

A HYBRID BETWEEN AN AUDIO-VISUAL ART GENRE AND A
MEDIUM IN CHINESE CYBER CULTURE

Three Perspectives on Micro Film

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Abstract

In 2001, the term micro film was proposed by director and music producer Zhiping Yang, referring to a novel form of online audiovisual art, which is short in terms of duration and production process with small-scale investment. This thesis aims to contribute to the fundamental research of micro film in Chinese media studies on the definition of micro film and offer three particular perspectives on the form. Contrary to current research that regards micro film as a new audio-visual art genre, I propose to view micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium in Chinese cyber culture. This will be addressed through the perspective of the art form of micro film, the genealogy of micro film, and micro film as a “new” medium.

In the first perspective, I engage into the ongoing debate around which art form micro film is, that is, whether micro film is film or video. I argue that as different audio-visual art forms, film and video address their ideal spectators differently. Thus, the art form of micro film can be defined by analyzing the ideal spectatorship of film, video and micro film, respectively. The second perspective focuses on the hybridity of micro film as a new art genre, which is argued as the other reason contributing to the debate around the defining issue of micro film. I suggest studying the history of micro film to understand its hybrid feature. Rather than tracking the micro film history in a linear way as what Chinese researchers did, I propose to study the genealogy of micro film, which stresses the historical affiliations and resonances of micro film. I argue that short film, amateur video of *egao* and advertisement are the three main cultural forms which are remediated by micro film. The third perspective discusses the characteristics of micro film as a medium. By studying the argument that micro film is the product of “new media”, I criticize that Chinese researchers who propose this argument avoid answering the most fundamental questions: what is the definition of “new media” to which they refer and what are the characteristics of these “new media”? Furthermore, I argue that it is problematic to adopt the term “new media” and suggest using participatory digital media instead. I continue to discuss that as a medium, what the characteristics of micro film are in relation to the specifics of participatory digital media. Last, I analyze the problems for the further development of micro film. I argue that the root of these problems lies on the current way that micro film is defined since it cannot reflect the distinct characteristics of micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium.

Introduction

Since 2010, a series of novel cultural products or objects have appeared and prevailed online in China. They are often named with the adjective “micro” as qualifier: micro novel, micro factory, micro blog (known as Weibo), to name but only a few.¹ Hence, “micro” seems to become one of the dominant labels for the current cyber culture in China (Lv, 2012: 55). However, “micro” is also a universal cyber-cultural phenomenon which signifies the features of a short and immediate digital entity with a distributed nature (Gai, 2013). Twitter is the most typical example (Song, 2010: 10). In China, because of the Internet censorship by the Chinese government, a significant amount of popular foreign websites are blocked, such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook (King et al., 2013: 328). Yet, there are close Chinese substitutes which provide similar services focused on the population of mainland China. For instance, RenRen is a clone of Facebook and Weibo is often considered to be the Chinese Twitter (ibid.).² In other words, the technical affordances of the Chinese media are like a mirror that reflects the technical affordances of the media that are picked up in the West. Thus, there is a potential for a comparable cyber culture in China. However, the main difference lies in the regulation of content online. Public expression in China is limited to avoid instigating collective political action, such as protests (ibid.: 329).

In the context of a specifically Chinese cyber culture, the term “micro film” was proposed by a director and music producer Zhiping Yang, who was subsequently hailed by the micro film industry as the “father” of micro film, in 2011 (Liu and Yan, 2013: 42). Since then, micro film has been widely acknowledged as an important element of what we can consider contemporary “micro culture” in China (Zheng, 2011: 9; Kang, 2011: 75; Sun and Qian, 2012: 4; Li, 2011: 88; Dong, 2012: 24; Li, 2012: 42; Cui, 2012: 41). Because of a significantly growing number of Internet users in China every year, micro film has enjoyed a growing popularity within a short amount of time.

Due to the sustaining and even growing popularity of micro film, Chinese academics have paid more attention to its research in recent years. Current research on micro film is based on the assumption that micro film is a new audio-visual art genre in the Chinese cyber culture. Yet, also due to its newness, there is still debate about

¹ Micro novel refers to the online novels of which the words amount is less than 140. Micro factory signifies a kind of manufacturing system which relies on the Internet to communicate and to cooperate with others. It aims at satisfying the demand of extreme personalization and allows the “customer” to participate in the research process of their own products. Micro blog is one of the most frequently used social media in China. It is widely known as Weibo and it functions as the Chinese Twitter. All of them belong to the contemporary “micro culture” in China.

² RenRen is a social networking service in mainland China. It is dubbed as “a Chinese copy of Facebook”. Its address is www.renren.com.

the definition of micro film within media studies. Some researchers, such as film scholar at Communication University of China, Xiaomeng Chen (2012: 33), and media researcher at Shaanxi Normal University, Rongrong Li (2012: 34), believe that micro film is essentially a novel form of films in the Internet age. Another approach comes from researchers Xiaojun Zhen (2012: 9), lecturer of advertisement studies at Jinan University, and Zhifei Ye (2012: 47), advertisement researcher at Sichuan Normal University, who argue that micro film is actually a form of advertisement that is telling a story. From a third perspective, media researcher, Dong Fang (2012: 46), at Northeast Normal University, maintains that micro film is online videos which are creative and have undergone elaborate production processes. A fourth and final approach comes from researchers like media theorists at Chizhou University, Li Sun and Guiyi Qian (2012: 99), who state that micro film can be understood as the hybrid of short films and advertisements. In this sense, the first goal of this thesis is to contribute to the debate by reflecting on the reason why researchers hold different opinions towards the status of micro film. Following this, it will initiate an attempt to explore the art form of micro film, which is the most fundamental issue of the study of micro film as a genre.

Even though the definition of micro film is unstable, Chinese researchers agree on the fact that micro film is exclusively distributed on new media platforms, specifically Web 2.0 sites, and is watched on different new media devices, ranging from personal computers to mobile phones. Additionally, micro film is generally made with digital editing software. Hence, researchers claim that micro film should be understood as the product of new media (Quan, 2012: 38; Hong, 2011: 49; Meng, 2011: 100; Sun, 2012: 121). In other words, the defining characteristics of micro film are supposed to be influenced significantly by the specifics of new media. However, Chinese researchers rarely clarify the notion and the specifics of the “new media” they refer to. Likewise, seldom do they analyze how the specifics of “new media”, which is with the World Wide Web as the clearest manifestation, influences the characteristics of micro film so far. Therefore, the second goal of this thesis is to elaborate on the relationship between the specific features and functions of “new media” and the characteristics of micro film. I will argue that from this perspective, micro film can be regarded as a “new” medium in the digital context. In short, micro film is essentially a hybrid between a genre and a medium. Furthermore, micro film is still in development. Ironically, most micro films today cannot be distinguished from other online videos or online short films. I will argue that the root of such problem lies in the current definition of micro film, which does not reflect the distinct characteristics of micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium. Hence, I will

attempt to propose a possible suggestion to make an improvement of the current way to define micro film.

1. Context and Significance

In Chinese academia, 2010 is regarded as the first year of micro film because the first micro film that is widely acknowledged was released in this year (Meng, 2011: 99; Kang, 2011: 75; Lv, 2012: 55).³ This first micro film is a well-produced commercial of Cadillac, which imitates the style of action movies. It was made by professionals (mainly from Hollywood) and featured two famous actors from Hong Kong. On December 27th, the day it premiered on the official website of Cadillac, it attracted more than 100 million views (Zheng, 2012: 10). Nevertheless, the prototype of micro film emerged in 2005 and I argue that its development can provisionally be divided into two chronological stages.

In the first stage, the prototype for micro film is mainly derived from the grass-root video. Since ancient times, elites constituted by intellectuals and professionals have been dominant in Chinese mainstream values and culture. Consequently, the grass-root culture, which entails the values of civilians and which is in opposition to elite culture has been constantly marginalized (Liu, 2008: 48; Zeng, 2010: 87). Nevertheless, a turning point emerged at the end of 2005 (Liu, 2008: 48). In that year, a singing contest named *Super Girl*, which was open to any female contestant, finally brought civilians to television viewers both elite and from the grass-root. This program was a big success and sparked the creation of similar contests. Simultaneously, a series of online amateur works (these women singing) received tons of public attention, which contributed to the fast development of the grass-root culture. Afterwards, more and more common people are eager to show themselves and their talents in different ways, either to participate in the contests held by traditional media institutions or by simply uploading their works online. Nowadays, the grass-root culture is a very important subculture in China (Liu, 2012: 111). A *Murder Case Caused by a Mantou*, which is regarded as a first and rudimentary form of micro film, was one of the most popular online amateur videos in 2006 (Lv, 2012: 55).⁴ Strictly speaking, this is an online parody video lasting 20 minutes. It was made by Ge Hu, an amateur director. He re-edited the commercial film *The Promise* (2005) and parodied a Chinese legal talk show to satirize Chinese cinema. In spite of its great popularity, as a grass-root video, most people did not treat it seriously at that moment.

³ It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM2PD-nhqdk> (in Chinese).

⁴ It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIU4udZRKEY> (in Chinese).

Nevertheless, a large quantity of parody videos appeared online afterwards, including Ge Hu's following videos such as *The Empire of Spring Transportation* (2006), *007 vs. Man in Black* (2007).⁵

Around 2010, the development of a micro film prototype moved towards a second phase. This is a period when professional organizations and commercial enterprises got involved in the production of micro film. In August, video hosting website Youku cooperated with China Film Group Corporation and Chevrolet to produce a film series named *The Bright Eleven*, which invited eleven intelligent Chinese youth directors to participate.⁶ It consists of ten short films which were distributed online only (originally on Youku) and one long film that was released in the cinema. All of these films shared the same theme on "the youth of the generation after the 80's" and all producers promised that everything was created by them. As soon as these films were distributed, they achieved great success. Take for instance, *Old Boy* (2010), the most popular among these films. It had more than 500,000 views and 12,000 comments on the first day it was released. One week later, "old boy" became one of the most frequently searched key words online. Afterwards, *The Bright Eleven* was labeled as the first online short film series with the same theme in the history of Chinese cyber culture and caused the boom of online films in the following time.

More importantly, because of funding sponsorship from commercial enterprise and the assistance of professional organizations, *The Bright Eleven* also drew attention from academia and the industry besides a large public interest. In academia, the term of micro film was coined officially by Zhiping Yang to define this cyber cultural phenomenon. For the industry, since 2011, most Chinese major portals and video websites invested in micro film, for example Sina, Tudou and Tencent (Dong, 2012: 22). They mimic Youku's approach in supporting upcoming directors (both professional and amateur) by cooperating with commercial enterprises. Notably, also at this time, more and more long advertisements began to appear online under the name of micro film.

