

**From “Weirdos” to “Lovely People”:
The Incorporation of Chinese Rural Subculture**

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On my honor,
I have neither given nor received
Unauthorized aid on this thesis

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Abstract

This research analyzed the incorporation process of the Chinese rural subculture by focusing on the mainstream media's reactions to "Kuaishou". Kuaishou is a short video app that is extremely popular among China's rural population, and it is considered as an online subcultural field of the rural subculture. 27 popular posts from China's mainstream media platforms from 2016 to 2019 were coded for understanding different strategies that the hegemonic group applies. The analysis shows that although the Chinese rural subculture has successfully built an influential online community, its resistant power is being neutralized. In the beginning, the hegemonic group demonized the Chinese rural subculture, so that it could take supervising action over the subculture. More recently, the hegemonic group is converting subcultural products into harmless commodities. Kuaishou itself is transforming from a deviant field to another mainstream social media platform as well.

Keywords: China; Subculture; Social media; Hegemony; "Kuaishou"

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INTRODUCTION

The appearance of the Internet has somewhat subverted the dominance of traditional mass media and given the audience more power to spread its voice and ideas (Chen 2013; Geser 2004; Zhou 2019). In particular, it becomes easier for formerly marginalized or subordinated groups to come together online and express themselves to a broader audience (Ji 2019; Liu 2018).

In China, there are discussions and studies about how technical innovations have improved people's lives as well (Gong 2019; Ji 2019; Liu 2018; Zheng 2010). Kuaishou and Chinese rural subculture is an interesting case of how formerly marginalized groups can be revitalized by forming communities online. Kuaishou is a Chinese video sharing app most of whose users are from rural areas (People's Daily 2017). Since 2016 when Kuaishou became well-known in China, it has been always referred to as the miniature of the Chinese rural subcultural world by the mainstream society (Ding 2018; Huo 2016). Even though about a half of the Chinese population is considered as rural, and 26.3% of Chinese netizens are from rural areas, this group and its culture have been ignored or misinterpreted by the mainstream media for a long time (CNNIC 2019; Huo 2016). Yet, Kuaishou has provided an invaluable stage for the rural population to record and express their thoughts and daily lives.

However, Kuaishou has received fierce criticism from the hegemonic urban culture during the past four years. The app is filled with videos about "masochism, vulgar dirty talk, and all kinds of weirdos" (Huo 2016), and the subcultural community is depicted as a backward and violent jungle, which reflects what the real rural world looks like. The mainstream media also urged the Chinese government to take action on Kuaishou because it encourages unhealthy social trends (Ding 2018; Tonight News Paper 2018).

Notwithstanding, there is a transition of the hegemonic group's attitudes towards Kuaishou recently. Nowadays, Kuaishou is believed to help the rural population to improve both their living conditions and mental health (Duanshipindaguan 2019; People's Daily 2019). People from the mainstream society have also started to use Kuaishou, saying that Kuaishou opens a window for them to explore and understand different ways of living in modern China (Gabrielle S 2018; Han 2018; Liao 2018).

It seems contradictory when reviewing different descriptions and evaluations of Kuaishou, but I would argue that the transition indicates the changing power dynamics between the Chinese rural subculture and the hegemonic urban culture. Thus, it becomes necessary to look closely at the transition of impressions and to understand how and why it happened.

This research analyzes the neutralization process of Chinese rural subculture starting from 2016. Kuaishou is a Chinese video sharing app that is referred as the biggest online community of Chinese rural subculture. Instead of analyzing content in Kuaishou, this study looks closely at representations and discussions about Kuaishou in three mainstream social media platforms and three official media agencies. This research tries to theorize and understand how the Chinese rural subculture is naturalized by the hegemonic urban culture with theoretical frameworks of "hegemony" and Pierre Bourdieu's field theory.

I would argue that the Chinese rural subculture, the formerly marginalized group, has successfully reconstructed its online community in Kuaishou. However, Kuaishou and the subculture are being incorporated by the hegemonic urban culture. The hegemonic culture is applying different strategies to either demonize or commercialize the subcultural group. As a result, the hegemonic group takes away the subcultural group's agency over Kuaishou and even their own subcultural products.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban-rural Opposition and the Crisis of Rural Culture in China

In this research, urban-rural opposition underlies the conflicts and struggles which we will observe in the Kuaishou app and other social media platforms. There have been many discussions about this opposition between urban and rural culture (Ji 2012; Jiang 2018; Williams 1973; Xu 2016). It is a long-existing opposition between two rival ideologies: “modern versus tradition” (Jiang 2018). We can tell their differences by looking at the stereotyped images about “country” and “city,” with “country” as natural, peaceful but ignorant and “city” as advanced and progressive but arrogant (Williams 1973). However, the development of industrialization, urbanization and modernization disrupted the balance of this binary structure (Ji 2012; Jiang 2018; Kang 2012; Liu 2018). According to Marx (1940), the group who takes control over the means of production also takes control over cultural productions. Not surprisingly, urban culture wins the competition while rural culture begins to decline.

In China, the urban-rural opposition still exists, but the rural culture has declined during the past few decades as well. Researchers have produced studies to understand the development and influence of the urban-rural opposition (Ji 2012; Jiang 2018; Liu 2018; Xia 2016). Some of them indicate that the Chinese government plays an indispensable role in the development of the opposition (Jiang 2018; Kang 2012; Xia 2016; Xu 2016). The government has developed a series of policies in order to achieve the “urban-rural integration,” which is to eliminate the backward countryside by changing it into advanced cities (Kang 2012; Xu 2016). Although the government’s intention is to get rid of the dual structure and help rural areas to develop, it in fact indicates the inferior position of rural culture in Chinese mainstream ideology.

Besides governmental policies, the popularity of “Mingong,” the migrant workers, also indicates the crisis of rural culture (Xia 2016). Mingong refers to the migrant workers who come from rural areas and enter cities to work (Zheng 2010). Hall and Jefferson (1975) argue that whether a class or a culture is maintained or not depends on both social and material conditions. They further argue that physical communal space is essential for a culture to develop and retain its structure and networks. Looking at the decline of working class in post-war Britain, the break-up of traditional housing patterns was essential because it eliminated both social and material conditions (Hall and Jefferson 1975). The Chinese rural population now faces the similar condition that the post-war British working-class once experienced: the big local communities have disintegrated because of either individual’s migrations to cities or the reconstructions of housing patterns within the “urban-rural integration.”

With the stagnation of economic development, shrinking of kinship networks, and even loss of spatial territories, Chinese rural culture has inevitably declined and become a marginalized subculture during the past few decades (Ji 2012; Jiang 2018; Liu 2018). Because of the decline, the rural population faces a dilemma of their identities: the pride of being a peasantry has all gone, and the rural culture becomes a synonym of “poor, stupid, and vulgar” (Liu 2018:166).

It is not surprising that the crisis of Chinese rural culture makes it difficult for young generations from rural areas to construct their self-identities as well. They also hold an ambiguous attitude towards the urban-rural opposition (Liu 2018; Xu 2016; Zheng 2010; Zhu and Gao 2019). On the one hand, these young people grow up in a society where the mainstream media continuously praises the urban culture but degrades the rural one. Their experience convinces them that urban culture is more privileged. Thus, they reject their original rural culture

and identities but actively mimic and chase after the urban culture, yearning to become members of this more privileged group (Liu 2018; Zheng 2010). On the other hand, the young generation also realize that they will never become the real “city folks” (Zheng 2010). On the contrary, no matter how hard they try, they are always mocked by the urban culture and never get rid of their peasant identities (Liu 2018). The yearning for the urban culture gradually turns into resentment. Young people from rural areas are facing the predicament that they cannot completely integrate in either side, becoming the vagrants between “city” and “country” (Xia 2016).

Cultural Hegemony, Resistant Culture, and Incorporation

Because this study analyzed the process of how the hegemonic urban culture neutralizes Chinese rural subculture, it is necessary to understand what the concept “hegemony” and the process of incorporation are. Raymond Williams (1973) defines “hegemony” as a “central system of practice, meaning and values (9)” manipulated by the dominate group. He emphasizes that hegemony is not merely an abstract ideology but a fundamental and dominant guide that penetrates in the everyday experience (Hebdige 1979; Williams 1973). In addition, hegemony is continually adjusting itself in order to maintain its dominance effectively, since there are always “the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative senses of the world” (Williams 1973:10). By consciously selecting, organizing, and interpreting with meanings and practices, hegemony maintains its dominance over all areas, groups, and through all time periods.

