practitioners (Canella, 2024). These problems need to be addressed by the authoritative film and television production teams.

In general, fan films involve a variety of stakeholders. It is not enough to just interview fan-movie creators and the audiences of derivative video creations, there is a lot more to explore.

Implications: Rapid development of technology

The continued development of *Web 3.0* and the rise of *Web 4.0* have greatly influenced the direction of fan movies. *Web 3.0* breaks the media landscape dominated by official professional organizations and gives different interest bodies and individuals the opportunity to present their own works (Gan et al., 2023). However, at the same time, the decentralized structure of *Web 3.0* has also led to fragmentation (Wang et al., 2023). This fragmentation is not only reflected in creators but also in content, and the short video is the product of such

fragmentation (Liu et al., 2022). The short video will play a considerable role in the creation and future changes of official film-television works and fan movies, which is also indicated by some interviewees. *Web 4.0* allows computers with artificial intelligence to handle problems independently (Nath & Iswary, 2015). These highly intelligent machines have been involved in the ability to think and create, which were previously dominated by humans (Nath & Iswary, 2015). During interviews, several fan filmmakers emphasized that thinking and creativity are the most irreplaceable aspects in the production of films. Whether this intervention caused by *Web 4.0* will harm or help producers of official movie and television works and fan filmmakers remains to be further discussed.

Short videos may have an impact on fan films as well as official film and television productions. Short videos can be very short, usually under 15 seconds (Guinaudeau et al., 2022). By contrast, this is a big shock and challenge for fan films, which often take 10 minutes or more to clearly tell a story (Lerner, 2018; Li, 2015; Young, 2008; Walliss, 2010). When audiences have formed short video viewing habits and preferences, it is difficult to guarantee that they will have enough patience to watch a 10-minute fan movie (Zhang, 2020). Fan-film creators may feel less motivated if viewership declines, leading to a decrease in the grassroots entities' willingness to express their opinions through derivative creation while combating media organizations for discursive power. In essence, technological advancements may not always bring about cultural democratization (Jenkins, 2014). However, from the perspective of interviewee 9, if fan movies are considered the result of the impact of short videos on official films and TV series, the future of derivative video creations seems less pessimistic. Fan films can provide a condensed and improved proposal to urge official film and television productions

with a large number of episodes to avoid redundancy. This effect of fan movies is also one of the reasons why most fan filmgoers mentioned in interviews that they love fan films. Moreover, fan movies are concise, complete, and innovative in their narratives, and they hold significant references for official film and television works in production, setting them apart from traditional trailers made for publicity.

Technology will impact not only the distribution and promotion of film and television works, but also their production. Both fan film creators and official movie and television producers need to think of the challenges of AI (artificial intelligence) generative tools. First, it is important to investigate whether AI tools utilizing existing official film and television works for derivative video creations have gotten authorization from corresponding copyright holders. If not authorized, there will be a question about the attitudes of professional film and television production teams towards the companies that own these AI tools (Kavitha, 2024). It is also worth pondering whether these attitudes will be the same as those of official practitioners towards fan filmmakers, which may answer whether people should trust in technological determinism and consumer capitalism (Jenkins, 2014). If authorized, the terms of cooperation negotiated between official film-television producers and the decision-makers of AI generative tool companies are unclear (Kavitha, 2024). Both sides' treatment of individuals and groups using AI tools for creation remains uncertain as well. Second, there is a need for a clear statement on whether using AI tools in film and television production should be embraced or encouraged (Chow, 2020). Some official film and television companies have attempted to establish their own AI generative models to improve their working efficiency (Chow, 2020). Some fan movie creators are trying to use AI tools to generate audio-visual materials that can

be inserted into their derivative films (Chow, 2020). These examples are worth studying in the future. Third, further research should be conducted to determine the extent to which existing official film and television works are integrated into the process of AI content generation (Smith et al., 2017). If such a probe is feasible and credible, it is plausible to ascertain the level of innovation in fan films and the extent to which they appropriate official film and television works.

In a word, in the environment of *Web 3.0*, the short video can provide a new approach to thinking for the development of fan films. Under the influence of *Web 4.0*, the emergence of AI can bring new insights for official film and television producers when re-examining fan movies.

