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Underdetermined Globalization:
Media Consumption via P2P Networks

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So far, research on media and globalization has focused mainly on the global circulation of media products through formal channels. Few works study the distribution and consumption of media content via informal and sometimes illegal routes such as peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing. This study analyzes the Chinese online volunteer community of Zimuzu—Internet-based groups that translate foreign media content into Chinese subtitles—to explore the cultural significance of creative media consumption via P2P networks. This article lays out the theoretical framework for understanding power on digital networks to try to capture the power relations at the institutional and individual levels. It examines Zimuzu by looking at (a) the operation of Zimuzu within the Chinese context of media market and state regulation; and (b) how Zimuzu localize Western media content through their subtitle translations. My findings attempt to situate this study in debates on media consumption in a global networked society.

Introduction

Research on media and globalization to date has focused mainly on the global circulation of media products through formal channels. Few works study the distribution and consumption of media content via such informal and sometimes illegal routes as peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing. In discussions of the rise or decline of Western media dominance (Fuchs, 2010; Jin, 2007; Miller, Govil, McMurria, & Maxwell, 2001; Tunstall, 2008) or studies of transnational media consumption and identity formation

(Donald & Keane, 2002; Kim, 2010; Morley, 2000; Strelitz, 2004), it is usually taken for granted that large-scale distribution of media content can only be institution based, whether public or private. With the diffusion of networked digital technologies significantly reducing the entry barriers to the media market, this default understanding begs revision.

Nowadays, digital networks do not simply facilitate media flow across borders; they are problematizing and reconfiguring dichotomies—global/local, commodity/commons, consumer/producer—in the process. What happens when content circulating via networks circumvents national regulations such as import quotas or censorship? What if media products in their digital format are treated as both commodities and common cultural resources? What is implied when media consumption involves the creation of new content? These are broad questions to which there are no simple answers; however, they are crucial for understanding the dynamics between media and globalization in the changing technological environment.

To explore the cultural significance of creative media consumption via P2P networks, this study analyzes a case at the juncture of the aforementioned issues: the Chinese online volunteer community of Zimuzu ("subtitle groups" in Chinese), which are Internet-based groups that translate foreign media content into Chinese-subtitled content. The relevance of the Zimuzu case is related to its unique positioning in the global media products market. First, the content that Zimuzu subtitle and share does not comply with either Chinese censorship or copyright regulations. In other words, the Zimuzu community functions in a grey area, in the shadow of state-sanctioned and market-based media consumption. Second, Zimuzu production is conducted within a decentralized organization, and the translated subtitles are distributed for free. This contrasts with commercial media companies, which mostly are organized hierarchically for decision making and which produce commodities for market exchange. Third, through their voluntary subtitling work, Zimuzu are simultaneously promoting the popularity of Western media products and undermining the commercial logic of transnational media companies.

These characteristics of Zimuzu compel participants constantly to negotiate the meaning of their activities, which, in turn, results in multiple dimensions of their subjectivity. Drawing upon the Foucauldian notion of power (Foucault, 1980) and on Castells' (2009) analysis of information networks, this article examines the practices and discourses of Zimuzu as an articulation of the various forces at play on the Chinese Internet. It lays out the theoretical framework for understanding power on digital networks to capture the power relations at the institutional and individual levels. This study then provides an overview of the Zimuzu operation by linking it to the Chinese context of media market and state regulation. The main body of analysis focuses on (a) the operation of Zimuzu within the Chinese context of media market and state regulation; and (b) how Zimuzu localize Western media content through their subtitle translations. During this process, participants negotiate different and sometimes contradictory dimensions of their identities. The findings situate this study in debates on media consumption in a global networked society.