Meanwhile, the number of grass-root videos is still increasing significantly. This ranges from mainly re-editing and mashing up previous blockbusters to producing

⁵ *The Empire of Spring Transportation* (2006) parodies *The Matrix* trilogy, some of the movies of Stephen Chow and *Hero*, aiming at satirizing Chinese chaotic period of spring transportation. It can be watched on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZL_F85AhSg (in Chinese); *007 vs. Man in Black* (2007) was produced, directed, edited and wrote by Ge Hu with the goal to satirize North Korean leader Kim Jung-II's regime. It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsM5N4zAQU8&list=PLF4233D7193692529> (in English, but typical Chinese style English).

⁶ All of the ten online short films can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLaj-D27bt1IRji8gHJAYZKel6RhjjET2s> (in Chinese).

original works. Simultaneously, a range of micro film festivals has been held globally, such as China International Micro Film Festival (CIMFF), Taiwan Micro Film Festival (TMFF) and Canada International Micro Film Festival (CMFF).⁷ Furthermore, after the first website catering to the distribution of micro film being formally built (www.weiyang.com) in April, an increasing number of similar websites appeared within these years, such as www.vmovier.com and wdy.wmxa.cn.

Nowadays, micro film is no longer an unfamiliar concept, but a household label in China. From *The Ultimate Winner* (2011) and *Father* (2011), to *Courageous Love* (2012) and *The Divergent Road* (2012), a couple of years later, the popularity of micro film is largely comparable to blockbusters and watching micro film has already become a pervasive form of entertainment.⁸

In fact, we should note that the development of micro film has a beneficial environment in China due to the large amount of Chinese Internet users. From 1997 on, China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) works in the investigation, collection and analysis of the statistical data on the Chinese Internet use and predicts the trends of Internet development. In accordance with *The 29th Statistical Report of the Development of Chinese Internet* published in 2012, the total number of Chinese Internet users reached 513 million by the end of the December 2011. Among them, there were 325 million users watching online videos.⁹ Such a large number of the Internet users facilitated the speedy development of micro film in 2011. More recently, *The 33rd Statistical Report of the Development of Chinese Internet* shows that the total number of Chinese Internet users has already risen to 618 million by December 31st, 2013. 428 million among them were users of video websites, and the proportion of online video watching was 69.3%. Compared with the 29th statistical report, the trend reflects an increase of more than 100 million users in terms of online video watching only during two years. As predicted by the 33rd statistical report, the number of the video online viewers will keep increasing in the future.¹⁰ Furthermore, in 2012, the average time Chinese Internet users spent on watching online videos was four hours per week, which was two times as American users' average time (as cited in Chen, 2012: 73). It is notable that the number of users who access the Internet by mobile

⁷ The official websites of these micro film festivals can be accessed 1) <http://www.cimff.com/>; 2) http://www.weifilm.com.tw/works.php?video_type=-1; 3) <http://cmff.ca/en/>, respectively.

⁸ *The Ultimate Winner* (2011) and *Father* (2011) were both made by the same producing team of *Old Brother* (2010). Both of them can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vocUPbcLilc> (in Chinese) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3-Ukg4W3VU> (in Chinese), respectively. *Courageous Love* was a professional micro film which can be watched on the YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bW956Ged_Qg (in Chinese). *The Divergent Road* is a micro film made by students from National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan. It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydSbK-QL-H4>.

⁹ Further reading: http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201206/t20120612_26720.htm (in Chinese)

¹⁰ Further reading: http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201403/t20140305_46240.htm (in Chinese).

phones was incredible: 500 million in 2013. Comparatively, 32% mobile phone users watched online videos in 2012, while one year later, the proportion rose to 49.3% - an increase of 112 million. Thanks to the upcoming fast 4G telephony network, more and more people will choose to watch online video via mobile phones in the future as a 4G connection speed will make the practice of online video watching more convenient. All the statistics above indicate that the development of micro film will be positive and promising in the future.

All in all, the emergence of micro film is a comparatively new cultural phenomenon and micro film is still in development. Accordingly, the research on micro film, which began only in 2011, is very recent and not yet very rich. In addition, due to the continually increasing number of Internet users who watch videos online and the main trend that the devices for watching become more mobile and flexible for watching short content, micro film is expected to continue to develop in the coming years. Thus, a close study of micro film is worthwhile. This thesis mainly focuses on the definition and defining characteristics of micro film, which contributes to the fundamental research. It is notable that all arguments in this thesis are based on the assumption that micro film is a hybrid between a genre and a medium in the cyber culture of China.

2. A Review of the Research on Micro Film

Micro film is regarded as a novel cultural object in the context of contemporary developments within digital culture. From 2011 to 2014, the content of the articles on Wikipedia and Baidu Baike have been changing and elaborated on continually on the basis of the latest research within, primarily, Chinese academia.

As suggested by the name, “micro” is the first core feature to define micro film. Chinese scholars conclude that the micro feature reflects in three aspects (Chen, 2011: 95; Kang, 2011: 75; Dong, 2012: 22; Zhou, 2012: 60; Cui, 2012: 41). Firstly, “micro” refers to duration. Typically, a micro film lasts between 30 and 3000 seconds. Compared to mainstream films which usually last longer than one and a half hours, micro film is definitely shorter. Yet, no matter how short a micro film is, it always tells a complete story, and as a genre it covers a wide range of themes, including romance, comedy, history and even spoof. Hence, the story told in a micro film is required to have a well-knit plot and simple structure (Li, 2012: 33-4). Secondly, “micro” film reflects a short production process, short relative to mainstream films form cinema or formats of advertisement that claim to be micro film. Within just a couple of weeks, a micro film can be finished and distributed online. Sometimes, a

micro film is produced within a single week, or even a day. This is one reason to explain why there are so many micro films uploaded online every day. Last but not least, “micro” reflects the low investment costs to produce a micro film. Rarely does a micro film cost more than ten thousand dollars. Additionally, there is no need to pay the distribution and advertising fees. In this regard, more and more amateurs take part in the practice of making micro film due to the low barrier for entry (Che, 2012: 61; Wang, 2011: 23; Zhang, 2012: 92).

The second main point of interest in definitions of micro film is that micro film is exclusively distributed on various new media platforms (Sun, 2012: 98; Dong, 2012: 22; Zhou, 2012: 60). Therefore, the speed of its distribution is fast and it is easy to reach global audiences (Che, 2012: 61). Moreover, nowadays most new media devices are portable, such as the mobile phone and iPad which allows audiences to watch micro film on the move, as long as Internet network connectivity is available. This is regarded as the most dominant difference between micro film and other traditional films. Audiences are no longer required to go to the cinema or attend to the film festivals to watch the films. Rather, they can enjoy a micro film on the train or while walking on the street on their way home.

Although scholars have already determined two central features to define micro film, the question that which art form micro film belongs to remains unsolved and arouses debate. In this debate, scholars are divided into four groups.

The first group of scholars maintains that micro film is film, though it presents in a different type when compared with traditional film which is played in the cinema. Xiaomeng Chen argues that the development of film is essentially the evolution of film types (Chen, 2012: 33). Actually, this type of film is not fixed and stable. In contrast, it experiences continuous changes and evolves with the development of technologies. Following this logic, micro film is essentially a new type of film, which appears due to the development of new media technologies. Similarly, Rongrong Li states that micro film is the product of the development of the Internet and digital media technologies. It still belongs to the art form of film (Li, 2012: 34). Even though more and more micro films now are invested in by commercial companies which aim at selling their products, she asserts that these commercial elements are merely film props which are designed to serve the plot (*ibid.*).

However, Xiaojun Zheng and Zhifei Ye, who belong to the second group of scholars, hold a different opinion. They claim that micro film is long advertisement, but presented in the cinematic form (Zheng, 2012: 9; Ye, 2012: 47). Xiaojun Zheng maintains that producers of micro film commonly do not expect to gain profits from

the micro film itself (Zheng, 2012: 9). Thus, she is inclined to believe that micro film is an initial attempt of a new marketing approach for advertisers; to take the benefits of choosing new media as the distribution platform (in that a wide range of potential customers can be reached) without paying a high distribution fee into consideration (ibid.). Zhifei Ye asserts that there is always a specific product playing a leading role or as an indispensable clue, instead of being a distraction, in micro film (Ye, 2012: 47). He assumes that this is because by doing so audiences can accept what micro film intends to advertise with an attitude that they were only watching a film (ibid.).

The third group of scholars, nevertheless, advocates that micro film is a form of online video. Dong Fang explains that while film is a kind of independent art form, parallel to the painting and the sculpture and which has a long history, micro film on the contrary is a novel product of digital culture (Fang, 2012: 46). In short, it is too early to define micro film as film since micro film is in its “infant stage” without its own developed aesthetics. Furthermore, he continues to argue that micro film so far belongs to popular culture; it is like a “fast food” and will be out of fashion gradually (ibid.). Hence, according to Dong Fang, we cannot assert the future of micro film and it is not convincing to classify micro film into the category of film, but only into short online video.

Compared to these three perspectives, the opinion held by the fourth group of scholars is seemingly more balanced. They advocate that micro film is the combination of film and advertisement. Li Sun and Guiyi Qian can be the representative among them. Sun Li states that micro film is a new cultural form across the fields of film and advertisement. Micro film is both to be recognized as film and as advertisement. Therefore, the research on micro film should be divided into two directions (Sun, 2012: 120). Specifically, a part of micro film is essentially filmic, being understood as an aesthetic expression of the maker, on the one hand. The research on it, in this case, focuses on the aesthetics by making a comparison with traditional film. On the other hand, the other part of micro film is advertisement because the makers treat micro film as a marketing tool to advertise something and make profits. Additionally, both Sun and Qian declare that micro film advertisements can be understood as film being inserted into advertisement (Sun and Qian, 2012: 99), namely, applying the filmmaking process in order to make advertisements. Thus, in this case, researchers are expected to mainly discuss its communicating effects and marketing strategies.

3. Research Questions and Methodology

The primary focus of this thesis, then, is to study micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium in the Chinese cyber culture from three perspectives: 1) the art form of micro film; 2) a genealogy of micro film as an audio-visual art genre; 3) the characteristics of micro film as a “new” medium in the digital context. In order to elaborate these perspectives, some research questions, as the following, will be answered.

- How can film and video as different art forms be differentiated today?
- What is the ideal spectatorship of film, video and micro film, respectively?
- What is the genealogy of micro film?
- What are the “new media” that Chinese micro film researchers refer to and their defining characteristics?
- What are the characteristics of micro film as a medium in relation to the specific features of “new media”?
- What is the fundamental problem surrounding the development of micro film?