Other scholars have studied the resistance to hegemonic culture (Bao and Wang 2010; Hall and Jefferson 1975; Hebdige 1979; Liu 2018). One of the most common ways to resist hegemony is to collage, parody, and make irony with symbols. By re-defining and re-constructing everyday objects and behaviors, subculture groups question the “natural” social

norms and reveal other possibilities of understanding everyday life. Hall and Jefferson's (1975) studies of "Youth Culture" in Post-war Britain provide comprehensive descriptions of how socially marginalized groups pieced objects and behaviors together to form a series of "rituals." These rituals did not only resist and ridicule the abstract ideology, but also attempted to resolve the real social problems. More or less, rituals helped these young people to construct group networks, confirm a collective identity, and "win [actual] space ...in the neighborhood and institutions, real time for leisure and recreation" (Hall and Jefferson 1975:45). Hebdige (1979) also studied subcultures in post-war Britain. The subcultural groups redefined the most mundane objects, turning them into "the status and meaning of revolt, the idea of style as a form of Refusal, the elevation of crime into art" (Hebdige 1979:2). Hebdige (1979) gives an example of how a tube of Vaseline in Jean Genet's possession is considered as a signal of homosexuality and it is confiscated by police. Nevertheless, Genet affirmed his commitment to the object, saying, "I would indeed rather have shed blood than repudiate that silly object" (Hebdige 1979:3). By doing so, Genet successfully re-confirmed the resistant meaning of Vaseline. The collection of these subversive definitions became a subcultural style, a dramatic force disturbing a seemingly natural "map of meaning" (Hebdige 1979:14).

Nevertheless, the hegemonic culture has different methods to deal with the subversion or resistance. Williams (1973) classifies the meanings and practices outside the hegemony as either alternative or oppositional cultures, arguing that the demarcation can be very vague. Depending on the social contexts, some ideologies can be tolerated and even accommodated, but others are disdained and even wiped out. As long as the hegemonic culture's dominance continues, both alternative and oppositional cultures always end up being eliminated or neutralized. The process of incorporation is achieved either by "the conversion of subcultural signs" or by "the 'labelling'

and re-definition of deviant behavior by the dominant groups—the police, the media, the judiciary” (Hebdige 1979: 94). The commercialization of subcultural symbols and objects diminishes the uniqueness and originality of subcultures, finally diffusing of their subversive powers (Hebdige 1979; Liu 2018). And by re-defining and re-interpreting subcultures, the hegemonic culture either creates “moral panics,” indicating subcultures as threats that need to be controlled or makes subcultures into objects for mere amusement (Bao and Wang 2010; Liu 2018).

Urban culture in China has become the hegemonic culture with the development of modern society, while the rural culture has declined for years and become a marginalized subculture. However, this subcultural group has reformed and returned to the public with the development of Internet technology, a topic that I discuss in the next section.

Digital Divide, Mobile Phone, and Online Representation

Some scholars use the concept “digital divide” to understand how discrepancy in access and use of Internet technology may lead to further social inequality (Attewell 2001; Chen 2013; DiMaggio and Hargiatti 2001; Hargittai 2001). Generally, there are two levels of digital divide. The first level digital divide refers to the difference on people’s ability to access the Internet, “a binary classification of Internet use by only considering whether someone is or is not an Internet user” (Hargittai 2001:1).

As the Internet penetration continues, more scholars have turned their attention to the second level of digital divide (Attewell 2001; Chen 2013; DiMaggio and Hargiattai 2001; Hargittai 2001). The second level divide focuses on variations of the purposes and skills of using Internet technology, “what are people doing, and what are they able to do, when they go on-line” (DiMaggio and Hargiattai, 2001: 4). Scholars argued that the different using behaviors have

created “new kinds of inequality--- inequality among Internet users in the extent to which they are able to reap benefits from their use of the technology” (DiMaggio and Hargiattai, 2001:8). DiMaggio and Hargiattai (2001) used the idea “digital inequality,” arguing that individuals with different backgrounds will manipulate Internet technology differently, preserving and reproducing social inequality online and offline. They later conducted a research about such difference in American society (DiMaggio and Hargiattai, 2002). The result showed that people with higher income or educational background tended to use the Internet for “capital enhancing” purposes, such as searching for political, health or education-related information. In contrast, people with lower socioeconomic status were more likely to use the Internet for entertainment purposes. Later studies had the similar results (Howard, Raine, and Jones 2001; Madden 2003; Robinson, DiMaggio, and Hargittai 2003). Studies of Internet users in China reveal similar patterns, adding that there is also a discrepancy between urban and rural populations (Chen 2013; Li 2011; Wei and Yuan 2009). As the result, the hegemonic culture’s dominance continues online, and alternative ideas and voices from other groups are often ignored or even twisted (Chen 2013).

Nevertheless, some scholars argued that other forms of online participation, including entertainment activities, still increase the opportunities for subordinate groups to gain social capital and represent their ideas (Chen 2013). What is more, it is noticeable that portable devices, especially smart phones, play an important role in eliminating the digital divide. Mobile phones reduce the spatial limitation which secures the traditional social stratification (Geser 2004; Zhu and Gao 2019). It also provides opportunities for subcultural groups who once disintegrated to re-form communities online (Liu 2018; Zheng 2010). Additionally, the portability makes it possible for individuals to create their own spaces at anytime and anyplace (Zheng 2010).

Songtai Zheng's (2010) field study on Chinese rural workers presents how people from rural areas use mobile phones to resist their "everyday roles," which is inequality and exploitation, by actively engaging with others in similar situations online.

However, these studies only focus on the interactions and connections inside subcultural groups. For this study, Kuaishou is unique because not only is it a platform where rural people actively share their daily life and build connections with others, but also it represents this subculture to other social groups (Zhou 2019). It is a stage where the boundaries between urban and rural cultures diminish (Ji 2019), providing an insight of how the rural subcultural group uses Internet technology to gain resources there and to resist digital inequality.

The Formation of Subculture Field

The popularization of the Internet and mobile devices makes it possible for subordinate groups to overcome the spatial limitation and reform their communities online. Some studies applied Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to analyze these online communities, considering them as subcultural fields (Bao and Huang 2010; Guo 2018; Li 2016; Liu 2018; Zhou 2019).

"Field" is a spatial metaphor of ranks and hierarchy, analyzing the underlying and invisible power dynamics between people or groups (Bourdieu 1983). The field is "an arena of struggles of power" (Li 2016). All fields share a structural homology and have influence on each other in some level, because they are structured by both their internal autonomous power and the external environment (Guo 2018; Li 2016).

One's position in field is determined by his or her control over the valued resources called "capital" (Bourdieu 1983). Thus, people actively gain or reproduce valued capital in order to change or maintain their positions in the fields. There are multiple kinds of capital, like economic, social or cultural, and different kinds of capital can transform into each other. Even

though capital's value varies in different fields, because of the homology among fields, capital can circulate and be manipulated across different fields.

However, for the subcultural fields, the circulation of capital with other fields does not happen often because of its resistance to the hegemonic culture (Liu 2018; Yang and Zhou 2018). At the same time, subcultural groups often create their unique subcultural capital which is based on their shared identities and experience (Yang and Zhou 2018). On the other hand, as naturalization of subcultures happens, subcultures lose their uniqueness and become part of the hegemonic culture. Subcultural capital which used to be valued in certain fields now is accepted and manipulated in other fields as well (Guo 2018; Liu 2018; Yang and Zhou 2018).

Some scholars argued Kuaishou has become a subcultural field of Chinese rural subculture (Bao and Huang 2010; Guo 2018; Li 2016; Liu 2018; Zhou 2019). The rural population is often in a subordinate position in the mainstream field, considering the continuous disdain of rural culture in Chinese society. Also, because of the crisis of rural areas, they have been often left behind since the beginning of the accumulation of capital. However, in the subcultural field, the rural populations reconstruct a series of symbols and styles based on their shared peasantry experience and identity, which finally transfers into the valued capital in this subcultural field (Guo 2016; Liu 2018; Zhou 2019).

METHODOLOGY

For this research, I coded and analyzed 27 posts about Kuaishou using software NVivo12. Different forms of content were chosen and coded, including articles and videos. Comments or retweets under them are counted as part of the dataset as well.

Since the purpose of this study is to understand the process of naturalizing Kuaishou and Chinese rural subculture, it is necessary to keep track of the transitions of the hegemonic culture's attitudes towards them over time. Although Kuaishou was founded in 2011, it was not widely known by the public until 2016 because of an extremely popular article called "The cruel story of the bottom: Chinese countryside in a video app" (Gao 2017; Xi and Wang 2016; Zhao 2016). It was a starting point where not only did Kuaishou become well-known, but also Kuaishou was tightly connected to Chinese rural subculture. Thus, I decided to collect data starting from 2016 to 2019. Although the primary plan was to collect ten posts for each year, due to the limited accessibility of earlier resources, finally I was able to collect only seven articles for 2016 and 2017, and 20 for 2018 and 2019.