"Underdetermination" and Power in Digital Networks

Building upon the Althusserian notion of *overdetermination* (Althusser, 1969), Mark Poster (1999) uses the term *underdetermination* to theorize the cultural significance of the Internet. For Althusser, overdetermination is the conjuncture of multiple causes of a social political symptom and concerns the unity of phenomena in their contradictions. In other words, social change cannot be explained by a single causality, but rather is the outcome of several contradictions. Poster (1999) goes a step further in referring to the complexity and indeterminateness of certain social objects in a virtual setting:

> Not only are these objects formed by distinct practices, discourses and institutional frames, each of which participates in and exemplifies the contradictions of capitalism and the nation state, but they are open to practice; they do not direct agents into clear paths; they solicit instead social construction and cultural creation. (p. 16)

The implication of this underdetermination is that the modernist conception of the instrumental-rational subject is deconstructed in the age of networked digital communication. Previously separate categories—time/space, subject/object, human/machine, mind/body, among others—have become entangled and their significations fluid. The concept of underdetermination sheds light on Zimuzu practice, because it opens up multiple sites of inquiry by accounting for the mediating role of digital networks at the micro and macro levels.

While underdetermination helps to conceptualize the mediating role of digital networks at different levels, it is not a sufficiently analytical tool to dissect the power relationships in a given network. Inasmuch as meaning in digital networks is open to practice, it is important to examine how the practice is configured and how this produces new closures and social norms. As a production and communication network, the functioning of Zimuzu is best captured by the Foucauldian notion of power. In contrast to theories that conceptualize power as a form of domination possessed by a sovereign entity, Foucault (1980) contends that power is relational and productive. Power, according to Foucault,

> must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. . . . [Individuals] are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (p. 98)

The exercise of power does not only bring repression, it also generates pleasure, knowledge, and discourse; therefore, it "needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

Further, for individuals entangled in a web of power relationships, their subjectivity is formed during—rather than preceding—the exercise of power. It is within various discursive apparatuses that "divide, classify and inscribe body differently in their respective regimes of power and 'truth'" that the

subject emerges (Hall, 2001, p. 78). Zimuzu are subject to the regulatory power of the institutional arrangements of the Chinese media market, which not only sets the parameters for Zimuzu activities but also disciplines members, at the discursive level, in terms of how they make sense of their participation. This power, though, is a generative rather than a repressive force because it gives rise to efforts by Zimuzu to seek greater autonomy in daily media consumption through their own creative activities. At the discursive level, Zimuzu appropriate various strategies to negotiate norms and legal frameworks related to digital content in a networked environment. In the course of this process, their positioning in the digital networks shifts, generating new power dynamics.

Partly informed by Foucault's conception of power, Castells (2009) emphasizes power dynamics through "the construction of meaning on the basis of discourse" in network society (p. 10). He identifies four forms of power in networks: (a) networking power as the power that actors in global networks exert over those excluded from the network; (b) network power as the power of network protocols, which are the basic rules of the game for anyone included in the network; (c) networked power as "the form of power exercised by certain nodes over other nodes within the network" (p. 419); and (d) most importantly, network-making power wielded by the "actors and networks of actors" (p. 47) with the capacity to set up and program a network. It is not always easy to demarcate the boundaries between different forms of power for two main reasons: First, the relationships between actors and networks change depending on the focus of analysis. For example, an actor that is part of one network may be excluded from another, or a node that is powerful in one network may be only peripheral in another. Second, networks are dynamic, meaning that power shifts as tensions continuously emerge and subside.

This typology of network power is useful for mapping the conflicts and contradictions external and internal to the Zimuzu network that rearticulate the relationship between local and the global through the interconnection with other networks. To be sure, Zimuzu are not an entirely unique phenomenon; fan-subtitle (*fansub*) groups that translate and share Japanese anime have attracted more scholarly attention than have their Chinese counterparts (e.g., Denison, 2011a, 2011b; Lee, 2010, 2011; Leonard, 2005). Although Zimuzu have a similar work flow and a similar quasi-legal status in terms of their relationship with copyright regulation, one of the features that distinguishes this case from anime fandom is the institutional context of the development of Zimuzu. In the specific Chinese environment where formal media channels are heavily regulated but copyright enforcement is rather lax, P2P file sharing opens up a third communication space between the market and the state. However, this third space is connected to, rather than being autonomous of, market and state, both of which play important roles in shaping the trajectory of Zimuzu. Instead of labeling Zimuzu participants as fans, I observe how their subjectivity is constructed through Zimuzu activities. The ways that Zimuzu members relate to digital content, to their fellow participants, and to the global media industries are underdetermined and contingent upon their practices.