Future research: Further exploration of the Chinese context

People's actions are constrained by their context (Roccas & Sagiv, 2010; Elias, 2010). The behaviors of fan-movie creators and viewers are influenced by cultural policies. Fan films, similar to fan fiction and fan videos, often face controversies due to the appropriation of official texts. This media practice, known as textual poaching, frequently leads to copyright disputes. Media and copyright policies play a crucial role in shaping the actions of fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers. Therefore, the ban announced in April 2021 by Chinese film and television organizations (Zhu, 2021b), and the 2022 invitation issued by film-television copyright holders and video platforms (Li, 2023), present a dilemma for fan films. To fully understand the significance and possibilities of fan films, it is insufficient to just study the producers and consumers of fan films within Chinese participatory culture. Further examining the history of

Chinese media and copyright development is also required. Historical research on media and copyright in China responds to the lack of diversity of stakeholders interviewed for this study. On the one hand, changes in media and copyright policies may explain why some fan-film creators have left the fan-film field. On the other hand, media and copyright policies of different periods can reflect the wavering attitudes and views of policymakers towards fan films.

The impact of Chinese media and copyright policies on fan films can be traced back to their influence on fan culture. Fan fiction, fan videos, and fan films are all products of fan culture (Coppa, 2013). The stance of media and copyright policies towards fan fiction and fan videos has evolved from opposition to an endorsement of fair use (Chatelain, 2012; Phillips, 2012), and even to the active integration of fan creation into official productions (Yeloshyna, 2021; Helens-Hart, 2014). This evolution can provide insights into the current situation and future development of fan films. When historically reviewing Chinese media and copyright policies, exploring their impacts on fan culture will provide valuable context for this study's analysis of fan-film producers and consumers.

Chinese media and copyright authorities actively incorporate fan culture into official productions, demonstrating the characteristics of convergence culture. Convergence culture involves collaboration between media professionals and amateurs to create and promote cultural products (Jenkins, 2006). This collaboration is made possible by the advancements in media technology (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). The progression from fan fiction to fan videos, and to fan films is closely linked to improvements in media. With the influence of *Web 3.0* and *Web 4.0*, fan films will confront more opportunities and challenges. In addition to investigating the history of Chinese media and copyright and its impact on fan culture, adding more case

studies on Chinese fan films, such as *An Ancient Love Song*, may give inspiration to the cooperation between the grassroots entities and enterprises in the films and television industry.

Incorporating more case studies in future research will yield numerous benefits. Case studies can methodologically complement this qualitative research by illustrating the actions and motivations of fan filmmakers and filmgoers. Analyzing the storylines, character relationships, or special effects of a specific Chinese fan film will clearly demonstrate how fan-film producers express their attitudes toward the originals. Furthermore, analyzing the comments section of a specific Chinese fan film will directly reveal how fan-film consumers compare the official work with the fan film. Case studies can also address the implications of rapid technological development, proposing suggestions for potential collaborations between fan films and official productions. Facing the impact of short videos, fan film cases that are still highly reputable in China can become potential partners and provide insights for official productions on how to navigate the influence of short-form content. Moreover, regarding AI generative tools, fan film cases that utilize these tools can serve as a pilot test for integrating such tools into Chinese film and television production. Conversely, fan film cases that exhibit high creativity and clearly reject using AI-generative tools can offer strategic references for official producers who prioritize unique human creations over mechanized industrial production.

For future research, in short, it is necessary to further explore the Chinese context to deepen the analysis and important findings of this study. This entails studying the history of Chinese media and copyright development and its influence on Chinese fan culture. Additionally, more Chinese fan films should be included for case studies.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Combined with the research background and literature review, I put forward three questions for fan films. The first question involves how fan-film creators are rethinking official film and television productions. The second question concerns how fan-movie viewers treat official film and television works. The third question is about how fan-film creators collaborate with official film and television teams. To figure out these questions, this research performed participant observation and conducted in-depth interviews, to elaborate on current operational procedures of fan films and analyze the practices and thoughts of fan film producers and audiences. By analyzing the data obtained from the preceding two methods, this article has the following findings.