A study on micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium in the Chinese cyber culture raises interdisciplinary problems, requiring research perspectives and concepts from film studies, new media studies and philosophy. Literature from these three research areas forms an important basis in the staking out of a theoretical foundation. First, the way to differentiate film and video on the basis of the ideal spectatorship will be based on film theory and used to analyze which art form micro film belongs to. Then, the concept of “genealogy” as proposed by Michel Foucault will be used to trace the history of micro film as an art genre, aiming at exposing its hybrid characteristics. Subsequently, theories on the definition and the specific features of new media from digital media studies will be used to investigate the characteristics of micro film as a medium. Finally, the fundamental problems for the development of micro film will be analyzed and thus, a possible solution will be suggested.

4. Overview of the Chapters

The first chapter explores the fundamental question of micro film as an art genre, that is, which art form micro film is. By analyzing the current debate on defining micro film, I argue that it is essentially a debate on the differentiation of film and video, which is an intractable problem in film studies nowadays. Due to technological

development, especially the digital revolution, the previous distinct boundary between film and video, which is basing on the material difference, becomes ambiguous. Consequently, the debate on defining novel forms of audio-visual art is very common. The defining problem of micro film is a case. However, I will argue that film and video as different art forms actually engage spectators' minds and emotions differently and formulate different spectatorship ideally. Thus, the art form, which micro film belongs to, will be discussed by analyzing the ideal spectatorship of film, video and micro film, respectively.

The second chapter engages in the discussion of a genealogy of micro film. In fact, the increasingly blurring boundary between film and video is one reason for the debate on defining micro film. Micro film as a new audio-visual art genre presents the trend of hybridity, which contributes to the second reason. Such a hybridity is reflected not only on the diversity of micro film makers, but also on the evolving remediation of different forms of media. Therefore, in order to understand the hybridity of micro film, I will trace its history. Rather than tracing the origin of micro film and regarding its history as linear sequences and chains of events, I prefer to use Michel Foucault's concept of genealogy which stresses historical affiliations and resonances of micro film. That is, through the exploration of differences and connections between micro film and short film, amateur videos of *egao* and advertisement, the genealogical history of micro film will be clarified to interpret its hybrid feature.

In chapter three, the characteristics of micro film as a medium in the digital context will be investigated. Micro film is acknowledged as the product of "new media" by Chinese researchers since personal computers are the main tool for the creation of micro film and Web 2.0 sites are the exclusive platform for the distribution of micro film. However, Chinese researchers rarely elaborate the definition and the specific features of the "new media" they refer to. Furthermore, they fail to realize that besides of being an art genre, micro film is also a medium, of which the characteristics are influenced significantly by the specific features of "new media". Hence, I attempt to fill in these gaps in this chapter. Firstly, the term "new media" will be defined and the characteristics of "new media" will be analyzed. I will argue that it is problematic to use the term new media and suggest using participatory digital media instead. In addition, I will argue that the defining characteristics of participatory digital media are essentially the changes in the instrumental level, which are brought about by the digital revolution. Rather than declaring these characteristics as a norm to distinguish participatory digital media from other media formats, I prefer to adopt the notion of "affordance" (Lister et al., 2009: 16). In this regard, these

characteristics will be described as a range of possibilities that participatory digital media invites users to perform. Secondly, how the specific features of participatory digital media influences the characteristics of micro film as a medium in the digital context will be analyzed. To put it specifically, I will argue that the characteristics of micro film as a medium is essentially a double logic. Micro film values individuality and conversely collectivity in terms of the consumption, distribution and creation. Thirdly, I will analyze the problem which the development of micro film is facing today. By briefly reviewing the problems of micro film development which are proposed by Chinese scholars, I will argue that the root of these problems lies on the current definition of micro film because it cannot reflect the distinct characteristics of micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium. I will suggest giving a new definition of micro film to facilitate its further development.

The concluding chapter, then, gathers the findings of this study to make a conclusion on micro film as between a new audio-visual art genre and a new medium in the Chinese cyber culture from three perspectives: the art form which micro film belongs to, a genealogical history of micro film as a genre and the characteristics of micro film as a medium. Furthermore, I will evaluate the significance of my argument within the existing Chinese academia and point to where further research is needed.

Chapter 1: The Art Form of Micro Film

In 2011, the term “micro film” was coined to describe a novel type of online audio-visual art in China. Nevertheless, three years later, the definition of micro film is still unclear. The debate on whether micro film is film, or video, or advertisement continues (Leng, 2013).¹¹ In research on micro film as a genre, investigating which art form micro film belongs to is vital. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to discuss the art form micro film. However, researchers in the debate about the artistic value of micro film seldom elaborate on their arguments, and usually rely on one or two short paragraphs to demonstrate their opinions, which makes their claims susceptible to questioning.¹² Hence, instead of participating in their debate by reacting to all the specific claims, I will deploy a different starting point to orientate the discussion in the context of film and video art theory. In order to do so, I will first investigate the current debate on micro film. Secondly, a viable way to determine the art form of micro film will be proposed.

1.1 The Increasingly Blurring Distinction between Film and Video

By analyzing the current debate on the definition of micro film in Chinese academia, I recognize a pattern in trying to describe the essential differences between film and video. Scholars who insist that micro film is advertisement emphasize the commercial benefits instead of the artistic value of micro film, including Hong Yang (2011: 151), Zhifei Ye (2012: 47), Xiaojun Zheng (2012: 9), Dewu Chen (2012: 59). They do not argue whether micro film is best to be considered as film or video, but define micro film as clearly targeted and mere advertising. Hence, the debate I attempt to engage in is the difference between film and video from an artistic perspective.

In film studies, the conceptual boundary between film and video becomes more and more ambiguous with the development of new technologies, as the material difference is common way a differentiation was made. The digital revolution renders the differentiation of film and video more intractable, which results in an ongoing debate on defining these new forms of moving images. Thus, what accompanies the rise of micro film is the debate on whether micro film is film or video.

Previously, the material difference was the most obvious and authentic way to differentiate film and video. In general, film refers to a series of still images which are

¹¹ Notably, film, video and advertisement here refer to different forms of audio-visual art.

¹² See Xiaomeng Chen (2012: 33), Rongrong Li (2012: 34), Xiaojun Zheng (2012: 9), Zhifei Ye (2012: 44) and so forth.

recorded on plastic film through “the interactions of a complex chain of optical and chemical events” (Wyatt, 1999: 369). These images create an illusion of movement when they are shown on a screen with a succession of twenty four frames a second by a film-based projector (ibid.: 365). Unlike film, video is the images created through “the recording of the optical events in electric form, upon magnetic media” (ibid.: 369). What on videotapes is a flow of live signals which can be modified (Blom, 2013: 280). More importantly, the imagery quality of film and video is different. Compared with film images, video imagery is densely layered or in undulating forms, commonly with electronic noise on the surface (Kim, 2013: 141). Consequently, (early) video offers less quality compared to film. Besides the material difference between film and video, the different ways they were distributed and consumed are also perceptible. In English, the term “cinema” signifies both the place where the film is shown to the public and the film itself. Their intimate relationship is self-evident. On the other hand the video; rather than being shown in cinemas, the images of video are commonly recorded onto, among others, a videocassette or a DVD and watched on a television or computer screen in a personal space.

The differentiation between film and video on the basis of the material difference has become less reliable. Since the 1960s, more consumption of film has taken place via video formats, instead of going to the cinema (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010: 43). Film was no longer merely relying on the cinema, but was also viewed on video. Furthermore, the digital revolution makes such difference far more insignificant. Both film and video are in the process of digitalization. In the case of film, digital technology has permeated into nearly every domain of filmmaking. It is common to use digital technology for film editing, creating visual effects or sound design now. Many directors, including major commercial filmmakers like George Lucas and Robert Rodriguez, use digital cameras to shoot film (Thompson and Bordwell, 2010: 713-714). This means that their films are in the digital form from the very beginning. In addition, in spite of the resistance to replace film stocks with digital formats, more than half of the European screens were digitized in 2012 and half of the North American screens had been replaced for digital ones by 2011 (Belton, 2012: 131).

The trend of digitalization continues. This means that in the near future, even those films that are shot in a non-digital format, like 35mm film, have to be distributed in digital copies because cinema distribution demands digital projection. In this regard, Lisa Dombrowski declares that “the era of 35mm is over” (as cited in Belton, 2012: 133). Video is undergoing changes as well. The previous analog video is becoming obsolete, because of the convenience of the digital video, which is often also available in high definition. At the same time, the popularity of digital platforms

for the distribution of video works also contributes to the obsolescence of the analog video (Kim, 2013: 141; Blom, 2013: 280). Rather than being recorded on videotapes, most videos nowadays are recorded in a digital format and are also editable using digital software, just as can digital film formats. In addition, high definition digital videos improve the quality of the video imagery. This results in the obliteration of the very distinction between film and video in relation to the quality of images.

The difference between film and video has been reduced to “a question of rhetoric (as opposed to technical) formatting” (Blom, 2013: 280). To be more specific, the digital revolution makes the differentiation of film and video from the technical perspective more problematic and intractable. Both film and video present the main trend that they are largely digitized and that their previous differences become too vague. Therefore, the distinction between these two art forms should lie beyond the technical domain.

1.2 The Ideal Spectatorship of Film, Video and Micro Film

It is beyond doubt that both film and video belong to visual culture. In essence, they are audio-visual constructions of the world in front of the people who play the role as spectators. Film and video provide spectators ways of seeing and feeling, and take spectators through experiences (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010: 3). Nonetheless, film and video, as a form of audio-visual art, are different, no matter how similar they may be. Just like the experience of appreciating paintings and drawings will not be the same, we may argue that film and video, as different visual art forms, offer different viewing experiences to their spectators. For instance, compared with video, film provides a more patterned viewing experience which is driven by stories, characters, visual qualities and sound textures (ibid.). Furthermore, William John Thomas Mitchell implies that “vision is (as we say) a cultural construction” (2002: 162). It hints at the fact that the manner in which the audiences enjoy the mediated images and sounds of film and of video is actually learned and cultivated, “not simply given by nature” (ibid.). In other words, film and video formulate different conceptions of their spectators by different modes of address to engage spectators’ minds and emotions. Therefore, I argue that differentiation between film and video can be analyzed in relation to their ideal of spectatorship; especially from the perspective of spectators’ specific positioning and viewing experience.

1.2.1 Film: Centralized Attentiveness into Spectacle

If we return to film history, we can find that besides the material issue, the distinct concept spectatorship is also an important element to film studies. Since the 1970s, when film studies formally became an academic discipline, spectatorship has been the most influential axis of “film theory” (Christie, 2012: 17). Most theorists at that time emphasized the relationship between the film texts and their spectators as well as the spectators’ reception. Until today, spectatorship is also essential for film and film studies, though film studies as a discipline has already diversified and film theories have largely matured.