The empirical evidence for this study comes from 18 interviews conducted face-to-face and online, thematic analysis of 400 online posts, and online observation over a period of 6 months. The first two sources provide information, mainly from the participants' perspectives, on practices and perceptions. The extensive online observation enhances contextualization and enables triangulation that reduces the potential bias of self-reported data. The data reveal how Zimuzu function as two types of networks: a

production network that interacts with commercial global media industry networks; and a communication network that builds connections and generates meanings. The dynamics of these two functionalities of Zimuzu are well-captured by the Foucauldian notion of generative power.

Multiple Sites of Power Struggle between the Global and the National

Before file sharing gained popularity on the Internet, commercial piracy satisfied Chinese audiences' appetites for foreign media content in the context of a heavily regulated media environment. As broadband services have become more widespread among urban Internet users, P2P file sharing has proven more efficient at delivering programs that respond to audience demand. The shift from pirated VCD and DVD to digital downloading is more than a change in the means of accessing content; it also provides the possibility to reconfigure the power relations among the networks of media industries, state regulators, and audience members who are assuming an active role in the production and distribution processes. Starting in 2001, a unique community of volunteers emerged—the Zimuzu or subtitle groups— that began to translate and release Chinese-subtitled foreign films and TV shows. Four of these Zimuzu groups enjoy high visibility and have a good reputation with fans: YDY, YYeTS, TFL, and 1000FR. These groups command huge foreign language expertise, and they translate content ranging from Hollywood films to BBC documentaries to Japanese animation. Each group numbers between 100 to 200 volunteers, and every translation project is coordinated online via instant messenger such as QQ[2] or MSN. The completed subtitles are released via the groups' own forums, blogs and microblogs. The turnaround time for the most popular shows can be as short as six hours, enabling fans to watch their favorite programs, sometimes on the same day as do their American counterparts.

For the global media industries, the ideal network is one underpinned by maximum copyright protection that applies across countries and by minimum trade barriers in the form of import quotas and subsidies to domestic industries. To establish the ideal global media market network, dominant players in the media industries aggressively lobby policy makers at the national and international level to strengthen copyright regimes and relax trade barriers to audiovisual products (May, 2003; Richards, 2004; Ryan, 1998; Sell, 2003). Being a signatory to the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) agreement—an effort to harmonize IP protection at the global level (Jackson, 2003)—is a prerequisite for any country seeking membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), which promotes the liberalization of international trade. For any country that is a member of the WTO, inadequate protection of international IP rights can result in trade sanctions. For the first time in history, IP issues have become integrated into a global trade agreement. In the process of codifying private interests in public law (Sell, 2003), the linkage between public interest and IP rights is severed, and only the private rights of multinational corporations are recognized.

Hand in hand with seeking favorable institutional arrangements is the network- making power of global media industries at the discursive level. In multilateral trade negotiations (see May, 2003; Richards,

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[2] The most popular instant messaging service in China.

2004), in legal campaigns against copyright infringement (see Boyle, 2003; Lessig, 2004), and in educational materials designed for school children (see Gates, 2006; Gillespie, 2009), copyright issues related to media products are framed as being economic, and they ignore the social and cultural dimensions. The discourses circulating in these spaces prioritize the private interests of copyright owners over the public interests of content users. Consequently, the changes wrought by digital technology on media consumption are seen as a threat to the traditional media industry business model rather than as creating opportunities for consumers (Cammaerts & Meng, 2011).

The two main aspects of network-making power in the global media industries—the ability to establish the rules for global media markets and the capacity to maintain the discourses that serve their interests—are mediated by the Chinese state and by online communities such as Zimuzu. In relation to trade in cultural goods, the party-state needs to protect both the economic interests of the domestic media industry and its own political interests in maintaining ideological control over media content. In fact, given there is no private ownership of mass media in China, the economic and political concerns of the party-state over domestic media are inseparable (Zhao, 2000, 2003). The end result of this power negotiation is less than ideal from the point of view of the global media industries.