In order to analyze the hegemonic culture's representations and evaluations of Kuaishou and Chinese rural subculture, I purposefully selected and collected popular content about Kuaishou from three mainstream social media platforms in China. They are Sina Weibo, Zhihu, and Wechat. Additionally, because of the Chinese government's dominance over China's online sphere, I also collected posts from three official media agencies: People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, and China Central Television (CCTV). They are the biggest three Chinese official media organizations, directly passing on the central government's policies and viewpoints towards current affairs (Wikipedia 2020).

Since there are limited qualitative studies about either Kuaishou or Chinese rural subculture, I developed a bilingual code book for this study. Basically, I coded content based on whether the posts' attitudes towards Kuaishou or Chinese rural subculture are positive or negative. (See Appendix A for codebook.)

To be more specific, there were subsets of codes about content in Kuaishou, Kuaishou users, and the Kuaishou app separately. By doing so, I was able to analyze how the mainstream media is taking away rural subcultural groups' agency over Kuaishou by labelling them as either deviant groups or part of the hegemonic culture.

In addition, I also coded discussions about the Chinese rural subculture and rural people specifically. Even though Kuaishou is always tightly connected to the subculture in the mainstream media, directly analyzing the content about the subculture helps to understand the traditional image and history of Chinese rural subculture.

Finally, I coded social phenomena or problems that are discussed in the posts in order to understand Kuaishou and the rural subculture within the larger social context. They include “distributions of online power discourse”, “technical innovation”, “success”, “‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’”, “stratification & solidification of social class” and “financial benefits”. There was also a subset about government's measures to censor and supervise Kuaishou.

This method has its shortcomings. First, the content was chosen based on the researcher's judgements and accessibility of resources, thus the results are not able to present a comprehensive view of Chinese online popular culture. In addition, coding was done by one sole coder, thus all of the decisions were made with one individual's interpretations of the content. Finally, since the content was translated from Chinese, there is always loss or inaccuracy of information. A suggestion for future study is to enlarge the scale of data collection to get more comprehensive results and better understandings of both Chinese rural subculture and China's online sphere.

ANALYSIS

Timeline of Kuaishou

Even though Kuaishou had 3 billion users in February 2016 (Gao 2017), it was not known by the majority until June 2016. An article called “The cruel story of the bottom: Chinese countryside in a video appⁱⁱ” came out at that time and suddenly aroused fierce discussions. It introduced Kuaishou as a rough app filled with “masochism, vulgar dirty talk, and all kinds of weirdos” (Huo 2016). What is more, the author Qiming Huo connected Kuaishou with Chinese rural subculture, because most of its users are from rural areas. “You can understand Chinese rural life and ideology by just looking through this appⁱⁱⁱ” (Huo 2016). He further argued that this app fulfilled the rural population’s needs to be approved and noticed, but violent or sexual content is often the only way for them to attract other’s attention. “No one pays attention to 6.74 billion rural people, almost half of the Chinese populations,” he wrote, “the countryside is forgotten by the mainstream^{iv}” (Huo 2016). The article ended up in a pessimistic way, saying that although the rural people were active in Kuaishou, they would always be regarded as deviant and never be accepted by the hegemonic culture (Huo 2016).

The mainstream media considers this article as the beginning of Kuaishou and its online community becoming noticed by the mainstream society (Gao 2017; Xi and Wang 2016; Zhao 2016). Discussions around this article and Kuaishou continued for months, and most of them followed Qiming Huo’s arguments, criticizing or ridiculing on Kuaishou and its users’ taste (RMyzc 2017; Xiao 2016).

Nevertheless, attention to Kuaishou declined in the next year. There were limited materials online, but negative attitude towards Kuaishou and Chinese rural subculture did not change much. On the other hand, People’s Daily (2017) reported that Kuaishou received a 3.5-

billion-dollar investment, which indicated its potential in the market. Besides reconfirming Kuaishou's connection to Chinese rural subculture, *People's Daily* (2017) also agreed that Kuaishou satisfied the rural population's demands to create and consume their own subcultural products, which have been ignored by the mainstream media for a long time.

Kuaishou came back to the public's sight in 2018. At the end of March, China Central Television (CCTV) reported that there was a trend of teenage pregnancy in Kuaishou (2018). This message brought back intense criticism towards Kuaishou and its users (Ding 2018; *Tonight News Paper* 2018; Zhangquandan 2018). Many people even urged the government to block the entire app because they believed that Kuaishou encouraged unhealthy social trends, especially among children^v (Solo-Daxiongmao 2018). In the following days, the government published a series of policies to regulate Kuaishou and other short-video apps (*People's Daily* 2018). At the same time, the government required Kuaishou to block several of its influencers, who were criticized as "causing extremely bad influence on teenagers^{vi}" (*Tonight News Paper* 2018).

However, by the end of 2018, another kind of voice about Kuaishou appeared. Xinzhong Liao (2018), an author, posted an article called "When you feel tired about your life, go and watch Kuaishou!^{viii}" in Weibo. Instead of portraying Kuaishou and Chinese rural subculture as backward and boorish, he gave examples of Chinese working class and craftsmen in Kuaishou and argued that they were epitomes of hard-working and tenacious Chinese people. Liao (2018) believed that Kuaishou represented all kinds of ways of living in modern China^{viii}. This article provided a new angle of perspective to understand Kuaishou and the rural subculture.

In 2019, reactions to Kuaishou became more complex. There was still acerbic sarcasm towards it (*People's Daily* 2019; *Zhihu* 2019). Yet there were growing positive comments as well. Articles and posts like Liao's one appeared, focusing on how Kuaishou offers opportunities

for everyone to share his or her daily life and makes it possible for these moments to be seen^{ix} (CCTV 2019; Duanshipindaguan 2019; Zhu 2019). For example, an author wrote a series of articles called “Mysterious Kuaishou^x” and reorganized Kuaishou videos by different themes like “local folkways,^{xi}” “industry^{xii}” and “invention and craftsmanship^{xiii}” (Zhu 2019). Official media also displayed a more positive attitude towards Kuaishou. For instance, a local fire brigade is actively posting videos in order to introduce general knowledge of firefighting in Kuaishou, and their posts are widely acclaimed (People’s Daily 2019). At the same time, it became popular to collect posts from Kuaishou and re-edit them into longer videos. A collection of 160 Kuaishou videos received over 250 thousand likes in Weibo. Its introduction said “Kuaishou is one of the most vibrant places I have ever seen. Everyone is trying his or her best to show their own life, their jobs, skills, families, whether these moments are interesting or not, happy or not. Finally, they keep living bravely^{xiv}” (Zhaomingmingdexiandingzahuopu 2019).

On 4th January 2020, CCTV showed a two-minute-long advertising video of Kuaishou. “Your love of life is lovely. Find out and like this love in Kuaishou, in China^{xv}” (Guanggaowenan 2020). During the past four years, Kuaishou has been switching its image in hegemonic culture from a coarse app filled with vulgar videos to a platform that shows all different kinds of possibilities of life in contemporary China.

Technical Innovation

Even though descriptions and opinions of Kuaishou vary, one topic is consistently mentioned by the mainstream media. It is about how technical innovation has changed and improved people’s lives, particularly for people from the lower social class. According to previous studies about the digital divide in China, the wide penetration of the Internet, combined with smart phones, provides opportunities for people from all social classes to produce cultural

products by themselves (Chen 2013; Liu 2018; Zheng 2010). Particularly, it becomes easier for subordinated or marginalized groups to make their voices heard, which means a possible subversion of current discourse of power (Chen 2013; Gong 2019).

This argument also appears when talking about Kuaishou. In one Zhihu article called “Disgusting Kuaishou? How many people are considered as inhuman^{xvi}?”, the author argued that “it used to be hard for these people (rural populations) to make their voices be heard online, because at least you need to have a computer to access the Internet. However, the development of material life gives them chances to be active online, and that’s why Kuaishou becomes so popular^{xvii}” (Banrenmaxingren 2018). Other articles hold similar viewpoints, saying that the recent technical development in China is the cornerstone of the popularity of Kuaishou (CCTV 2019; Duanshipindaguan 2019; Liao 2018).

Then, why particularly is Kuaishou getting so popular among the rural population? The mainstream media asked the same question at the beginning. They ascribed Kuaishou’s success into two technical advantages. First of all, short video, its medium, is very easy to make. “Making a short video in Kuaishou is pretty easy and convenient: no editing, no dubbing, just shooting with your phones^{xviii}” (Banrenmaxingren 2018). Combined with smartphones, almost everyone can shoot videos at any time anywhere, which is to say, “to record normal people’s normal life^{xix}” (Qiaoqiao 2019). The simplicity of Kuaishou’s interface encourages people with limited knowledge to upload their works as well.