In “Spectator, Film and the Mobile Phone”, Roger Odin proposes *communication space* as a theoretical construct to analyze the audience live experience of film watching. He gives a definition to film’s communication space as follows:

By film’s communication space, I mean a space where communication actors share the experience of constructing a film: building a world which the viewer is invited to enter, a world within which various events occur (usually structured by narrative), and whose rhythm the spectator is encouraged to share (I call this the “phasing” process) (Odin, 2012: 156).

Then, he argues that the cinema, a place devoted to film, is designed to facilitate the construction of such filmic communication space and to produce a viewing position where the film spectator is like a voyeur (ibid.). Seen in this light, the cinematic experience is the dominant and hegemonic model to define the supposedly “authentic” filmic experience of spectators. It addresses an ideal relationship between the film and its spectators ideally. Furthermore, the mode of cinema viewing not only constructs the communication space, but does justice to the aesthetic integrity of the film (Gaudreault and Marion, 2012: 6; Christie, 2012: 19). The arrangement of cinema is not random at all. Rather, in Jean-Louis Baudry’s sense, the *dispositif* that refers exclusively to the viewing situation has been integrated into the aesthetics of film. Hence, cinema itself became a hegemonic aesthetic model and representational system for films to create a spectacle of reality for spectators (Parente and Carvalho, 2008: 38). This could explain why Raymond Bellour shows a negative attitude when he mentions that the “death” of the last film is accompanying the sound of which “cinema will merely be just another element, just an image-skeleton floating among all other images” (Bellour, 2012: 217). For him, true films are expected to be those made to be seen in a cinema theater, under the influence of the cinema’s *dispositif*. In other words, cinema is the fundamental element to construct the distinct mode of spectatorship of film. It is supposed to create distinct viewing experiences and ideal positioning among audiences.

The problem, however, is that cinema is in crisis today, as is also argued by André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion (2012: 3). The old theme that cinema is in the process of dying reappears in current film historical research (Odin, 2012: 155; Bellour, 2012: 206). However, in *The Kinematic Turn*, Gaudreault and Marion challenge the prediction of the death of the cinema; a death caused by the digital revolution. Rather, they argue that the death knell of cinema is constantly accompanied by a renaissance as well. The history of cinema is actually “a succession of births and a succession of deaths” (Gaudreault and Marion, 2012: 11). Seen in this light, the nature of the current crisis of cinema is a part of a new beginning with changes and upheavals. Similar to the previous “deaths”, these upheavals are influenced by new technologies. Their work continues to analyze and negotiate the changes and upheavals that will confront (or are confronting) cinema. In their analysis, they note that the biggest issue that the cinema is facing today is an identity crisis, because cinema increasingly mingles with other media (ibid.: 35). Firstly, adoption of digital technology by audiences makes the alternative practice of film watching possible, since films can be distributed on increasingly more media platforms. Secondly, cinema is not merely a movie theater, but is showing “live or pre-recorded operas, professional boxing matches, ballets, plays, sporting events and major interviews” (ibid.: 14). It seems that cinema as media catering to film is shifting to a convergence of moving image media.

The aforementioned crisis raises the question whether cinema today is still qualified to be the fundamental representational system for film and to address the ideal film spectator position. My answer is definitely positive. It is granted that since the late 1970s, film can be distributed through other media than cinema, like television, DVD, and the Internet. However, movie theaters are still in the center of the film exhibition system; while, other platforms remain as the ancillary market in spite of the higher profits of the classical business model (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010: 40). This corresponds to Bellour’s argument that a true film is made to be seen in the cinema theater, which indicates that films are intended for cinema exhibition. Indeed, the majority of films are made in an aspect ratio of 1.85:1 or 2.39:1, while other screens like televisions, tablets and computers often have a different aspect ratio, like 4:3 or 16:9. In other words, a movie, which is exhibited on a screen different from cinema, will have to be cropped and certain areas will be left out (ibid.: 44). This may affect the viewing experience as the image is partly cut down. Following this logic, it can also be argued that television programs which are shown in the cinema theaters actually treat the cinema as their secondary market. That is, they are a kind of work mainly produced for small screen rather than cinema. Thus, the cinematic

experience is still eligible to analyze and describe the filmic experience in an ideal sense for spectators.

Raymond Bellour is aware of the crisis of the cinema in “The Cinema Spectator: A Special Memory”. He suggests that the digital image results in more expression and fundamental mutation in cinema than what television did before. The digital revolution influences “both the nature of images and their modes of distribution and consumption” (Bellour, 2012: 206). Nonetheless, he believes that even under these circumstances, cinema’s *dispositif* is still “the only truly inviolate element” (ibid.: 211). In other words, the way cinema addresses its spectator is relatively stable. Thus, by analyzing the *dispositif*, the distinct ideal spectatorship of the film can be found.

The theoretical concept *dispositif* (a French word) originally emerged within a poststructuralist paradigm that critiqued the structuralist concept of meaning in the 1970s (Kessler, 2007: 8). Jean-Louis Baudry was the first to bring this concept into cinema studies (ibid.). Frank Kessler argues that the translation of *dispositif* as “apparatus” is problematic, since *dispositif* following Baudry exclusively relates to “viewing/screening a film”, one aspect of all the machinery to produce and screen a film (Kessler, 2007: 8). André Parente and Victa de Carvalho understand *dispositif* as a broader concept, namely, the “cinema effects” on the film spectators (2008: 40). These effects are the result of the cinema’s *dispositif* that is defined as “a set of technologies (the camera, moviola, projector, etc.) and conditions of projection (the darkened room, hidden projector, immobile spectator, etc.)” (ibid.). When analyzing the *dispositif* of the cinema, Baudry likens the film spectators to the prisoners in Plato’s “cave allegory” (1978: 30). To Baudry, those spectators and prisoners are in the similar situation that they are immobile in the darkness. The difference is that spectators are held in place because they are enjoying an illusionary world, instead of being “chained” there. In this sense, film spectators are voluntary prisoners of a spectacle. Rather, cinema creates an ambience in which the film spectators are immersed into the filmic representations, as a victim of an impression of reality. Thus, the patterned experience offered by the film to the spectator comes “to be represented as realistically as possible” (Morse, 1990: 156).

In general, within the classical cinematic *dispositif*, a cinema is designed as a dark, isolated and silent place with a hidden projector and a big screen, to facilitate the construction of double spaces. To put it specifically, film, as a kind of proscenium art, aims at creating a vision into another world. In Morse’s words, the design of the cinema theater, especially the screen of films, “[divides] the here and now of the spectator from the elsewhere and elsewhere beyond with varying degrees of absoluteness” (1990: 156). It is both a temporal and physical separation. By being

isolated from the outside world, spectators are entering into a dark and silent place where the only light emanates from the big screen in the front. When the film is playing, the event on the big screen is essentially happening in an “elsewhere” and “elsewhen”. Here, the cinema *dispositif* produces a distinct viewing position where the role of spectators is like a voyeur who is “seeing without being seen, looking at a chain of events unfolding before his/her eyes” (Kessler, 2007: 10). In this sense, spectators not only concentrate on the film, but also become immersed in it (Casetti, 2011: 4), even though there is a distance between the depicted event and the spectators (Bellour, 2012: 211). They can be best described as a distant witness, to observe the story and to focus on “visual overview, identification, and recognition” (Blom, 2013: 293).

It should be noted that centralized attentiveness is an important mental state for an ideal film spectator. A film expects a gaze from its spectators in order to invite them to engage and to contemplate the world in front of their eyes (Casetti, 2011: 3-4). In short, an ideal film spectator is not only viewing and perceiving a film, but is also interiorizing and reflecting on the real world. On the one hand, the spectators in the darkness are entering into the film’s communication space in Odin’s sense. They share the experience of constructing the film with the filmmakers. On the other hand, they are writing besides of looking, as argued by Serge Daney. He notes that “to write is to recognize what is already written. Written in the film (the film as an organized depository of signs) and in me (the self organized as a depository of mnemonic traces that, over time, comprise my history)” (as cited in Bellour, 2012: 210). In a sense, “there is a meeting, a beautiful meeting” wherein the world in a film meets with the world of each spectator (Deleuze, 2001: 103). Hence, Francesco Casetti borrows the concept of “heterotopia”, from Michel Foucault to argue that cinema is a heterotopic place that “is a fenced-in space, offering a catwalk towards another world from which we can draw resources for *our* world” (Casetti, 2011: 5). Furthermore, in cinema, spectators all follow a uniform time of film playing, once again demands spectators to centralize their attention to watch and simultaneously to interiorize the film concurrently with the strict temporality of film projection.

One may argue that today more and more spectators choose to watch films online or on DVD, which seems to be the opposite of the viewing situation of cinema. However, as I have mentioned above, these new modes of film viewing are only an ancillary domain for film spectatorship. Drawn from Bellour’s claim, spectators can re-watch a film in various situations, but only if the film “has been seen and received according to its own aura” (Bellour, 2012: 212). The aura is achieved by the *dispositif* of cinema, and consequently the film on TV or on the Internet is essentially a

“reproduction” of the “real” film, according to Daney. Therefore, I believe that even in the digital era, film as an art insists upon the ideal mode of spectatorship that is with silence, isolation, darkness, obligatory time and centralized gaze without suspension and interruption, in order to immerse into the film’s communication space and collaborate in the spectacle.

Margaret Morse declares that film is an illusionistic art which is on “the plane of representation” (Morse, 1990: 156). It represents a world that is radical “otherness”, but spectators can draw resources from it for their world (Casetti, 2011: 5; Pang, 2006: 73). This is why Bellour defines the experience of the film as “an assembling of memory in a sole place, no matter how dispersive it may be or how diverse all the places it convokes” (Bellour, 2012: 213). In essence, film spectators reserve a gaze for an illusion of reality. In such an illusion, spectators are traveling without physically moving, but are consciously constructing connections between their lived world and the one into which they travel.

1.2.2 Video: Decentralized Attentiveness but Active Participation in “Live”

The medium of video is practically everywhere today, from video music and video gaming to video conference and video surveillance, to name but only a few. It seems that the application of video has already permeated into nearly every domain of visual culture, such as cinema, television and live performance. However, just because of its wide proliferation of application, the word video becomes meaningless and imprecise, namely, results in “semantic inflation” (Sherman, 2008: 2). It can be used to describe different things, ranging from a technology or a medium to an art form. Moreover, such inflation also leads to the failure to describe its nature, which undermines the video art and even dwarfs its status as an art form. This is the main problem of the development of video today.