First, despite WTO accession, China has retained import quotas for foreign films, which Hollywood considers as a major barrier to accessing the lucrative Chinese market (Landreth, 2009). The broadcasting sector is one of the "forbidden" industries excluded from the WTO-mandated liberalization. Television stations as state-run enterprises are not allowed to absorb foreign investment, although television drama production can accept state, private, and foreign capital (Guo, 2003). In addition, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) further restricted the import of television content after WTO entry by issuing 2004 order No. 42, which emphasizes that television stations need to apply for approval for the import of any foreign content, and that this import will be subject to "close scrutiny" to ensure "healthy content" and "high quality." Approved content is aired only outside the prime time slot of 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (SARFT, 2004).

On the copyright front, where more heavy-handed regulation is desired by global media industries, the power of the Chinese state lies in the lax enforcement of the law rather than in the propagation of new rules. Compared to the somewhat sketchy 1990 Copyright Law of China, the new 2001 Copyright Law substantially upgrades copyright protection in China through a clarification and expansion of legal rights (Feng, 2003). It is the discrepancy between the actual law and its enforcement that causes disgruntlement in the global media industries.

The Chinese government prioritizes censorship over copyright regulation for content on digital networks. Zimuzu are not at the top of the agendas of Chinese regulators, who are more interested in censoring politically sensitive content than in detecting copyright infringements. Also, in cases of copyright law being enforced, domestic rights holders are prioritized over foreign ones. When the economic stakes in domestic media industries' control of copyrighted products are high, the Chinese regulator will step up measures to curb file sharing. For example, when a domestic blockbuster movie is released, it is commonplace for major file sharing sites to receive notices from SARFT demanding that digital copies of the movie should not be made available to file sharers for the next two weeks (YM, manager of Internet

company, personal communication, April 18, 2009). Given that Zimuzu deal only with foreign content, the seemingly accommodating attitude of the state regulator could be due to lack of will rather than to lack of competence.

This is the institutional context of Zimuzu that also exploited the opportunity presented by the technological features of digital networks. To a large extent, the ongoing contestation between the global media industries and the Chinese state over control of the transnational flow of media content is indicative of the difficulty for any single entity to exert such control in a networked digital environment. As the economic and political elites strive for network-making power to define the rules of the game, different kinds of grassroot networks are emerging to try to counterbalance that power, albeit not necessarily on an equal footing. Zimuzu, as an example of online collaborative production, comprise one such network.

Zimuzu as a Production Network

Foucault's conceptualization of power as a generative and circulating force is helpful for capturing the ambivalent, oftentimes underdetermined, relationship among Zimuzu, global media industries, and the state regulators. The power of dominant institutions is exercised not necessarily by suppressing challenges to the status quo but by setting the boundaries to possible alternatives. In the next section, this article illustrates how, at both a practical and discursive level, Zimuzu disturb the order of the network that the global media industries try to maintain. But this disturbance is situated in a particular power matrix that shapes its contours.

Zimuzu challenge two basic assumptions of copyright: fixed text and exclusive authorship. Poster (2006) points out that "when cultural objects are digitized, they take on certain characteristics of spoken language. Like an oral sentence or a song, digitized voice is easily and with little cost reproduced by the networked computer users" (p. 244). This goes beyond more efficient means of distributing content. According to Poster, it reconfigures the relationship between the traditionally separate categories of producer, content, and consumer, who are now becoming the users that actively join in the production process while consuming the content. In this fluid process, it is increasingly difficult to pinpoint when text should be fixed as final and who enjoys the exclusive rights of creator. Hence, Poster contends that "the old legal and economic structures that ensure commodification on the basis of authorship are disintegrating before our eyes" (p. 249).