The second advantage is Kuaishou’s unique recommendation system. Unlike most social media that deliberately distributes its resources to several influencers, Kuaishou itself does not create influencers by distributing resources unevenly or recommending only certain kinds of videos^{xx} (Xi and Wang 2016). “Kuaishou’s algorithm is designed to recommend content based

on single users' interests^{xxi}” (Xi and Wang 2016), which means everyone's works have the same probability to be seen. This system is considered as one of the most important features of Kuaishou, for not only does it encourage everyone to create and post his or her own works, but also it fulfills every user's interests with a variety of content (RMyzc 2017; Xinhua News 2019).

Nevertheless, sometimes this recommendation system receives negative feedback, because some people believe that Kuaishou should be responsible for supervising and censoring users' works: not all works should be delivered equally. In 2018, Kuaishou was requested to add an extra censorship algorithm in order to “perform its social responsibility by fostering healthy and mainstream ideologies in the platform^{xxii}” (People's Daily 2018). In 2019, the government further required Kuaishou and other short video apps to activate “anti-addiction mode^{xxiii}” which is designed especially for teenage users (People's Daily 2019). Once the mode is activated, it will automatically restrict users' view time and show only certain kinds of content.

Although there are criticisms about Kuaishou encouraging unhealthy social trends by showing vulgar content without selection, it is undeniable that Kuaishou provides rural populations, a formerly ignored group, a stage to share their daily lives easily and to further reproduce their own subcultural products.

The Subcultural Field in Kuaishou

Technical innovation also diminishes spatial limitation which used to prevent subordinated or marginalized groups from forming communities (Geser 2004; Zhu and Gao 2019). The popularization of smartphones further mitigates such limitation so that it becomes easier to reform subcultural communities online (Liu 2018; Si 2019; Zheng 2010).

Some scholars argue that Kuaishou is an online field, a miniature of the Chinese rural subcultural field in the real world (Guo 2018; Liu 2018; Zhou 2019). Chinese rural areas and the

local subculture have declined during the past decades, but Kuaishou becomes the continuation of traditional rural subcultural field which is described as “a jungle-like world where winning is everything^{xxiv}” (Huo 2016).

Otherwise, Kuaishou convinces its users that everyone can succeed there, regardless of their original background. Most users of Kuaishou, the rural population, are usually from the bottom of the larger society. They were born with limited capital, and their original background leaves them little chance to enter a higher social class or become the true city folks. However, although there is still hierarchy in Kuaishou, this app gives everyone hope that he or she has the chance to become a winner there, especially with its technical advantage on the medium and recommendation system. Thus, Kuaishou users are actively applying different strategies to either obey or subvert the rules in order to improve their positions in the field.

To the hegemonic group’s surprise, people are gathering large amounts of capital in Kuaishou. Financial capital is one of them, and it is always transferred from the social capital that one user has in Kuaishou. Unlike the traditional image of rural population, the top influencers in Kuaishou earn an unimaginable amount of money there. One of the most popular influencers said once, “If I want, I can earn 20 thousand yuan by tonight’s live-streaming^{xxv}” (RMyzc 2017). One common way of earning financial capital is by placing products’ advertisement in their short videos and later selling products to their fans (RMyzc 2017; Xi and Wang 2016; Xiao 2016). Another way of monetization is “tipping^{xxvi}.” An article gave detailed instructions of tipping competitions: sometimes several influencers would have living streaming at the same time and encourage their fans to tip other influencers (RMyzc 2017). In return, influencers who received tips would require their fans to follow back other influencers. “Streamers earn the money, and fans are just bargaining chips^{xxvii}” (RMyzc 2017). They are

examples of circulations between financial capital and social capital in the field, and both are ways that rely on how many fans the influencers have in Kuaishou only. Since the business all happened in the closed subcultural field, it is not surprising that the mainstream society has not noticed that until 2016.

Like other subcultural fields, Kuaishou also has its unique subcultural capital. It is the symbolic capital that is closely related to traditional Chinese rural subculture (Huo 2016). The symbolic capital is generally described as the absolute dominance over money, fame, and sometimes women. Because of its brutality and uncivilized nature, this kind of capital received overwhelming attacks from the hegemonic culture. “In their (Kuaishou users) opinion, this world is pretty straightforward like a jungle: rich people can take away everything including their loved women, and they cannot resist it^{xxviii}” (RMyzc 2017).

Bourdieu (1983) argues that all fields share structural homology in some level that makes it possible to mobilize capital between different fields. Kuaishou users may agree with Bourdieu, believing that the mainstream society is very similar to the small world where they live. As a result, they also believe that success in Kuaishou will lead to success in the mainstream society. “Young people from rural areas are always eager to break the solidification of social class and enter the higher class which has much more resources. That is also the reason that they are making so many efforts in Kuaishou^{xxix}” (Huo 2016). However, regardless how successful Kuaishou users are in their subcultural field, it seems impossible to improve one’s social rank in the mainstream society only by succeeding in Kuaishou. The solidification of social rank in Chinese society and long-existing stereotypes of Chinese rural subculture prevent the mobility since the beginning: Kuaishou users will never get rid of their “poor, stupid, and vulgar” (Liu 2018:166) peasantry identities. Not surprising, capital earned in Kuaishou is not often circulated

in the outside world as well, especially for social and symbolic capital. For instance, two Kuaishou influencers once released their new song in another social media. The song received about 50 thousand comments, and most of them are about people's mockery, "why is the app recommending Kuaishou's popular song to me? Did I do anything wrong?^{xxx}" (RMyzc 2017). Even users who are portrayed in a positive way cannot escape from their original social rank. The mainstream media always alienates them as outsiders of the hegemonic urban culture unconsciously. A truck driver, Baoge, was known by sharing his daily life in Kuaishou, and he was considered as an exemplar of a "formerly ignored group who becomes noticed and respectful now^{xxxi}" (Duanshipindaguan 2019). Again, Baoge and other truck drivers are excluded from the visible mainstream culture since the beginning. What is more, Baoge's social life is still limited in Kuaishou with people who share a similar background, and his fame seems not to bring any chances of social mobility as well. "Gaoge has added about 300 friends in Kuaishou, most of them are also truck drivers, and others are also related to his job^{xxxii}" (Duanshipindaguan 2019).

Overall, Kuaishou has become an online subcultural field for the Chinese rural population, and its users are able to gather different kinds of capital to raise their positions there. However, because of the solidification of social class in China and distain towards Kuaishou, capital earned there cannot be circulated smoothly in the larger field. Thus, although Kuaishou users hope to escape from their original social class by succeeding in Kuaishou, in fact they "will stay with their million fans who are also from rural areas forever and never become influential in the mainstream society^{xxxiii}" (Huo 2016).

Incorporation of Kuaishou and the Chinese Rural Subculture

Demonization of Kuaishou. Although the rural-urban opposition has existed for a while in China, the rural subculture has never received so much controversy before. Scholars argue that the popularity of Kuaishou is a sign of resistance to the hegemonic urban culture and its long-time ignorance (Gong 2019; Ji 2019). The indication of possible subversion over the hegemonic urban culture has caused alarm or concern from the mainstream society as well. People's Daily (2017) urged the Chinese government to face the rural population's great demands for consuming its own subcultural products in order to operate in this market in the future. It further showed concerns about whether the mainstream urban culture would maintain its dominance. "Will the 'silent majority' on the Internet be silent forever^{xxxiv}" (People's Daily 2017)?

According to Hebdige (1979), demonization of subcultures is one of the most common strategies to naturalize them. By converting subcultural products into threatening and harmful signs, the hegemonic group is able to create moral panics which rationalize the further policing behaviors. After Huo's (2016) article, there were increasing posts exposing different kinds of vulgar, dangerous, and even illegal content in Kuaishou (CCTV 2016; Xi and Wang 2016; Xiao 2016). It became an emergency to act on this threat. One news article was about the police's investigations on Pica disorder performances in Kuaishou and if the actor was forced to do them (People's Daily 2016). Comments under this news were like "So disgusting^{xxxv}" (Jiabaorong 2016), or "(the actor) is asking for help, but the police does not intend to do so^{xxxvi}" (Pingchengfeiwu 2016).

Kuaishou and Chinese rural subculture have experienced demonization from the hegemonic urban culture as well. In 2016, "The cruel story of the bottom: Chinese countryside in a video app" labeled Kuaishou as collections of backward, immoral and brutal subcultural

products (Huo 2016). Kuaishou users, who are mostly from rural areas, were also portrayed as “someone with no money, education or even beauty^{xxxvii}” (Huo 2016). Intentionally or not, this article successfully convinced the mainstream society that Kuaishou was a miniature of Chinese rural subculture, and both of them were threats to the whole society.