Historically speaking, video as a technology branched from the introduction of the television. Television, as is widely known, operates according to a centralized system where information is spreading to the periphery from the center (Gripsrud, 1998: 20). However, after the video technology was spun off from television, its distribution became decentralized, applied by a range of independent artists to make serious video creations. At the same time, this experimentation of artists gradually creates a trend that video is predisposed as an area of important public activity (Kurtz, 1973: 37). These are two extremes of the development of video as a medium.

On the one hand, for professional video artists, video art should be distinguished from other art-making activities. Video art is a viable art form which is considered parallel to film, television and live performance, even though video art is actually

more closely related to them (ibid.; Chambel et al., 2007: 838; Rush, 2007: 10). The earliest video artists were propelled by the belief of the need to hold media power and use “televisual technologies for the non-instrumentalist purpose of art” (Blom, 2013: 277). In addition, rather than necessarily relying on the conventions of traditional film-making, they disregarded of the construction of representation by narrative or plot, but focused on crossing the fixed boundary of different art-making activities (Chambel et al., 2007: 838; Kurtz, 1973: 37). At that time, what attracted the artists most about video was its capacity to represent “real time”. Thus, in a review of early artists mainly attempted to “capture time as it was being experienced, right here and now, indoors or outdoors” (Rush, 2007: 10) without processing and editing. Documentary video is a representative of such early video art. Additionally, due to the low quality of early video images, spectators of video art actually enjoyed their experience of liveness, as opposed to a filmic expression of reality.

Even today video artists express disinterest in the need to accurately represent reality. Instead, a turn to the manipulation of time by extending, repeating, speeding up and stopping time challenges spectators’ ideas of space and time which have shaped by mainstream media, such as the cinema (Collins, 2014). Meanwhile, they continue to explore the boundary of the medium itself and to incorporate multiple artistic media (e.g. other videos, painting, digital graphic art, or sculptures) to make installations in galleries or museums. Thus, Morse maintains that video art is essentially “art on the plane of presentation” (1990: 156). To put it specifically, in contrast to films, the visitors (instead of the spectators) to an installation are no longer surrounded by an illusion and a representation of elsewhere and elsewhere, but an actual sense of here and now. It seems that everything is happening on the same plane that visitors inhabit. Even though, there are some recorded-video art installations, visitors still can experience the sense of “presence” since they are ambulatory rather than immobile in the gallery or museum. Hence, they find themselves “in a bodily experience of conceptual propositions and imaginary worlds of memory and anticipation” (ibid.: 159). In short, visitors also can experience the “presence” on the basis of their physical relationship among literal objects and image sets. Again, as visitors are ambulatory, rather than immobile, they can achieve a kinesthetic experience that serves to differentiate the spectatorship of video versus film. Morse even makes a comparison that if an audience in a cinema can watch the stories on the stage as happening elsewhere, visitors in a video installation can wander around the stage, hear actors’ talking aside and change the point of view (ibid.: 158). Furthermore, because of the freedom to move around, the audio-visual experience of the visitors is multiplied, shifting between various objects and practices. Therefore,

they have a decentralized attentiveness to the video art around them; namely, they reserve a glance instead of constant gaze (Casetti, 2011: 3).

It is worth to mention that besides installation video art, narrative single channel video art is the second most common variety of video art today. This single channel is regarded as far closer to the conventional concepts of television and film. However, audiences easily mistake the narrative of single-channeled video art for film or television content. Thus, video artists also need to engage in seeking the power to have their work be appreciated on its own terms (Singer, 2013). In this context, narrative video insists to explore the possibilities to represent the plane of presentation over stories “in a ‘messier’, multileveled form” (Morse, 1990: 158). This also demands little in terms of centralized attentiveness from spectators.

On the other hand, video art as a genre of artistic creation is devalued since everyone can be a video artist (Sherman, 2008: 9). For the general public, video is an accessible and affordable technology that can be used gratuitously to one’s disposal whether for amusement or professional purposes. Of course, not everyone has the capacity to use video as a format to make sophisticated artworks. However, it is already irrefutable that an increasing number of people participate in the process of making video works, which they assert are video art. Spectators are not only uneducated visitors to an installation or gallery space as discussed above, but are often also (amateur) video artists themselves. More importantly, video is generally considered as intimate and personal (ibid., 8; Kurtz, 1973: 41). It is a very common medium used by both professionals and amateurs for personal communication and self-expression. Video works or art are highly expressive of an artist’s thoughts and ideals, for instance in the form of confession and admission and narcissism, such as Harjant Gill’s video *Milind Soman Made Me Gay* (2007). Hence, spectators no longer need to concentrate on deciphering the spectacle as built by films, but are rather required to recognize the video, and specifically video art, as a dialogue aiming to make a communication with them.

In effect, video is identified as a “hybrid medium” because it always subsumes and embodies other media forms (Keen, 2005: 8). As such, video art can be easily misidentified. Nonetheless, I argue that video art has its own way to address the role of spectatorship. Kurtz claims that video art does not merely enhance the visual sense of spectators, but makes a combination of “visual, tactile, and auditory sensations, as well as movement and time” (Kurtz, 1973: 43). At the same time, spectators of video art are typically move around an exhibition or viewing space and reserve a glance to the video works as opposed to a constant stare typical to film. In short, spectators’ attentiveness is decentralized, as they are directing their attention to “a plurality of

objects and subjects” (Casetti, 2011: 3) and as they have unfixed positions. Rather than representing a wholly “other” world as realistically as possible, video art stresses the audio-visual expression on the plane of presentation in order to make full use of the video’s benefit as a time technology (Blom, 2013: 280). Video art attempts to create a live experience of here and now and to make spectators feel the images around them belong to their world instead of to a spectacle (Morse, 1990: 161). More importantly, video in the 21st century has become the people’s medium, namely, “a decentralized communication tool for the masses” (Sherman, 2008: 10). Therefore, more and more spectators are able to participate in the creation of video art. Additionally, video is becoming more and more personal and intimate. Thus the video works today are much more often used as a means of self-expression and to foster communication between video artists and their audiences.

1.2.3 Micro Film: Multiple Sensational Experiences and Sense of Autonomy

In fact, literature seldom addresses the issue of spectatorship of micro film. However, through analysis of the aesthetics and the characteristics of micro film, the ideology behind the ways in which spectators function to give micro film meaning can still be deduced.

What attracts me is the description that “micro film is suitable to be watched in a mobile condition” (Li, 2011: 33; Sun and Qian, 2012: 98; Li, 2012: 63; Zhou, 2012: 40; Dong, 2012: 22; Cui, 2012: 41). In short, the audio-visual experience of watching micro film is supplemented kinesthetically. It indicates that the means in which micro film addresses its spectators is distinct from the ways in which film attempts to do the same. In this regard, I prefer to label micro film as a kind of “mobile” art and I argue that the mobility of micro film actually happens on three levels.

Specifically, the mobility on the first level refers to the moving images that are presented to spectators. Both film and video are made up of moving images decoded by spectators. Thus, mobility on this first level is not something specific to micro film.

However, the mobility on the second level renders micro film different from film. This level refers to mobility as the physical movement of spectators. As discussed above, the ideal spectatorship of film is that spectators are immobile and isolated from the outside in a dark place. In contrast, micro film spectators are ambulatory and are not required to be isolated from reality in order to be considered a spectator. Rongrong Li, media researcher at Shaanxi Normal University, maintains that fast pace of life and fragmentation of time are core features of contemporary Chinese society (Li, 2011: 33). In this context, micro film is expected to serve modern people’s

increasingly fragmented leisure time (ibid.; Quan, 2012: 37; Chen, 2011: 95). Spectators do not need to come to a specific location and be fixed there to watch a micro film. Rather, they can watch while they are waiting for a train, or while walking back home from the office, for example, as long as there is an access to the Internet (Meng, 2011: 101; Zhang, 2012: 107). In this context, it is difficult for spectators to centralize their attention on micro film. Instead, spectators continue to shift their attention between the screen and the outside world. As such, spectators are “in between” (Odin, 2012: 160).

Mobility on the third level refers to the distribution platforms of micro film, specifically the online navigation of micro film spectators. In general, the website where a micro film is ‘screened’ is like a video installation online. Thus, the spectators who navigate through Internet pages to a micro film website are like the visitors who navigate in a gallery space to a video installation. Micro film website www.vmovier.com is constituted of countless micro film videos, complete with categorical definitions and waiting to be selected by spectators (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Furthermore, micro film as it exists on a webpage within the confines of the Internet is constantly hypermediated, as in order to exist it must exist in cooperation among different mediated forms. To put it specifically, the video of a micro film is commonly in the cooperation with texts (video descriptions, tags and comments), pictures (photos drawn from the micro film) and other recommended micro film videos (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Again, spectators “activate a multitasking form of attention” in this sense (Casetti, 2011: 4). Their attention can pass from one source to another. Occasionally, a tactile relationship can be established, such as moving fingers on the mouse, the keyboard, a trackpad, or on a touch screen to navigate to and through website.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

In addition, media lecturer at Henan University of Technology, Chuying Kang, states that micro film no longer depends one-way communication, but rather stresses interactive communication (2011; 75). Similarly, Honglian Chen, media lecturer at Changjiang University, claims that micro film is highly interactive and participatory. Spectators are encouraged to share as well as comment on a micro film at anytime they prefer. Others, including other spectators and micro film makers, can see these comments and make replies (Chen, 2011: 96). Moreover, some micro films today explore ways in which to invite spectators to participate in creating or moderating the micro film's narrative structure. Take *Exclusive* (2012), a micro film made by Casarte, for example. *Exclusive* provides two different plot structures in the beginning (see Figure 5) and five different endings at the end from which spectators can choose (see Figure 6). The complete story will be different according to spectators' individual choice. Hence, the artist Bo Zhang claims that spectators play the leading role in this interactive relationship with micro film (2012: 106). Meanwhile, spectators today also often directly participate in the making process of micro film (ibid.). Some of these spectators-turned-artists can even get financial and technological support from professionals or commercial institutions. In this sense, micro film is also a kind of participatory art form. Spectators' contributions become a constitutive part of an individual micro film, such as their comments under the micro film video or their decision towards defining the plot. Besides, they can be makers as well, by creating own micro films and uploading these online and inviting contributions from others.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Last but not least, micro film is regarded as an art of expression which commonly focuses on hot current (political) affairs (Dong, 2012: 22; Meng, 2011: 100). Compared with conventional films, micro film shows less interest in the creation of spectacle. Instead, it attempts to employ the “language” (both visual and narrative) as plainly as possible (Wang and Yan, 2011: 182). In other words, multi-level plot structures and complicated visual effects are expected to be avoided - the main information and ideas in micro film should be conveyed clearly and directly (ibid.; Li, 2012: 64). In this sense, micro film is more like a conversation. The maker aims at conveying information or expressing his ideas in the form of audio-visual storytelling and expects to initiate a live discussion and communication among spectators (Zhang, 2012: 107; Kang, 2011: 76).