Investigating how Zimuzu operate enables a better understanding of how digital networks and online collaboration contribute to different perceptions of authorship. The almost instant availability and reproduction of new content encourages sharing and redistribution, both of which undermine respect for original authorship. For many Zimuzu, as well as for Chinese audiences, a favorite example of instant availability was the American TV drama *Prison Break*, which caused a sensation in China in 2007. The typical work flow for translating a new TV episode is as follows: Around 9:15 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, 15 minutes after the episode premieres, the English version is published by one of the overseas "0-day

warez" groups.[3] These groups strive to release computer software and entertainment content on the same day as the original product is aired. By 9:30 p.m., Zimuzu have acquired the content from the server of the releasing group via FTP downloading. In the meantime, members located on the East Coast in North America send the recorded closed caption to China, allowing Zimuzu to directly translate from a text file rather than having to rely on members' listening proficiency. Once the closed caption is received, the team in charge of synchronizing starts matching each line of subtitle to the audiovisual content. By 11:30 p.m., five or six Zimuzu members, having been assigned 100 to 120 lines, are translating. At around 2:30 a.m (3:30 p.m. Beijing time), the copy editors in the group begin to put together the different pieces while checking the format, style, and accuracy of the Chinese subtitles. The aim is to maintain consistency and make the translation "audience-friendly" for Chinese fans. The copy editing process takes around an hour, which means the Chinese version of the new episode is available just six hours after the original release.

Audiences do not have to wait for corporate delivery of content; they can now pull it off the network. Zimuzu also changes the perception of media content, which is seen as a shared experience rather than as a fixed product. When asked about their motivation to join Zimuzu, many participants responded that the "Internet is about sharing." For them, the process of taking part in Zimuzu activities is more important than the end product. Because they are not performing the translations for commercial purposes, they do not think copyright regulation is relevant:

> Copyright regulation? Nah, I don't think they will be after us, coz [*sic*]we are not pirating. We just move all the content that is already available on servers overseas to our own server, you know, content published by those 0[-]day groups, and then we translate them. I don't think we are doing anything illegal. (DP, young professional, personal communication, April 22, 2009)

> [W]hy would they want to hunt us down? Really it's just fans getting together to share something they feel very passionate about. I become close friends with some of the group members and I am still very attached to the community even though I have now left. (PM, graduate student in legal studies, personal communication, April 20, 2009)

The instant availability of popular shows on digital networks has promoted a new sense of time and space among Zimuzu and the larger fan community they serve, which is able to keep up with fellow fans around the world without being subjected to the market segmentation of global media industries. Because the format of a show changes several times from being aired on television, uploaded on the Internet, downloaded, divided into several parts, translated, subtitled, reassembled, and finally reuploaded, Zimuzu participants do not feel that the traditional notion of content as a final product is relevant. That they are responsible only for some of the activities involved in the redistribution process makes copyright also of less concern. Furthermore, the way that Zimuzu members relate to the digital content goes beyond the consumption of ready-made products and becomes part of an interactive and

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[3] This is the term describing the underground community of people who specialize in releasing unauthorized copyrighted works. 0-day warez groups release copyrighted content, such as music, software, and movies, on the same day as the original product becomes available.

participatory relationship. Participants take pride in seeing their online IDs in the credits of a subtitled project, but they view the creative process as collective. It is in this sense that Zimuzu production challenges the power of global media industries in maintaining both the discursive and practical order of the networked market.

Compared to celebrated projects of online collaborative production, such as Wikipedia and Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), Zimuzu are less autonomous because they work on films and TV shows produced by global media industries rather than create content from scratch. Transnational media companies cannot really claim commercial loss based on the popularity of Zimuzu products, without which Chinese audiences would not have access to most foreign programming. In the way that pirated DVDs cultivated a preference for Hollywood movies among Chinese audiences (Miller, Govil, McMurria, Wang, & Maxwell, 2005; Pang, 2004), Zimuzu contribute significantly to expanding the audience base, if not yet the revenues, of foreign media companies, especially those producing American entertainment programming. The close connection between Zimuzu and the mainstream media industries results in commercial discourses restricting Zimuzu activities despite their non-commercial nature.