Considering how well-known this article was, it is unsurprising that Kuaishou received fierce criticism from the mainstream media later. For instance, CCTV (2016) reported that there was a “fake donation^{xxxviii}” trend in Kuaishou: some Kuaishou influencers had live streamed on how they handed out cash to one entire improvised village and took the money back after streaming. Most comments under this news item were criticisms of Kuaishou: “It is time to supervise Kuaishou^{xxxix}, this is just the tip of the iceberg. So many charlatans there” (Lingyigewoninengkanjian 2016). Another article in Zhihu had detailed depictions about how Kuaishou users illegally sold fake shoes, watches, and even fake make-up to earn money there (Xiao 2016). Labels like “vulgar”, “weirdos”, and “immoral” are still some of the most common ones when talking about Kuaishou today, even though there is growing positive feedback of the app. For example, comments under a 2019 Weibo post said, “Kuaishou is pretty good except some stupid and vulgar drama shows^{xl}” (Wozhendemeiyoutoulan 2019).

Chinese rural subculture did not escape from demonizing as well. What those vulgar videos show was believed to be the common scenes of the current countryside (Huo 2016). “Kuaishou is just a mirror that reflects how backward China’s cultural life is^{xli}” (Yihonggongzi 2018). Rural people were regarded as typical Kuaishou users “who live in the countryside or small cities without a bachelor’s degree...whose social life is limited in the local areas^{xlii}” (Banrenmaxingren 2018). In other words, Kuaishou reflected what the true rural cultural life looks like, which is “there is always an idea of ‘worship of violence, winner is the king’ in the

Chinese countryside^{xliii}” (Huo 2016). The subcultural group was indicated as a hidden danger to the modern society as well: “Kuaishou is a dumping ground but I do not support to block it. Once it is closed, its users are going to pollute other social media^{xliv}”(Xiuxinxiangmian 2018).

Governmental institutions also play an important role in demonizing Kuaishou. In China, voices from official media organizations often guide the overall opinions in the mainstream media. For instance, after CCTV (2018) reported the teenage pregnancy trend in Kuaishou, a new round of moral panic started on the Internet. A lawyer wrote an article about this trend, arguing that Kuaishou has propagated unhealthy trends and ideologies among rural areas (Ding 2018). “The most dangerous part about these (short video apps) is that they are telling our society that attracting people’s attention with vulgar content is a convenient way to succeed. The popularity of such ideas will unavoidably harm the younger generation^{xlv}” (Ding 2018). At that time, almost all of the media was busy with exposing a variety of problems in Kuaishou: illegal actions, dirty talk, or just philistine content. Besides official media agencies’ announcements about regulatory action on Kuaishou, one article in Zhihu gave a list of harmful and threatening short videos like animal abuse or joking videos, arguing that the popularity of them would turn the next generation into “mischievous or even lethal children^{xlvi}” (Zhangquandan 2018).

The supervising behaviors from governmental institutions have further consolidated the moral panics around Kuaishou. A series of actions and policies convinced the majority the necessity of putting Kuaishou under surveillance: the entire app was censored for several days, several influencers were blocked, and later Kuaishou was required to add algorithms to censor videos in order to create a healthy online community (People’s Daily 2018). It is interesting that most of the criticisms are around children and adolescents. The mainstream media put lots of emphasis on how young Kuaishou users could be, and comments under the posts also showed

worries about the youth's future. One comment said, "my younger sister also uses Kuaishou. I am so worried about her, because she can be misled easily by things there^{xlvi}" (Huliyouzhixiaoshayu 2018).

Commercialization of Kuaishou. Recently, Kuaishou has received more positive feedback from the hegemonic culture. More and more people are starting to believe that Kuaishou gives people from the hegemonic culture a chance to "explore the bigger world^{xlvi}" (Xingyingyao 2019) that has been ignored for a while. The label of "Kuaishou user" also has been extended. Instead of being restricted to brutal rural populations, everyone can be a user of Kuaishou to record their daily life. "Kuaishou is not 'low' at all, there are just normal Chinese people who love their lives and enjoy recording their lives^{xli}" (Liao 2018).

The rural subculture seems not to conflict with the hegemonic culture as much as before: now it is a metaphor of ideal rural life as "living in peaceful villages in beautiful mountains and forests^l" (CCTV 2019). Although the rural cultural life is still considered as the opposite side of urban life, in fact this kind of imagination fulfills the hegemonic urban culture's demands of mitigating urban life's intensiveness and anxiety (Han 2018; Liao 2018). "The pressure from urban life makes many people to admire the rural life. However, the yearning does not mean taking any action but just appreciating from distance^{li}" (Han 2018). The rural areas are now included as an indispensable part of modern China as well, "the 'picture scroll' of peaceful rural life is the real life of Kuaishou, the real life of China^{lii}" (Han 2018).

In more recent posts, rural populations were portrayed as the descendants of the traditional Chinese optimistic and tenacious working class. "We can glorify their (Kuaishou users') diligence, wisdom, and persistence, but we should also understand the danger they are facing^{liii}" (Zhu 2019). For instance, several articles introduced videos of truck drivers, workmen

in factories and fishermen, praising them as hard-working, kind, and brave (Duanshipingdagan 2019; Liao 2018; Zhu 2019). Liao's (2018) article included families who live in their cargo ships all years, a circus who would give away their food to homeless, and electricians working at heights^{liv}. "You think people from the bottom society are just jokes, but you never see how everyone is trying their best to live^{lv}" (Liao 2018). "Like what Romain Rolland said, 'there is only one heroism in the world: to see the world as it is and to love it'...I think they are the heroes of life^{lvi}" (Gabrielle S 2018). Additionally, there are two posts in Weibo which collected a series of works from Kuaishou and introduced Kuaishou users as the experts of traditional Chinese craftsmanship who are able to show their creativity in Kuaishou (Wozhuasanbao 2019; Shenfanxp 2019). "I have re-edited more than 100 Kuaishou videos to show my respect towards these anonymous masters among the people. Also, I want to have more people to know them, know their persistence on traditional craftsmanship^{lviii}" (Shenfanxp 2019).

The government and official media organizations switched their attitudes towards Kuaishou as well. In 2019, People's Daily (2019) announced that it would start cooperation with Kuaishou in order to promote itself among lower social class groups. By adjusting its "algorithm to accord with healthy mainstream ideology^{lviii}" (People's Daily 2019), Kuaishou would ensure that it would supervise the overall trends in the app. There are other stories about how Kuaishou helped local governments to publicize local cultures and improved rural populations' life quality there. For example, a small village in Guizhou province uses Kuaishou to revitalize the local economy (CCTV 2019). Videos about the village's natural landscapes, local cultural activities and farming life have successfully promoted local tourism and business (CCTV 2019).

The popularity of Kuaishou has made the hegemonic group realize that there is an ignored group, a possible resistant power in rural areas. On the other hand, it is impossible to

eradicate rural subculture because of the large base of rural population. Thus, the hegemonic urban culture has switched its strategies from just demonizing rural subculture to transforming and accepting it. According to Hebdige (1979), commercializing subcultural products is another common method to diminish subcultures' resistant power. By doing so, the hegemonic group takes away the subcultures' agency over their own creations and transform them into harmless entertainment that everyone can consume (Hebdige 1979; Liu 2018).

In China, it has become popular to collect works in Kuaishou and re-edit them into longer videos in the mainstream social media. Usually, the theme is about how normal people love and live their lives in different ways. "I almost cried when watching this...I changed my idea about Kuaishou, and I was so ignorant before^{lix}" (Yanshixiaoaxue 2019). In fact, I would argue that these videos reflect the process of how the hegemonic group deliberately selects, re-interprets, and introduces certain subcultural products to the public. Like how subcultures re-interpret the hegemonic culture to create their own meanings (Bao and Wang 2010; Hall and Jefferson 1975; Hebdige 1979), the hegemonic group is also actively re-interpreting subcultural products to make them become part of its ideology again.

What is more, as Kuaishou is supervised by the government, the subcultural field there has lost its autonomy as well. Kuaishou has become another mainstream social media platform which shares homologous structures and rules with other fields. For the Chinese rural subculture, once Kuaishou has lost its uniqueness as a subcultural field, they have also lost their agency over it, and further over their own subcultural products. Since Kuaishou has been tightly connected to Chinese rural subculture, the incorporation of the app indicates the naturalization of the whole subcultural group. Some scholars have noticed the incorporation and considered it in a sanguine way, arguing that the incorporation of Kuaishou, the subcultural field, makes it easier for the

rural population to succeed in the mainstream world with capital they earn in Kuaishou (Zhou 2019; Liu 2018).