The film researcher Xiaomeng Chen asserts that micro film is developing in an open system where spectators are dynamic instead of fixed (2012: 34). According to my previous analysis, I argue that this dynamic condition is made by the multiple sensational experiences and a sense of autonomy that micro film brings to spectators. An ideal spectator of micro film is expected to appreciate the audio-visual experience kinesthetically. These spectators are mobile both mentally as well as physically and their attentiveness is actually decentralized (Hong, 2011: 51). Watching micro film in an open space, spectators typically do not become immersed into the micro film, but remain “in-between”. Simultaneously, the hypermediated arrangement of micro film websites also multiplies their centers of attention. Furthermore, micro film increasingly promotes the significance of the spectators’ involvement. From inviting them to make comments and determining the plot structure to support the making of amateur micro film, spectators are supposed to enjoy the sense of autonomy and hence their passion of participation can be stimulated (Che, 2012: 61; Fang, 2012: 45). Generally speaking, creating a spectacle is not the task of micro film, instead it engenders self-expression and communication to establish an intimate and personal circumstance for its spectators.

1.3 Summary

Tom Sherman states that due to the digital revolution, filmmakers work primarily in video since 2002. But they call these works “film” instead of “video” even though they are finally projected as video (Sherman, 2008: 6). He explains that this is because the filmmakers “advance cinematic practice in video” (ibid.: 2). By doing so, both film and video art, as independent art forms, are undermined, as it has become much more difficult to make a differentiation between them.

Nevertheless, art is “an intention of stimulating human senses, mind or spirit, through the conscious use of skill and creative imagination” (Chambel et al., 2007: 838). It means that different art forms have their own distinct aim and approach to address their spectatorship ideally. Therefore, by analyzing the ideal spectatorship of film, video and micro film, respectively, I argue that micro film should be understood as a kind video art rather than film.

The ideal spectatorships of video and micro film share amounts of similarities, which lie opposite to the characteristics of film. Firstly, micro film does not demand a centralized attentiveness from spectators. Spectators no longer need to sit still in a dark and isolated place in order to become immersed into the spectacle. Instead, spectators are encouraged to be mobile by a number of factors to achieve multisensory experiences by supplementing their audio-visual experience kinesthetically. Secondly, active participation is highly important for the spectatorship of video and micro film. In essence, the spectators of film are also, but they are only mentally active. They are supposed to be active in order to interpret the film and invoke their memory. However, video and micro film spectators are able to experience a sense of autonomy. Video spectators can be an object in the video work, while micro film spectators can determine how the story of a micro film develops. Moreover, both video and micro film spectators can make their own video and micro film. Hence, video and micro film establish an interactive relationship with their spectators and create a more intimate and personal experience. In contrast, film relies on the one-way communication system to engage its spectators. Thus, the spectators of video and micro film are no longer a voyeur but a participator instead.

Notably, even though micro film is defined as a kind of video art, it relies on some conventions of filmmaking. The most dominant one is that micro film is required to be narrative with a complete plot being edited (Kiwitt, 2012: 11; Chambel, 2007: 838; Lv, 2012: 56). In this sense, micro film is essentially a cinematic video. Namely, micro film belongs to the art form of video, while it possesses the cinematic characteristics.

Chapter 2: A Genealogy of Micro Film

In chapter 1, I have defined micro film as cinematic video, which is telling a story by the use of actors, dialogue and editing (Lv, 2012: 56; Li, 2012: 63; Zhang, 2012: 105). However, in the process of micro film development, we can discern a strong trend of hybridity. This hybridity we can find in production and promotion, as well as in form and content. In the first place, the producers of micro film are not limited to professionals. Rather, amateurs also actively participate into the creation of micro film and become a dominant force in the promotion of the development of micro film. This makes them equally important as professionals. (Wang, 2011: 23; Zhang, 2012: 103; Zhou, 2012: 41). In the second place, micro film is heterogeneous in terms of form and content. More precisely, it is a mixture of fiction, parodies, advertisement, dramas, and the like (Dong, 2012; Zhou, 2012; Lv, 2012: 56). Hence, the development of micro film as an audio-visual art genre is actually the process where it absorbs and transforms other cultural forms. This corresponds to the concept of “remediation” which signifies “the representation of one medium in another” (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 45). Besides the increasingly blurring distinction between film and video, it can be argued that the hybridity of micro film contributes to the other reason for the debate on the definition of micro film. In *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin attempt to trace the genealogy of remediation as process, because genealogy “is defined by the formal relations” (ibid.: 21). Namely, researching genealogy is actually investigating how different things connect and influence others. Hence, in order to understand the implicit hybrid feature of micro film, it is important to trace its genealogy and to investigate the process of how micro film remediates other cultural forms.

So far, most Chinese researchers adopt a singular and linear historical approach to trace the development of micro film, such as Yanping Lv (2012), Yang Yang (2012), Wen Ai (2013). They describe a number of events that are significant for the development of micro film to create a timeline of the micro film history. However, this chronological approach can be criticized to regard the history of micro film as a progressive process in a patterned discourse. That is, the single and the linear historical narrative can easily neglect differences and complicated connections between micro film and other relevant cultural forms. Therefore, following this approach, we are unable to learn how micro film remediates other cultural forms that contribute to its characteristics. This drawback conflicts with my goal to understand the hybrid feature of micro film. Hence, an alternative way to trace its historical process “in terms of webs, clusters, boundaries, and overlapping spheres” is necessary (Lister et al., 2009: 58). In other words, instead of looking for the origins of micro

film, historical affiliations and resonances are more relevant. Thus, Michel Foucault's concept of genealogy is a useful approach to adopt as the main method in this chapter.

Genealogy as method was originally derived from the works of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, but nowadays it has become more associated with French philosopher Michel Foucault (Crowley, 2009: 341). Genealogy is a "historical perspective and investigative method" (ibid.). Foucault himself describes genealogy as "gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary" (Foucault, 1977: 139). It suggests that the past is neither transparent nor completely unknown; rather, it is "ambiguous and uncertain" (Sembou, 2011: 3). For Foucault, genealogists essentially interpret the human past and give meanings to the history by themselves. Hence, genealogy demands "patience, and a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material. [...] In short, genealogy demands relentless erudition" (Foucault, 1977: 139). There is neither true nor false in the genealogist history; rather, there are only different interpretations of the past

Additionally, instead of treating history as a chronological chain and linear sequence of events, Foucault portrays the image of the historical process as "webs, clusters, boundaries, territories, and overlapping spheres" to unearth the power relations operating within it (Lister et al., 2009: 58). In this sense, Foucault's genealogy is not interested in origins or destinations of things; "*Herkunft*" and "*Entstehung*" are the main tasks. In accordance with Foucault, *Herkunft* is "the equivalent of stock or *descent*" and *Entstehung* signifies "*emergence*, the moment of arising" (Foucault, 1977: 143 & 146). Therefore, adopting genealogy as my method to trace the micro film history means that I need to investigate "the 'through' and 'against' of things" (Lister et al., 2009: 58). In short, I will interpret the complex relationship between micro film and other cultural forms that it remediates.

Due to the limited space of this research, I cannot investigate all the cultural forms in detail, nor all the cultural events and contexts. Therefore, I mainly focus on the cultural forms and events which are directly related to the development of micro film and stress the most influential historical contexts. Current research on micro film history shows that there are three cultural forms sharing the most intimate relationship with micro film: short films, amateur videos and advertisements (Lv, 2012: 55; Yang, 2012: 12; Sun and Qiao, 2012: 98; Zhou, 2012: 40; Ai, 2013: 13). Thus, I explore in the following the genealogy of micro film in relation to these three cultural forms.

2.1 Short Film: Condensed Classical Narrative

A number of scholars who have conducted research on the history of micro film, including Junhua Dong (2012: 22), Zhaoqian Cui (2012: 41) and Wen Ai (2013: 4), suggest that the roots of micro film are to be found in the development of short film, because micro film closely resembles short film.¹³ However, in their arguments, none makes a distinction between micro film and short film, but rather proffer them as just a different phrasing for the same concept. Simultaneously, more and more short films are uploaded online today to reach large audiences (Nakajima, 2014: 60). Because of their close aesthetic resemblance, most online spectators have the difficulty in distinguishing micro film from short film. It's not unusual on popular bulletin board system (BBS) in China, like Douban and Zhihu to include posts about the question if micro film and short film are the same or are not. Indeed, micro film and short film share many similarities. In particular, they share the common defining feature of a shorter duration, when compared to feature-length films. However, a micro film producer from Hong Kong, Weifeng He, states in an interview that micro film is not the same as short film (Feng and Feng, 2012). He argues that what makes micro film unique is its mode of distribution, namely, only those "short films" which are distributed online are micro film (ibid.). However, his statement is problematic within the current media landscape in that most short film can be watched online as well. As I argued in the previous chapter, micro film is not essentially film, but rather, a form of cinematic video. While short film belongs to the art form of film, it is necessary to acknowledge that micro film is not the same as short film, not just because of the different modes of distribution, but perhaps mainly due to its different artistic property. Bearing this in mind, in the following, I will elaborate on how micro film remediates short film from a historical perspective.

In the western film history, all films at the outset were short, around 15 minutes (Cooper and Dancyger, 2005: 1). This was mainly because of technological limitations. Until 1914, when an Italian film *Judith of Bethulia*, with 61 minutes running time, was produced, the longer form started to be the norm (ibid.). By the 1920s, narrative short film that stresses condensed narrative coexisted with feature film and continued to enjoy a great popularity, especially short comedies and serialized films (ibid.). However, since the mid-1950s, the status of commercial live-action short films has been gradually marginalized because of the rise of television (ibid.). Simultaneously, short film became the ground for the training and testing of new talents, and the medium for artistic expression of independent filmmakers. Jeremy Howe called short film as "a great calling card" which indicates that a good short film becomes an entry into the career of the feature film production (Howe, 2004: 177). After 1970s, the short film was absent from the cinema and had to

¹³ Short film here is limited to the concept of cinema, which should exclude commercials and music videos.

seek alternative approaches to distribution; while, the feature film became a staple part in cinema, even now (Kelly, 1999: 9; Fitzhenry, 2008: 205).