One example is the virtual currency mechanism implemented by most major Zimuzu groups. Although members contribute voluntarily and do not seek monetary compensation, the recruitment message posted at the top of each group's Web forum promises a "generous reward" in the form of virtual currency for all participants. A member's accumulation of virtual currency depends on that member's level of contribution to the translation projects and administrative tasks, the length of stay in the group, and seniority. The currency has both pragmatic and symbolic value within the community. Many Zimuzu classify the content on their servers according to its popularity: the more popular the content and the more restricted the access, the more virtual currency required to access it. A member who accumulates enough virtual currency gains access to a treasure box of digital content. The digital goods freely available from warez groups are enclosed again, becoming a valued resource via a monetary mechanism. In addition, the amount of virtual currency possessed by a Zimuzu member is visible to the rest of the group and is a symbol of status within the community. This demonstrates the pervasiveness of the commercial logic, because like a "real" money system, virtual currency is utilized to manage access to scarce digital goods that initially are freely available from warez groups, but that are then enclosed on group servers.

The commercial logic of global media industries constantly drives the repackaging and recycling of copyrighted content in different commodity formats. Access to popular movies and TV shows provides an introduction to a media franchise that tries to spin off as many products as possible to capture fans within a continuous flow of branded narrative (Proffitt, Tchoi & McAllister, 2007). One established Zimuzu group, 1000FR, acts as a broker between the merchandisers and the consumers. On the 1000FR Web forum (http://www.1000fr.com/), in addition to subtitled releases and fan group discussions, there is also a section dedicated to "American TV show accessories." Here, vendors post advertisements for merchandise such as T-shirts imprinted with characters from *24*, key chains, and baseball hats carrying the *Prison Break* logo, calendars promoting the year's 12 most popular shows, and so on. Fans can also post their requests for particular kinds of merchandise or look for buyers with similar interests to get group discounts. Although a disclaimer on the Web page states that all products are "directly shipped from

America, hence the high price and long processing time for most orders," it is unlikely that any of these merchandisers are "legally" licensed.

Zimuzu members have different views about involvement with commercial activities. Some consider advertising and online retailing on their group forums to be reasonable, as it brings in income needed to sustain Zimuzu production and pay for server capacity to store digital content. "As long as we are doing volunteer work, we can still call ourselves Zimuzu rather than a translation company. We believe in sharing, we are running some advertisements just so we can keep sharing our subtitles," said LL, a long-term member of the YYeTS group (personal communication, April 28, 2009). Some other groups, such as TFL and YDY, are steadfastly against any form of collaboration with commercial companies. A senior member of YDY said they were fortunate enough to enjoy the ongoing sponsorship of a few founding members who either rented servers or obtained idle server space for free through their personal connections. Almost all of the YDY members interviewed were proud of being able to "stay clean" from involvement in for-profit activities.

As a production network organized around a different logic from global media industries, Zimuzu provide Chinese audiences with content that otherwise would not be available. Their ongoing operations in the last decade call into question some fundamental assumptions related to the commodification of creative content. However, the organization of Zimuzu production is not insulated against the power of commercial industries, which limits practicality and imagination—or to use the Foucauldian term— "knowledge" of alternative arrangements for digital content production.

Zimuzu as Communication Network

The functioning of Zimuzu as a communication network involves two aspects of subtitling: process and content. The subjectivity of participants is formed during one's engagement with Zimuzu activities, ranging from translation, coordination, and social interaction with fellow members to interaction with nonmembers on Zimuzu forums. The discursive dimension of these processes positions participants in relation to technology, society, and institutions. In terms of content, although Zimuzu relay foreign programming to Chinese audiences, the subtitling work involves participants making important choices and decisions.

Zimuzu fit broadly within a peer production model often associated with projects such as FOSS and Wikipedia. Benkler (2002, 2006) defines peer production as nonmarket-oriented and nonfirm-based production that is coordinated through digital networks. These two characteristics lead Benkler and others to extrapolate the political significance of this new model of production (Benkler, 2003; Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006; Coleman, 2009; Jenkins, 2008; Kelty, 2008; Weber, 2004). Benkler (2003) argues that, compared to activity in hierarchical organizations, individuals enjoy autonomy in peer production, which is seen as a manifestation of the values of freedom and equality. Also, content is not produced as a commodity, but is held in common, which permits it to be shared by contributors and noncontributors. Many studies of the hacker community (Coleman & Golub, 2008) and the FOSS movement (Coleman, 2009; Kelty, 2008) argue that peer production not only disturbs the economic order of capitalism but also constructs a new kind of liberal subjectivity and cultural sensitivity. When hackers or FOSS developers

write software code within a decentralized noncommercial mechanism, they are redefining the behavior and discursive norms of cultural production on digital networks. Some hold the view that involvement in commons-based peer production could cultivate virtues such as autonomy, creativity, generosity and camaraderie—important qualities for democratically engaged citizens (Benkler, 2006, Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006).