Who is representing them? Some people argue that since there is a variety of content in Kuaishou, it is impossible to summarize the whole online community with simplified labels (Han 2018; Liao 2018; Zhu 2019). However, since the very beginning in 2016, Kuaishou has been closely connected to one single group, the Chinese rural population. For a long time, this group and its subculture used to be ignored by the hegemonic culture. Generally, it is believed that the appearance of Kuaishou provides a stage for rural subcultural groups to express their thoughts and lives directly by themselves. “They (rural population) no longer want their lives and culture to be ‘expressed’ by the outsiders, and Kuaishou has given them the right to record and represent directly by themselves” (Ji 2019).

However, when Kuaishou or the Chinese rural subculture are mentioned in the mainstream media, most of the time the narratives are done by outsiders. Whatever it looks like, it is the result of deliberate selections and collages of subcultural products. The transition of the hegemonic culture’s attitude towards Kuaishou only indicates the process of incorporating Chinese rural subculture. Additionally, the representations of Kuaishou in the mainstream media reflect both the hegemonic culture’s imaginations of rural subcultural groups and different incorporation strategies. It is somewhat ironic that Kuaishou is often believed to “represent millions of users’ ‘real’ daily life in modern China^{lx}” (Xinhua News 2019) and give back rural people the agency to express themselves. As long as the hegemonic urban culture continues its dominance online and offline, it seems difficult for marginalized groups like the Chinese rural population to make their voices heard without the hegemonic culture’s reinterpretations. Furthermore, it will also be hard for them to subvert the whole discourse of power.

Conclusion

Looking back to those fierce discussions about Kuaishou, it becomes obvious that descriptions and evaluations of it and its online community have varied a lot. Indeed, the popularization of the Internet and smart phones have provided people, especially subordinated or marginalized groups, the ability to come together and express themselves directly to the public. For Kuaishou, its short video medium and recommendation system make it become the top choice for rural populations to share their life.

Because of its popularity among rural populations, Kuaishou should be considered as the online subcultural field for this group. Also, it is undeniable that its users benefit from Kuaishou by gathering financial, symbolic, and social capital there. However, though many of them believe that success in Kuaishou means success in the mainstream society, in fact it is usually hard for them to succeed and be accepted in the mainstream field with the capital they earn in Kuaishou, especially social and symbolic capital. The large amount financial capital Kuaishou users gather is not transformed into other kinds of capital in the mainstream field as well. Since the beginning, Kuaishou and its online community were demonized by the hegemonic culture, and it takes years to change the negative impressions.

More recently, there are transitions of attitude towards Kuaishou. Yet the transitions do not mean that the rural subculture itself has changed a lot to please the mainstream society. On the contrary, representations of Kuaishou are always selected and collaged by the hegemonic urban culture to fulfill their imaginations of Kuaishou and the rural subcultural group. The transitions of impressions and representations in fact reflect different kinds of strategies the hegemonic culture applies. I would argue that Chinese rural subculture is being incorporated by

the dominant urban culture in order to take control over the rural populations during the past four years.

DISCUSSION

From the hegemonic urban culture's perspective, Kuaishou is a deviant online field of the Chinese rural subculture. This subcultural field is portrayed as a miniature of the real subcultural world, whose structure and rules are very different from not only other fields, but also the hegemonic group's imaginations of it.

It is undeniable that the appearance of Kuaishou has provided the rural population opportunities to express their voices. In particular, the burgeoning of this online community makes it easier for the younger generation to construct and to further be proud of their rural identities. Young people from rural areas found that it was difficult to construct their self-identities during the past decades. The ignorance and mockery of the Chinese rural subculture in the mainstream media confirm to them the necessity to escape from the original social circle and to chase after the urban culture (Liu 2018; Zheng 2010). However, the solidification of China's society prevents them from raising their social rank easily (Huo 2016). Kuaishou has provided another possibility for the rural population, which is to accept their original subculture (Gong 2019; Ji 2019).

On the other hand, Kuaishou's success indicates a growing resistant power in some level, because it reflects the rural population's dissatisfaction of China's current discourse of power. The enlivening of Chinese rural subculture has caused the hegemonic group's alarm as well. According to Williams (1973), the hegemonic culture is never a rigid totality but a constantly changing aggregation of meanings and values. Depending on different social contexts, the

hegemonic culture will adjust itself to keep its fundamental position among as many groups as possible, “the dominant mode is a conscious selection and organization” (Williams 1973:13). On the other hand, there are always groups or ideologies excluded by the contemporary hegemonic culture. However, not all of them will be considered as threats: some will be tolerated in order to incorporate more groups. Williams (1973) categorized the excluded cultures as either alternative or oppositional, and “it is often a very narrow line, in reality, between alternative and oppositional” (11). For Chinese rural subculture, it used to be an ignored alternative subculture, not a hidden threat. However, because of the huge number of the rural population, once the group begins to unite together, it becomes a significant power that needs extra attention.

According to Hebdige (1979), two common methods to naturalize subcultures are demonization and commodification. By doing so, the hegemonic group is able to either eradicate the subcultures or to re-define them into harmless entertainment (Hebdige 1979; Liu 2018). Analysis shows that both strategies were applied by Chinese hegemonic urban culture in the process of incorporating Kuaishou. When Kuaishou was just known by the majority in 2016, it was portrayed as a rough app filled with backward, degenerate and vulgar content (Gong 2019; Huo 2016; Liu 2018). The subculture represented in Kuaishou was very different from the hegemonic urban culture, and many of the subcultural productions contained resistant symbols and values (Guo 2018; Liu 2018). Not surprisingly, Kuaishou and the rural subculture caused a moral panic and received numerous criticisms. The Chinese government’s supervising action further confirmed the majority that Kuaishou was a radical threat.

Commodification appeared in the later stage of incorporation. Since the end of 2018, there were articles introducing the rural population as the traditional Chinese optimistic and tenacious working class (Han 2018; Liao 2018; Zhu 2019). At the same time, Kuaishou became

a platform where showed all different kinds of ways of living (Gong 2019; Liao 2018; Zhu 2019). At that time, products from the Chinese rural subculture were purposefully selected, collaged, and re-interpreted by the mainstream media to fulfill their imaginations of the rural life as natural, peaceful, and diligent. Additionally, Kuaishou and the rural population were separated during the commodification. The label of “Kuaishou user” extended and was not closely related to only the rural population anymore: currently everyone can be a Kuaishou user to record their daily life. Kuaishou is being transformed from a unique subcultural field into another mainstream media. At the same time, the rural subculture has lost its agency over its own subcultural products, which have become commercial products that follow the hegemonic culture’s expectations.

Particularly, Internet technologies are essential to understand both the popularity of Kuaishou and the process of incorporation. The near-universal access to the Internet is the cornerstone for the popularity of Kuaishou. Furthermore, Kuaishou’s short video medium and its unique recommendation system also encourage more people to produce and upload their own works.

Recently, more scholars have switched their attention to the third level digital divide (Deursen and Helsper 2015; Ragnedda and Ruiu 2017). Instead of focusing on accessibility or using patterns of the Internet, scholars argue that it is time to “determine who benefits in which ways from internet use in terms of a broad range of offline outcomes” (Deursen and Helsper 2015: 30). There are worries about if the discrepancy of transformations of offline resources among different groups will lead to further inequality. For the Chinese rural population, indeed they can earn resources through Kuaishou, and some resources bring offline outcomes. For example, Kuaishou helps the rural population to overcome spatial limitation and to broaden their

social networks (Duanshipindaguan 2019). However, the transformation of offline capital does not help the rural population to break the solidification of social class. Evidence shows that capital earned in Kuaishou is not accepted by other mainstream fields, especially for social and symbolic capital. Although Kuaishou users also gain large amount of financial capital, little of it can be transformed into other kinds of resources as well. As a result, limited online capital can be transformed into offline resources, and it is still rare for Kuaishou users to achieve social mobility in the real world.

The hegemonic group also manipulates Internet technologies to regulate Kuaishou. Analysis shows that the hegemonic group pays lots of attention to Kuaishou's recommendation system. This system is famous for its fairness: Kuaishou itself is not responsible for distributing resources or supervising the overall trends, which means everyone's work has an even chance to be seen. Currently, Kuaishou has been asked to add an "anti-addictive system" which prevent teenage users from certain kinds of works, and its recommendation system has been redesigned to distribute more resources to content that promotes and represents mainstream ideologies (People' Daily 2018; Xinhua News 2019). By supervising its algorithms, the hegemonic group has successfully reformed the structure of Kuaishou and further transferred Kuaishou into a homologous field which follows the mainstream world's rules. As a result, even though it may be easier to transform capital earned in Kuaishou into offline resources, it becomes more difficult for the rural population to gain online capital there.