In China, Europeans played a vital role in the early development of Chinese film, because there was no indigenous tradition to draw on when the Chinese started to assimilate films into the Chinese culture. The first film exhibited in China was a western import by a Spaniard in Shanghai in 1896 (Zhao and Xiao, 1998: 4). 1905 saw the first Chinese film, a stage performance *Conquering Jun Mountain* that was filmed by Fengtai Ren in Beijing (ibid.: 5). Before 1921, both imported films and local films were in short forms. Yet the 1920s saw the film supplies from Europe depleting, since Europe was suffering from destructive effects of World War I. Hence, Hollywood stepped into the Chinese film industry and gradually replaced the status of European films in China (ibid.: 6). It was also the precise moment that the popularity of watching films as an entertainment pastime and a demand for full-length feature films increased dramatically (ibid.: 7). In this context, the first three Chinese long features were produced in 1921, and in 1926, the popularity of the short film in China faded (Zhang, 2013: 22). Until 1934, short film regained the public attention in the serialized form (ibid.). However, between the 1950s and the early 1990s, there is little to no research on short film in China. As there are no real records or other sources on Chinese short film in that period, it is hard to say something productive about short film in China in that time. It took until the early 1990s for the public and the academia to become interested in short film again, thanks to the emergence of independent filmmaking in China (Nakajima, 2014: 52).

After a market-oriented reform in China, Hollywood dominated Chinese film market and brought about “high concept” movies which refer to high-budget commercial films (Han, 2011: 104). During the 2000s, “high concept” movies drove almost all low-budget movies out of theaters (ibid.). In other words, it is nearly impossible for short films, commonly with low budget and with less potential to make profit, to be played in theaters or on mainstream media in current China (Qiu, 2013: 34). Moreover, there is still no official channel for the mass distribution of short film (Yang, 2012: 12). In this context, short film in China is more popular among independent filmmakers and college students, generally within a niche market. Meanwhile, film festivals (international or national) and DVDs with small circulation are dominant approaches for short film. This also results in a strange situation that most Chinese short films are praised within the international scene, but are seldom known in China (Reynaud, 2002).

In 2005, broadband network access was widely adopted and one year later, online video sharing became popular in China (Han, 2011: 105). In 2006, the largest

Chinese-language infotainment Web portal, Sina, hosted the short film *Bus 44* (2001) online.¹⁴ Even though this short film won prizes at highly-regarded foreign film festivals, like the 2001 Venice Film Festival, the 2002 Sundance Film Festival, and the 2002 Cannes Film Festival, it only caught attention of Chinese audiences after it was distributed online. Afterwards, more and more producers of short film regarded the Internet as an alternative and important medium to consider for distribution.

Furthermore, the popularity of online video-sharing also facilitates the rise of Chinese local video-sharing websites, such as Tudou and Youku. The operation of these websites merely relied on users uploading short films and videos until 2010 when Youku cooperated with China Film Group Corporation and automobile manufacturer Chevrolet to produce a series of films (Chen, 2011: 95; Yang, 2012: 12; Ai, 2013: 13). In this film series, ten narrative short films are released only online. This act points to the generation of a new kind of “short film” which is meant to be distributed through new media. However, considering my argument in the previous chapter, these ten short films are not “film” in a strict sense since they are not designed to be exhibited in cinema, to address the ideal spectatorship of film. In other words, they are essentially cinematic videos which remediate the short films and this remediation has achieved an immediate success in China which paves way for the development of micro film.

It is notable that short film has already developed into various types or sub-genres. However, according to Yilan Wang, there are two principle forms: narrative and experimental film (Wang 2010: 2). More precisely, story cinema is a continuum from condensed classical narrative while image cinema stresses the arrangement of abstract images. It is obvious that micro film mainly absorbs the former, because the core of micro film is “narration” (Sun, 2012: 123; Zhang, 2012: 103; Lv, 2012: 56). Furthermore, both Rongrong Li and Li Sun discovered that the micro films which pursue the beautiful arrangement of images but which ignore the presentation of stories always cannot achieve success and popularity (Li, 2011: 12; Sun, 2012: 122). Hence, similar to the narrative short film, micro film is on the basis of “an economy of a style” which is employed to arrange a restricted number of characters and simple story (Cooper and Dancyger, 2005: 5). That is, without sufficient time for elaboration of characters, it is well suggested to have “few secondary characters and no subplot” (ibid.; Wang and Yan, 2011: 182). Cooper and Dancyger state that short film enjoys more freedom compared with “commercially driven, realism-oriented long film”, because short film can be surreal by using metaphors and other literary devices to tell a story (Cooper and Dancyger, 2005: 5). However, micro film inclines to realism and

¹⁴ It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJjje4iZPXg> (in Chinese)

prefers stories which are true to life to resonate audiences' experiences (Chen, 2011: 95; Sun, 2012: 122; Lv, 2012: 56). It is common to employ popular elements into micro films; references to popular culture. In *The Big Girl* (2010), the popular game *Fruit Ninja*, the poster of popular singer Yuchun Li and the scene from the Japanese horror movie *The Ring* (1998) are used by producers to invoke a sense of familiarity.¹⁵ As argued in the first chapter, micro film addresses decentralized attentiveness from its spectators, thus it is clear that micro film is not the same as short film firstly because of the plain feature of its narrative strategies.

Furthermore, compared to short film, the costs of micro film are lower. According to Qi Qiu, the development of short film demands a certain scale of distribution channels which require financial investment, such as DVD's and galleries (Qiu, 2013: 34). In contrast, micro film depends on the Internet only and it is easy to reach large audiences. Hence, micro film gradually replaces short film to be a calling card for the filmmakers of the future in China. For instance, since 2010, Youku organizes a micro film competition every year, allegedly to support intelligent young filmmakers by offering fund and technical assistance.

In conclusion, micro film adopts the condensed classical narrative feature of narrative short film. It means that there must be a story in micro film. In this sense, how to tell a good story within limited time is an essential measurement to judge a micro film. Currently, micro film presents its potential to be an optimal entry for new talents to enter into the career of making full-length feature films. However, micro film is encountering a challenge that most people confuse micro film with narrative short film when both of them are distributed online. I argue that this is because micro film has not fully developed its unique characteristics in order to achieve awareness among viewers. I will elaborate on this in the following chapter.

2.2 Amateur Video of *Egao*: Individualized and Emotional Mode of Expression

As mentioned in the introduction, the first and rudimentary form of micro film, *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* (2006), is actually an amateur video. In this regard, current research on the history of micro film suggests that amateur videos exert a profound influence on the generation of micro film (Lv, 2012: 56; Wang and Yan, 2011: 182). Moreover, the fact that today amateurs are an important force of micro film producing indicates again the significance of the research on online amateur videos. Before the concept of micro film was formally proposed, there were various

¹⁵ It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzrwimkWVmA> (in Chinese).

types of amateur video works online, from DV documentary and parodies to video mashups and cellflix (Voci, 2006; Fitzhery, 2008: 205; Russo, 2009: 125). *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* is essentially a spoof video (or a parody video) and it is regarded as the symbol to mark the rise of a popular subculture *egao* in China (Gong and Yang, 2010: 8). Following the rapid spread of *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou*, a flood of similar spoof videos appeared. Nowadays, spoofing is becoming one of the most important forms of amateur videos online (Voci, 2006). Therefore, in this section, I mainly focus on spoof video. I argue that micro film absorbs the spirit of *egao* and remediates spoof videos during its development.

Egao in Chinese is constituted by two characters: 恶 (e) and 搞 (gao). Qing Huang, a journalist at one of the official newspapers *China Daily*, makes an explanation that “the two characters ‘e’ meaning ‘evil’ and ‘gao’ meaning ‘work’ combine to describe a subculture that is characterized by humor, revelry, subversion, grass-root spontaneity, defiance of authority, mass participation and multi-media high-tech” (Huang, 2006). It is a cultural product of digital technologies, especially the digital processing technology and the Internet (Gong and Yang, 2010: 5). More precisely, digital technologies are the tools for individual to make *egao* products, simultaneously, the Internet provides the soil in which *egao* takes shape and develops (ibid.). Moreover, Chenchen Zhao and Yumin Wu imply that because its feature of resistance collides with the dominant ideology of traditional and professional media, *egao* is destined to be amateur and only can appear in unofficial media, like the Internet which are considered more free than mainstream media, in mainland China (Zhao and Wu, 2011: 115).

In *egao*, spoof videos and pictures are the most popular forms (Gao, 2012: 56). Before *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou*, spoof videos already existed. Videos made by Back Dorm Boy are the most popular examples. Back Dorm Boy is a Chinese duo constituted of two college boys. They gained their fame for uploading videos in which they lip synched the songs by the Backstreet Boys and other pop stars with exaggerated facial expressions and hilarious gestures online.¹⁶ During an interview by *Southern Metropolis Daily*, Wei Wei, a member of Back Dorm Boy, admitted that their motivation to make those spoof videos was just for fun, entertaining themselves and others (Xu, 2005). In fact, his remark reflects the main function of the spoof videos at that time: merely for mass entertainment.

However, the emergence of *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* locates the spoof videos beyond the realm of pure entertainment. Rather, spoof videos start to

¹⁶ Their videos can be watched on YouTube, the link I offer is their most popular one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcD3Y8Kp29U>.

illustrate their significance by representing themes current or common to social and political affairs. In short, they are commonly used by Chinese citizens to satirize the social and political problems they experience and express their discontent with Chinese mainstream media and government policy today (Lugg, 2013). This facilitates the significance of *egao* as a subculture to “provide an alternative locus of power, permitting the transgressing of existing social and cultural hierarchies” (Gong and Yang, 2010: 4).

The direct reason for Ge Hu to make *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* is to express his extreme disappointment about Kaige Chen’s purported blockbuster *The Promise*, for which he paid the ten RMB ticket price to watch in 2005. Hu mentions that “[*The Promise*] was very bad, so I thought it would be fun to make a parody of it”. However, the techniques he used and the content he designed are more than merely making fun which was his purported initial thought (Lim, 2006). In “Digitized Parody: The Politics of *Egao* in Contemporary China”, Haomin Gong and Xin Yang analyze *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* in-depth. They argue that *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* is “an *egao* classic” and that it represents the spirit of contemporary *egao* culture (Gong and Yang, 2010: 11).

The fundamental attribute of *egao* is the strong sense of “playfulness”, namely, having some “fun” (ibid.). It suggests that whatever the theme it is, *egao* is essentially a kind of humor that makes people laugh out. Spoofsters commonly adopt different strategies to create a sense of humor and comicality. In *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou*, Hu deliberately mismatches the image and sound to provoke laughter. For instance, Hu dubs actors with cartoonish voices and adds popular music for the scenes drawn from *The Promise* which are originally epic and serious. Hu also uses the footage, in which the goddess Manshen’s hair floats above her head, to parody a shampoo advertisement, aiming at satirizing “the film as making being so bad that it will make one’s hair stand on end” (Lugg, 2013).