A Foucauldian perspective on subjectivity would be less optimistic about the autonomy enjoyed by Zimuzu. Foucault (2001) explains that "there are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else's control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience and self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (p. 331). Participants typically are aware of the difference between their production and the kind of media production approved by state regulators. My interviews with former and current members showed uncertainty about whether Zimuzu had spurred the frenzy over American shows or whether audience demand for foreign content had cemented the shows' popularity. There was consensus, however, on how Zimuzu had changed the media diet of millions of Chinese. A veteran member of TLF described it as "before the age of Zimuzu, only the most tech-savvy people with the language proficiency could watch American TV shows, now those shows really got mass audience" (personal communication, April 16, 2009). As much as the state strives to maintain a "healthy and harmonious" environment in both traditional and new media outlets through import quota and censorship, the power of digital networks undermines its tactics.

The interactivity and flexibility of digital networks enable Zimuzu to be exceptionally responsive to audience demands and preferences to an extent that would be impossible for state broadcasters. Zimuzu members of more than one of the major groups mentioned the reliance on user feedback to plan production. For TV programs that have new series coming out annually, Zimuzu often publish lists of show names and of episode synopses on their forums and ask registered users to vote for the ones in which they are most interested. This allows Zimuzu to prioritize their translation projects. Since the most popular TV shows are usually translated hurriedly, sometimes after finishing all the episodes in a popular series such as *Law and Order* or *24,* the most devoted Zimuzu members will compile a "collector's edition" that revises the subtitles based on fans' comments and suggestions.

In addition to being more responsive to audiences' preferences, Zimuzu differ from state media in terms of the decisions made about content and style. A former member of 1000FR recalled CCTV 8's short-lived airing of *Desperate Housewives*, one of the most popular shows among file sharers:

> Well, first they didn't put it in a prime time slot, I think it's usually after 10pm, and they also cut lots of things, like bad languages, inappropriate episodes…for example the one when Andrew revealed his homosexuality. And the translation, oh, it's kind of crappy, when you hear those dubbed conversations, it just feel so weird. Of course the rating was not so good. They cancelled the show after a season or so. (MO, college student, personal communication, April 12, 2009)

The language style of the "official" translations also differs. SP, the current Zimuzu team leader of a small group called Shofa, mocked the state broadcaster's efforts to "keep up with the trend":

Have you watched CCTV's live coverage of last year's Oscar ceremony? The subtitles they put up are really not that good, you know, how should I say it, so stuffy. It's like from those stupid English textbooks we used to study in college. You know what? They remind me of my 60-year-old translation professor back in sophomore year. (SP, young professional, personal communication, April 10, 2009)

Although the Zimuzu community perceives the state media as the common "other" from which it wants to distance itself, translation styles within the community differ. There is a lot of time devoted to discussing whether it is more important to be accurate or colloquial, whether to stay faithful to the original text or adapt it for China's context. The choice of translation style is not just a technical issue; it is related to inserting an individual voice when communicating to an imagined audience. For example, several participants referred to deliberate changes made to original scripts and explanations added to subtitles in deference to the Chinese audience.