Fan filmmakers create fan films to express their love and regret regarding official productions. Fan filmmakers have both passion and dissatisfaction with official film and television works, so they produce fan films to show their attitudes towards professional producers and make mental adjustments. Fan filmmakers extend the time and space of the originals or create a parallel universe in derivative movies to extend their love for existing official works. They also replace disliked parts of official storylines with their own expected plots in fan films to make up for their disappointments about the originals. For official film-television productions adapted from other media works, fan filmmakers create fan films to criticize these adaptations for drastically altering the original storylines and adding unnecessary characters. Despite the official creators' subjectivity or compliance with Chinese censorship, fan filmmakers believe that following the majority of original storylines is the basis for

adaptations. Fan films also provide references for literary and artistic works with the potential to be adapted into film-television works. Many official film and television works are stereotypical, favoring deviation from reality in the settings and emotional entanglements in the themes, which cause aesthetic fatigue in viewers. Facing this situation, fan filmmakers have created fan films reflecting realistic concerns and individual growth based on personal experience and past media consumption, which bring innovation to storylines. Characters can also be intermediaries to demonstrate fan filmmakers' love for original storylines or directly become objects of love for fan filmmakers. In reviewing original storylines, fan filmmakers deepen their understanding of characters and increase their love for characters. Additionally, some fan filmmakers love certain characters because of the corresponding actors or their own empathy with the characters. Fan filmmakers can also make replacements when their favorite characters interact with disliked characters or are played by unsuitable actors. Fan filmmakers' attitudes towards the originals can be more precisely expressed through audio-visual elements. The emphasis on costumes, makeup, props, scenes, special effects, and dubbing is related to the previous activities and media consumption of fan filmmakers and necessitates the teamwork skills of fan filmmakers.

Fan films can pique fan filmgoers' interest, which prompts them to keep track of the corresponding official film and television works. Additionally, fan films can offer comparisons with official productions to shape fan filmgoers' viewpoints. Both fan filmgoers and fan filmmakers are consumers of official movies and TV shows. Instead of creating derivative works, fan filmgoers prefer to express their thoughts and feelings toward official productions through intentional viewing. However, tracing fan films and comparing them with official

productions can also influence the attitudes of fan filmgoers. When it comes to the storylines of fan films, the extension of official narratives, the adaptation of other media works, and the creation of innovative storylines using official audio-visual materials can attract the attention of fan filmgoers, leading these viewers to trace the corresponding original works. In terms of character portrayal, fan films can restructure the materials of official productions to enhance the performance of actors in specific roles. This allows fan filmgoers to discover the allure of these characters and the further potential of the actors. This can motivate fan filmgoers to trace the corresponding original works. Fan movies can improve fan filmgoers' attitudes toward official productions by creating contrast with the originals through adjusted storylines and characters. Moreover, fan films provide a benchmark for evaluating official film and television works, enabling fan filmgoers to assess official works more accurately. Further, within the fan film community, fan filmgoers can have diverse identities and the potential to transition into fan filmmakers. The shifts in identity may even extend from the realm of fan films to the domain of official film and television productions.

To achieve collaboration between fan filmmakers and official film-television producers, both parties should understand each other's concerns and reach compromises based on mutual benefits. Many considerations in cooperation necessitate understanding and compromise. Official producers worry about the intentions and originality of fan films. In response, fan filmmakers express empathy and provide justifications, hoping for the understanding of official producers. Fan movies are not profit-oriented and are only used to express fan filmmakers' love and regret for official productions. As to whether fan films satirize or denigrate official productions, audiences have their own judgment when tracing the source texts of fan films and

comparing fan films with the originals. Fans tend to criticize fan films that are mere imitations of the originals, but they welcome innovative fan films that offer diverse perspectives. Moreover, the deviation from the source materials is sometimes caused by fan filmmakers' limited resources. Aside from these considerations, fan filmmakers and official producers recognize the potential benefits of collaboration. Fan films can assist official works in the promotion and bringing new inspiration for storytelling. Fan filmmakers can learn expertise from professionals, thus having the potential to become official producers. Nevertheless, challenges in obtaining authorization from official film-television teams and finding creative fan filmmakers prevent fan filmmakers from collaborating with official producers on production. In addition, issues related to protecting individual rights arise due to the power imbalance when working with official production teams. Given these difficulties, it is crucial to establish an integrated platform for fan films, which is responsible for the collective authorization of official film and television works and supports online instant communication. Any individuals and groups seeking to collaborate need to leave reliable contact information. Furthermore, a team that can defend fan filmmakers' rights is needed to negotiate the terms of cooperation with official producers.

The study has some limitations and future research possibilities. In terms of interview subjects, apart from fan filmmakers and fan filmgoers, interviews can also be conducted with fan movie creators who left the fan film field, as well as official film and television producers. Regarding technological advancement, how fan films cope with the influence of short videos and the intervention of AI tools in creation is a problem worth investigating. To gain more insights within the Chinese context, the history of Chinese media and copyright development,

along with its influence on Chinese fan culture, should be further investigated. Moreover, including more Chinese fan films as case studies can provide valuable contributions.

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