In 2020, with the outbreak of Coronavirus in China, there have been reports and articles about how people spontaneously manage to support the affected areas. For example, there was one news post about a farmer who rode 40 kilometers to send fresh vegetables to the medical team^{lxi} (People's Daily 2020). In Kuaishou, people also post short videos about their efforts and

hopes about the epidemic. One re-editing of Kuaishou videos has received over 80 thousand likes in Weibo (Nongchaoerdazongguan 2020). It includes videos from farmers, doctors, workmen, and even children, “normal people from Kuaishou are always the group who try their best to support our country^{lxii}” (Youniyanguanggengcanlantangdoubaobei 2020). I would argue that this is another example of the incorporation of Kuaishou and the Chinese rural subculture. Again, the mainstream media is busy on selecting and re-interpreting the rural subculture’s works and then transforming them into popular commodities. Besides commercialization, the hegemonic group is weakening the rural subculture by separating Kuaishou from the subculture. As Kuaishou becomes another homologous field, the rural subculture also becomes powerless again.

This research has several limitations. First, all the data was purposely selected based on my own judgement and accessibility of materials. Additionally, the coding was finished by a sole coder with the individual’s interpretations and understanding of texts. The translation of materials also caused unavoidable inaccuracy and loss of information. Thus, this research only represented a small piece of the hegemonic urban culture’s reactions to Kuaishou in China’s online sphere. What is more, this research did not collect and analyze materials from insiders of the Chinese rural subculture. I was unable to analyze if the Chinese rural subculture itself has changed because of the incorporation. For future studies, I would suggest enlarging the scale of data collection and analyzing how the subculture itself is affected by the outsiders’ reactions of it.

Nevertheless, this research provides insights and directions that will be helpful for studies about today’s subcultural communities. Internet technologies should be valued, because they have become an indispensable part of people’s daily life and further changed social structures.

Also, scholars may pay more attention to the third level digital divide. The transformations between online and offline resources in fact indicate the changing power dynamics in contemporary societies. Additionally, it becomes necessary for today's hegemonic group to be prepared for possible subversions happening online. Evaluating different strategies that the hegemonic group applies online will be helpful to understand how it consolidates its dominance. Moreover, today's social media plays an important role in affecting and shaping cultural groups. The uneven distribution of power also reflects the hierarchy existing in the online sphere. By understanding the mechanism behind distributions, scholars will be able to figure out alternative ways to improve social equality both online and offline.

Kuaishou and the Chinese rural subculture together is an invaluable case of how a historically marginalized group manipulates technical technologies to resist long-standing ignorance and oppression. More importantly, this research reveals challenges that subordinated or marginalized groups are facing today. Even though they may be able to form powerful online communities to resist oppression in reality, this study indicates that the online sphere is also being incorporated by the hegemonic culture. It has shifted from a virgin land where everyone has even chance to win to another homologous field that follows the real world's rule. Like Kuaishou and the Chinese rural subculture, other subcultures' agency over their online communities may also be taken away and the subcultural fields can be assimilated, losing its original resistant characteristics. Will the hegemonic culture successfully maintain its supremacy in the online sphere? Or will the subcultures find alternative ways to break the hierarchy?

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APPENDIX A: CODE BOOK

对“快手”内容的形容/评价 (Descriptions/ evaluations of Kuaishou's content)

- 正面 (Positive)
 - “人生百态”/“千人千面”：认为“快手”平台上的内容反映了社会中不同阶层不同人群的种种生活形态，不存在高低贵贱，偏正面。(“Vicissitudes of life”: Content in Kuaishou reflects a variety of lifestyles or ways of living.)
 - 真实的生活/“日常”：“快手”反映了（至少部分）大众/主流社会认为的人民真实的生活状态，具有普适性，偏正面。(“The real life”: Kuaishou at least partly represents what normal people's real daily life looks like.)
 - 其他正面描述：其余有关“快手”内容的正面形容/描述。(Other positive descriptions/ evaluations)
- 负面 (Negative)
 - 低俗/恶俗/庸俗/媚俗：认为“快手”上的内容低级，恶趣味，不具备审美或教育意义，亦可以形容人或文化。(Vulgar: Content in Kuaishou is in bad taste with no aesthetic or educational meanings. It can be used for people or culture as well.)
 - 吸引流量，注意力/“博眼球”：指内容上为吸引流量/注意力而不择手段，贬义。(“Attracting eyeballs”: Content in Kuaishou is made unscrupulously for attracting attention only.)
 - 违法行为：提及“快手”视频内容中涉及违法犯罪，贬义。(Illegal actions: Content in Kuaishou represents/indicates illegal actions.)
 - 其他负面描述：其余有关“快手”内容的负面形容/描述。(Other negative descriptions/evaluations)

对快手用户的形容/评价 (Descriptions/ evaluations of Kuaishou users)

- “奇葩”：原指不同寻常或非常出众的人物，现多指让人难以理解的，非正常人的，离奇丑陋庸劣的人，贬义。(“Weirdo”: People are considered as abnormal, hard to understand, or extremely displeased. Negative.)
- “年轻人”：强调“快手”用户的年龄偏小。(The youth: Emphasis on how young Kuaishou users usually are.)
- 乡村，小镇人口/工人阶级/“沉默的大多数”：提及快手用户的地域或阶级属性，强调这个群体在主流媒体中并没有得到足够关注或发声机会。(“The silent majority”/rural people/ working class: Emphasis on Kuaishou users' lower socioeconomic status, and on how this group is ignored by the mainstream media.)
- “每一个人”：强调快手用户所涵盖人群广泛，并不局限于任何特定人群。(“Everyone”: The label of “Kuaishou user” does not refer to only certain groups: everyone can be the user.)

- “高手在民间”：强调快手用户出色的才艺/技能并未被主流社会所发掘，重视。(“Masters among the people”: Emphasis on how talented/highly skilled Kuaishou users are, and their craftsmanship is often ignored by the mainstream society.)
- 共鸣：强调“快手”用户属性的趋同性，常指社会背景或情感经历。(Sympathy: Kuaishou users share similar social background/experience.)
- 其他描述：其他关于快手用户/主播的描述。(Other descriptions/evaluations of Kuaishou users)

对快手应用本身的评价 (Evaluations of Kuaishou, the app itself)

- 中立 (Neutral)
 - 农村乡镇景象/“中国的另一面”：认为快手展示了主流媒体中鲜少展示的中国社会中更为贫穷落后的那部分社会生态。(“The other side of China society”: Kuaishou represents the more impoverished and backward part of China society that the mainstream media rarely mentions.)
 - 快手亚文化圈/“真正的快手”：认为快手内部已经形成属于自己的独特亚文化圈。(“The real Kuaishou/subcultural community in Kuaishou: Kuaishou has formed a closed, unique subcultural community.)
 - 中立平台：认为“快手”仅仅作为一个中立平台存在，对内容并不负责。(Neutral platform: Kuaishou is merely a social media platform and is not responsible for content.)
 - 平台自主监管/“传播健康价值观”：强调“快手”应加强平台审核管理，以免对社会风气造成不良影响。(“Propagate healthy values”/ self-censoring: Kuaishou should reinforce its supervising/censoring mechanisms in order to promote healthy social values.)
- 正面 (Positive)
 - “一个展示才华的机会”：强调“快手”给了更多人一个展示自己才华/技能并得到承认关注的机会。(“An opportunity to show your talent”: Kuaishou gives more people opportunities to show their talent/skills to the public.)
 - 窗口/“看到了更大的世界”：强调快手作为一个窗口连接和展示了不同阶级人群的生活。(“The bigger world”/ Window: Kuaishou is a window that represents lives of people from different social class and connect them altogether.)
 - 其他正面描述/评价：其他关于快手应用正面的描述/评价。(Other positive descriptions/evaluations of Kuaishou app)
- 负面 (Negative)
 - “助长社会不良风气”：认为“快手”的存在不利于甚至有害于社会风气。(“Encouraging unhealthy social trends”: Kuaishou encourages unhealthy and even harmful social trends.)

- 其他负面描述/评价：其他关于快手应用负面的描述/评价。(Other negative descriptions/evaluations)

关于底层人群/乡镇文化的形容/评价 (Descriptions/evaluations of the lower class/ rural subculture)

- 正面评价 (Positive descriptions/evaluations)
- 负面评价 (Negative descriptions/evaluations)
- 农村衰落：提及农村本土经济文化娱乐生活的衰落或缺失。(Crisis of local rural areas: Rural areas has declined both economically and mentally.)
- 乡镇文化消费需求：提及农村自身文化的消退和缺失，但消费，生产需求仍十分旺盛的现象。(Demands of cultural consumption: Although rural areas are facing the decline of local cultures, there are still strong demands of producing and consuming cultural products.)