In some cases, Western cultural references are replaced with Chinese ones. In the show *White Collar*, a character says, "You could pick them up for a few dollars on eBay", and in the Chinese version produced by YYeTS, "eBay" becomes "Taobao," the most popular online shopping site in China. The expression "I swear to God" is often translated "I swear to Chairman Mao" as an expression of sincerity and honesty used during Maoist China. The names of foreign celebrities are often replaced by contemporary Chinese counterparts. The instantaneity of communication offered by networked digital technology means that Zimuzu are always up to date with the latest topics on the Chinese Internet, which enables them to use the subtitles to comment on current social affairs. For example, in one episode of *Criminal Minds*, when a homeless person cursed someone for writing in blood on a wall near a street corner that he called "home," a translator from 1000FR added to the original script: "Son of a bitch . . . who wrote that on my wall?" a comment in parentheses ("You should be grateful it's not the word 'demolish'"). This parenthetical line doubtless struck a chord with Chinese audiences due to its reference to a huge social problem brought about by urbanization. It is common in Chinese cities to see red signs bearing the word *demolish* on old buildings or temporary housing built by urban poor or migrant workers. The municipal government orders these demolitions to allow it to seize the area for profitable commercial developments. There have been quite a few high-profile confrontations with residents refusing to leave their homes, leading to bloodshed and even death.

This evidence offers some support for the claim that Zimuzu provide an alternative space in a heavily regulated media environment for cultivating creativity, autonomy, and a spirit of sharing. Participants communicate with one another and with fans via the production process and the text they produce. As a result, all the current and former Zimuzu members who were interviewed expressed a strong sense of belonging to the community. In fact, several major groups, including YYeTS and 1000FR,[4]

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[4] For example, see http://wiki.yyets.com/doku.php
http://www.1000fr.net/viewthread.php?tid=205777&highlight=

have made great efforts to define a group identity and group values through collective reflection. Their Web forums include a designated wiki section for participants—especially those about to leave the group—to record their memories of time spent in the group. These often colorful personal accounts of what they like about Zimuzu, how they relate to fellow participants, and how participation has influenced their thinking and behavior articulate the subjectivity of members, although not always coherently.

Unlike some Western warez groups, such as Pirate Bay, which explicitly advocates a free culture on the Internet (Andersson, 2009), Zimuzu shy away from articulating a political agenda. Members are aware that they are operating in a legal grey zone and are at the mercy of the Chinese state, which could invoke censorship or copyright law and crack down on P2P translation of foreign media content. To avoid provoking the censors, Zimuzu exert a degree of self-censorship. Sexually explicit content and dialogue are often replaced, and the groups try to stay within the boundaries of what they perceive to be political correctness by emphasizing the apolitical entertainment nature of the content they translate.

Conclusion

This article describes the case of Zimuzu, a voluntary online peer production community that translates foreign media content and shares its subtitled versions of that content with millions of Internet users. On the one hand, this is a global phenomenon triggered by the increasing cultural, social, and technological connectivity. On the other hand, the meaning of Zimuzu is prescribed in the particular Chinese context and should be understood as such. I argue that Zimuzu offer a unique case to examine the complex power relationships among the global media industries, the Chinese state, digital networks, and consumers who are now taking on the role of producers. Power is understood here as a generative force that operates at the practical and discursive levels, giving rise to the construction of institutions and subjectivity.

Zimuzu are enabled and sustained by digital networks and exemplify the conflicts and contradictions of media globalization in the age of networked power. This article discussed the global media industries' desire to build a network of strong copyright regulation and weak trade barriers to establish a global marketplace for their commercial media products. This agenda is mediated by a Chinese state that wants a part of the network power of global capitalism, but is determined at the same time to prevent certain domestic sectors from being completely networked so that it may maintain its control over them. It is in the context of these tensions that Zimuzu emerge as a distinct, but limited challenge to the networked power of institutions.

Working in the highly fluid digital environment, Zimuzu deconstruct the legitimacy of the copyright regime and the conventional business model of the global media industries. As a P2P community that distances itself from the officially approved culture and builds upon a decentralized organization, Zimuzu challenge the control of the party-state in the sector of media consumption. However, resistance is not equivalent to subversion. Although they may disrupt the revenues of the global media industries, Zimuzu extend the global reach of their products and to an extent, the consumerism ideology associated with these products. The Zimuzu community has positioned itself in the discursive arena of entertainment, but without posing any political threat to the Chinese state. Although many believe that digital networks offer the possibility to construct new political subjects, the case of Zimuzu falls short of this expectation.

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