关于政府监管整治快手的讨论 (Discussions about government's measures to censor/ supervise Kuaishou: Government should supervise or even block the entire Kuaishou app.): 提及政府对“快手”平台或内容进行监管甚至封杀的讨论。

快手所反映的中国社会现象/价值观 (Social phenomena/ problems/ ideologies reflected by Kuaishou)

- 成功：关于“成功”相关概念的讨论，特指被主流社会所认可，或是社会阶层上升。(Success: Succeed in particular raising socioeconomic status or being accepted by the mainstream society.)
- “阳春白雪”和“下里巴人”：上层文化和底层文化，都市文化与乡村文化，雅俗文化二元论相关的讨论。(“Highbrow” and “lowbrow”: The division of urban culture and rural subculture; of high culture and mass culture.)
- 社会阶层分化/固化：提及中国社会阶层差异甚至固化，包括底层群众难以突破阶层边界实现向上流动的话题。(Stratification& solidification of social class: It becomes harder for the lower social class to raise their social status.)
- 经济利益/“赚大钱”/“变现”：有关底层人群如何通过快手提升经济，物质层面生活的描述和讨论。(“Earn big money”/ financial benefits: Rural people improve their material life/gain more financial capital through Kuaishou.)
- 网络话语权：提及中国传统媒体及新兴社交网络上权力分配不均所导致的不同人群所掌握的话语权的差异。(Distributions of online power discourse: The distributions of online power discourse are uneven in both China's traditional mass media and social media.)

- 在其他社交媒体上的传播和呈现：提及“快手”和其内容在其他网络平台上被呈现，讨论，和传播。(Representations of Kuaishou in other social media platforms: descriptions of how Kuaishou and its content are propagated and represented in other social media platforms.)
- 科技惠民：有关科技发展及其影响的相关描述；包括对“快手”本身所有科技的描述以及更大社会背景下的描述和讨论。(Technical innovation: How technical developments effect/improve either “Kuaishou” community or the broader society.)
- 其他社会问题：有关其他社会问题的描述和讨论。(Descriptions/evaluations of other social problems)

关于来自主流文化的快手观看者的描述和讨论 (Descriptions/ evaluations of Kuaishou users who are from the hegemonic culture)

- “猎奇“：多指人刻意追求血腥，性，暴力等内容的行为，亦可用于形容这些内容本身，贬义。(“Seeking novelty”: People actively seek for novel content that is often about sex, blood, or violence. It is also an adjective to describe the content itself.)
- 其他评价：(Other descriptions of Kuaishou users who are from the hegemonic culture)

ⁱ 自虐视频、低俗黄段子、和各种行为怪异的人。

ⁱⁱ “酷底层物语:一个视频软件的中国农村“

ⁱⁱⁱ 只需扒拉扒拉快手这个 app，就能了解中国乡村的精神面貌了。

^{iv} 根据 2010 第六次人口普查，农村人口有 6.74 亿，几乎占中国一半的人口。...换句话说，6.74 亿农村人口的生活状态，没人关注。

^v 快手祸害未成年人，扭曲他们的价值观，应该直接封杀。

^{vi} ...败坏社会风气，严重影响青少年身心健康。

^{vii} “当你觉得生活又苦又累时，去看看快手吧！”

^{viii} 快手就是当代百工图。

^{ix} 快手给我们提供了一个动机，让我们留下这些瞬间，也让这些瞬间被别人看到，并且增添新的意义。

^x “神秘快手系列”

^{xi} “乡土民俗”

^{xii} “工业”

^{xiii} “发明与手工”

^{xiv} 快手是我见过最具有蓬勃生命力的地方之一。每个人都尽力都在上面展示着自己——展示自己的工作，自己的技能，自己的家人，展示见到的有意思或者没意思的事，展示生活所赋予的一切幸与不幸，然后继续努力勇敢的生活。

^{xv} 你对生活的热爱，很可爱。在快手，点赞可爱中国。

^{xvi} “快手惹人嫌？多少人被开除了人籍？”

^{xvii} 其实这些人平时是没什么机会在网上发声的，以前你至少要有一部电脑才能上网，其实这些人能够活跃，快手这种类型的让我们觉得很 low 的平台能够流行起来，得益于物质基础的堆积...

^{xviii} 快手的短视频的制作，非常简单，手机拍摄短短几秒十几秒的镜头，不用剪辑不要配音，非常方便...

^{xix} 记录平凡人的生活

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- xx 快手不像大部分社交平台的大V导向，不做任何资源倾斜，依靠的是算法。
- xxi 快手算法团队设计了一套个性化推荐机制，根据不同人的喜好，推荐不同内容。
- xxii 对用户、市场、社会和国家肩负应有的责任，积极培育社会道德和主流价值观。
- xxiii 青少年防沉迷系统
- xxiv 那个丛林主义、胜者为王的社会
- xxv 要是想赚钱，今晚咱直播间 20 万人气我能赚 20 万。
- xxvi 打赏
- xxvii 礼物进了主播腰包，粉丝们成为交易的筹码。
- xxviii 在他们看来，这是个弱肉强食、有钱者称王的简单世界，土豪可以抢走他们心爱的女人，他们的爱情只好向金钱屈服。
- xxix 但那些农村中的优秀的孩子们，无时无刻不想突破社会结界，到达资源丰饶的那个世界。...他们在快手上的拼命表现，求关注，本质上就是想靠此穿越结界。
- xxx 王乐乐和杨清柠曾推出一首洗脑神曲《我们》，在快手十分火爆...而在网易云音乐，这首歌的评论多达近 5 万条，内容多为对王乐乐的不屑：“我做错了什么，网易云音乐要给我推王导的歌”。
- xxxi “隐形功臣”从被忽视到被尊重
- xxxii 宝哥的快手里也关注了近 300 个老铁，大多都是卡友，还有些货主、配货中介、卡车销售和修理等与宝哥工作有关的老铁。
- xxxiii 他的影响力还是在那一百万的乡村粉丝中打转，并不会对主流世界产生一丝波澜...
- xxxiv 中国互联网的“大多数”是否会永远“沉默”？
- xxxv 低俗，恶心！
- xxxvi 明明有求生意愿，执法机关却无意相救。
- xxxvii 他们都是没有钱、没有文化、没有地位、甚至没有长相的人...
- xxxviii 伪慈善
- xxxix 应该整治一下快手了，这个真心只是冰山一角，各种炒作慈善打垃圾广告骗取卖假药。
- xl 快手除了一些非主流拍土味电视剧，其实还是很好看的。
- xli 快手只是一面镜子，照出这个国家的精神文明有多么落后。
- xlii 最高学历为本科以下，生活在农村或者小县城...平时的社交仅限于本地方言区。
- xliiii 中国的乡村一直酝酿一种暴力的种子。说来说去，中国基层社会从古至今的精神世界摆脱不了这八个字：暴力崇拜、胜者为王。
- xliiv 快手就是个化粪池，但是不希望这个平台被封，因为一旦被封，这些人就该去污染其他的社交媒体了。
- xli v 这些东西最大的危害在于向全社会传递了一个这样的讯息：制造恶俗的吸引眼球的东西是一个很便利的成功途径。这种价值观的流行必然会消磨年轻人的意志...
- xli vi 真正具有杀伤力的熊孩子
- xli vii 我的妹妹也在玩快手，我都不知道该怎么教育我妹妹...毕竟小孩子是容易被诱导，又不具备什么辨别能力。深深地担忧。
- xli viii 快手，发现更大的世界
- xli ix 快手一点都不 low，里面都是中国努力活着，热爱纪录生活的一群百姓。
- ¹ 高山密林，郁郁葱葱；水田村寨，安宁祥和
- ^{li} 因为城市生活的高压，所以很多人都开始向往田园生活，当然，不是真的投入田园，而是遥遥地云关注...
- ^{lii} 农林牧渔的画卷，是快手的日常，也是中国的日常...

liii 我们可以赞颂他们的勤劳，智慧和忍耐，但同样应该时刻了解他们面临的危险和辛苦。

liiv 高空作业的电工

liv 你看着那些基层 百姓拼命挣扎的样子拙劣好笑，可你没看出每个人都在努力活着...

lvii 就好像罗曼罗兰说的「世界上只有一种真正的英雄主义，那就是在认识生活的真相后依然热爱生活」...

我觉得，他们才是生活的英雄...

lviii 还有太多了不起的匠人故事，我把 100 多个快手视频混剪成一个，致敬这些真正的民间艺术家们，也想让更多人知道，他们择一而终，锲而不舍的传承和守护。

lviii 符合主流价值导向的算法

lix 看得眼眶湿润...对这个平台改观了，原来我犯了一个自以为是错误。

lx 记录了当下中国亿万普通用户的真实生活

lxi 农民骑 40 公里给医疗队送菜

lxii 往往是那些快手上的那些朴实人尽自己的全部力量帮助国家