However, such mismatches not only aim at provoking laughter, but also function as a parodic means for satiric and emotional expression. Alexander Lugg describes spoof videos as parasites since they “make parasitic use of well-known and widely consumed media products to enhance their popularity” (ibid.). Indeed, the most popular strategy employed by spoofsters is to appropriate official media content directly to suit their own needs or parody the presentation style of mainstream media to make irony (ibid.). *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* uses the footage from *The Promise* directly and imitates the narrative style of *China Crime Report*, a legal talk show on the state-run China Central TV (CCTV). By restructuring the plot in a comic framework and mimicking the standardized tone in official media, Hu succeeds in

injecting hypotexts to satire Kaige Chen, the director of *The Promise*. In other words, he produces a new audio-visual text with new meanings to criticize Chen's compromise to commercial films which are designed to serve box office and to impress the eyes with a hollow mind. Hence, Gong and Yang declare that the advanced target of *egao* is subversion and transgression (Gong and Yang, 2010: 12).

In addition, *egao* is radically subjective and self-expressive since its nature is an emotional expression of individuals (Lugg, 2013). Paradoxically, *egao* also demands a formation of a constructive community of spoofsters and audiences (Gong and Yang, 2010: 9). That is, in order to achieve the ironic effect of *egao* well, a shared attitude towards the satirical objects and shared familiarity with the new meaning between the spoofsters and audience are necessary. Furthermore, audiences are required to actively decode the hypotext and new meaning in *egao* works. Therefore, *egao* is essentially a culture in which people express their opinions or discontent and criticize the established social and cultural power structures "behind a veil of humor and contestable meaning" (Lugg, 2013). Its comic and satiric effects rely on both the encoding of spoofsters and the decoding of audiences. These constitute the essential elements of the spirit of *egao*.

Paola Voci points out that besides the parodies of popular films and mainstream media content, parodies of real life are also common to evoke *egao* (Voci, 2006). Some *egao* works gain shared notoriety making fun of innocent subjects, such as the spoof video *Bus Uncle* (2006). The original video shows an old man quarreling with a young man on the bus in Hong Kong. After this video was uploaded on YouTube, spoofsters mobilized their creativity to rework the video.¹⁷ Some spoof videos remix the original one by adding music and animation merely for fun. Other spoof videos restructure the original one to make a criticism of the society or to let off steam, like the one made by Yut Dung Chan who made *Bus Uncle* into a rap remix.¹⁸

The popularity of spoof videos shows that Internet users realize the possibility to use video as a medium to show and express their opinions. In Gong and Yang's words, *egao* offers "imagined empowerment for the digital generation, exploring an alternative space for individual expression" (Gong and Yang, 2010: 16). Influenced by the spirit of *egao*, micro film is not commercial-driven; instead, it is an individualized expression of the emotion and a subjective reflection of the society (Zhang, 2012: 107). For instance, Chinese famous comedian Bo Huang directed a micro film *Crazy*

¹⁷ Some examples can be watched on YouTube: 1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12Ri59U1JSA>; 2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7xEAAAnMOMo>.

¹⁸ It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjRcXLK5T4g>.

Dinner Party in 2012.¹⁹ He adopts a comic fashion to expose the underside of current Chinese society and satire the popular value of mammonism and luxury worship in China. Huang calls this film as an expression “played” by himself during an interview (Ai, 2013: 18). Of course, not every micro film is “playful”, some micro film producers incline to use an affecting mode to tell the story. In 2011, only 50 days after the train collision accident in Wenzhou on July 23rd, a micro film *If 723* (2011) was released online.²⁰ At the end of this micro film, there is a sentence that we do not intend to trigger your tears, but we attempt to use images to hold a memorial ceremony for all the victims. It is a reflection of the trauma this accident brought to victims’ families and people’s doubts towards the security of China’s high-speed rail.

Notably, early spoof videos, especially those that appropriate mainstream media content directly, are vulnerable, because they are easy to be accused as infringing on copyright. *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* is, again, a typical case. The popularity of *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* immediately infuriated Chen, director of *The Promise*. He threatened to sue Hu and his lawyers sent cease-and-desist letters to websites which distributed the video. Nonetheless, Chen’s threat provoked an overwhelming support for Hu and his spoof videos online. Finally, Chen did not sue Hu in court and the public discussion on it gradually disappeared. However, Hu explicitly claims that he is unwilling to take the same risks to be sued again (Han, 2011: 109). Since the production of *Annihilate the Gangsters on Niaolong Mountain* (2006), Hu started to stop using original footages.²¹ Instead, he engaged in making self-produced spoof videos which continue to parody famous films and satirize social and political issues.

Even though Hu was not sued, the case of *A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* signifies the importance of “self-producing” in video creation, especially for amateurs. Learned from this case, micro film emphasizes that everything should be “what you created” since the first day it appeared. It has already become the soul of micro film (Wang, 2011: 23; Zhou, 2012: 41). Pan Zhou argues that a successful micro film should be completely made by the producer, from script to music, in order to avoid the copyright disputation and to fully express personal emotions (Zhou, 2012: 41).

The rise of *egao* videos triggers public interests in video creation. Ordinary people realize that words are not the only medium to express their emotions; rather, through the arrangement of images, they are also able to reflect and criticize the society they are living in. In the development of micro film, the spirit of *egao* has

¹⁹ It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhJvM3Qh-H8> (in Chinese).

²⁰ It can be watched on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbIIL_nA50Y (part 1 in Chinese) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6aahUG0tTA> (part 2 in Chinese).

²¹ It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxjUBw7HWSs> (in Chinese)

been absorbed. *Egao* has become a creation element to be widely employed into the producing of micro film in China (Chen, 2012: 35). Most Chinese micro film producers, today, attempt to comically present their views and achieve irony. They regard micro film as an intimate approach to conduct individualized and expressive creation. Today, some spoof videos still appropriate footage from commercial films or from mainstream media directly. However, most micro film producers learned from the early copyright disputation of spoof videos and insist on originality, that is, neither pirate nor use footage from other works.

2.3 Advertisement: The Invasion of Commercialization

The secretary general of Chinese Nine-Minute Original Film Tournament, Qi Qiu, declares that micro film also presents a strong commercial tendency since its inception, because it is also used either for brand promotion or for celebrities' publicity (Qiu, 2013: 34). Currently, the funding for most micro films is mainly found in commercial enterprises with the aim of self-promotion (ibid.). Furthermore, the widely-acknowledged first micro film is actually an advertisement of Cadillac. Within the 90 seconds, Dutch director Frank Vroegop integrates elements of Hollywood action movies, such as the scenes of tussling, chasing, sky diving and blasting, to highlight the excellent performance of Cadillac SLS. Afterwards, a range of brand advertising was produced in the name of micro film, from a serialized commercial *Sour Sweet Bitter Hot* of Extra and *The Evoque Effect* (2011) of Ranger Rover to *Love, in Sichuan* (2012) about the tourism promotion of Sichuan province. Hence, some researchers assert that a micro film is essentially a long advertisement in the cinematic form (Zheng, 2011: 9; Chen, 2012: 58; Ye, 2011: 47). However, instead of directly equalizing micro film to advertisement, I argue that the emergence of micro film as advertisement is actually the outcome of the invasion of commercialization. In short, advertisers invest in the micro film industry, attempting to develop a new mode of self-promotion.

“Greed is good”, a quotation found in the trailer to *Wall Street* (1987), suits the mission of the contemporary advertising industry. Advertisers constantly seek every marketing opportunity to generate profits for their clients. Since 1979 the first TV commercial on the Shanghai Television Channel, TV commercials have grown to own the largest market share of advertising videos in China (Liu, 2010: 59; Lin, 2013: 2). However, the disadvantages of TV commercials in terms of production and distribution are obvious. Firstly, TV commercials are restricted in time duration (Lin, 2013: 6). A maximum duration of 30 seconds demands TV advertisers to quickly

demonstrate abundant product information, ranging from the product's function to the lifestyle of using. Thus, most TV commercials are information-intensive, but seldom consider the contextual watching experience of audiences (ibid.). Secondly, advertisers need to pay a high price to put their advertisements on television (Quan, 2012: 38). In this regard, they never stop engaging in the innovation of advertisement to reduce costs.

With the increase in value of the Chinese film market, product placement in feature-length movies soon gained popularity among advertisers (Chen et al., 2013: 508). This new mode of advertising is different from TV commercials. Product placement emphasizes the inclusion of product, service or brand into media content without undermining the original narrative structure (ibid.). In other words, compared with TV commercials, the promotional effect of product placement is implicit and unobtrusive, which is more acceptable to modern consumers (Sun and Qian, 2012: 98). Xiaogang Feng's feature-length movie, *Sorry Baby* (1999), is regarded as "the first Chinese domestic movie with intentionally embedded brands" (ibid.: 509). In his following movies, from *Big Shot's Funeral* (2001), *Cell Phone* (2004) to *A World without Thieves* (2005), Feng places several brands into the plot and inherently promotes the development of product placement in China (Mo, 2011: 41; Braester, 2005: 551). However, advertisers usually have less control since the original plot of a movie is the most important element which determines the presentation of the brands (Li, 2012: 95). Otherwise, fastidious audiences will criticize the incompatible placement of products in the movie, which will have a negative influence on the appreciation of both product placement in the feature-length movie and movie itself.

As early as 2007, Yahoo invited Xiaogang Feng, Kaige Chen and Jizhong Zhang, three famous directors of feature-length movies in China, to make short advertising films and distribute them online. These short advertising films each told a story within 20 minutes, respectively, to suggest their experiences using the powerful searching performance of Yahoo Search. In this sense, these films can be considered the prototype of micro film as advertisement. Nevertheless, at that moment, online video was still in its infancy and these three short advertising films can be considered more as an experiment. In this context, most advertisers held a wait-and-see attitude (Song, 2011: 111). In 2008, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) released the *Administrative Provisions on Internet Audio-Visual Program Service* to deal with the pirated issue of Chinese online video websites (Zhao and Keane, 2013: 728). It forces websites to pay for copyright content and to encourage user-generated content. Under the pressure of huge investment in server, bandwidth and copyright content, online

video service providers “started to experiment with alternative business models to offset the pressure” (ibid.: 733).

In 2010, YouKu was the first to cooperate with commercial enterprise, Chevrolet, to fund youth directors to make ten online short films (Yang, 2012: 12). It is notable that there was no product placement of Chevrolet in these online short films. Thus, I argue that commercial enterprises at that time inclined to play the role of sponsors to support the producing of short films rather than using online “short film” as a new advertising form. However, the continuing popularity of these kinds of “short films” have aroused more advertisers’ interests. At the end of 2010 when Cadillac made the first micro film as an advertisement and achieved high click rate, advertisers started to use the form of micro film to make advertisements. Li Sun and Yigui Qian argue that if product placement is an integration of brand or product into film, micro film as advertisement is an integration of film into advertisement (Sun and Qian, 2012: 99). Soon, amounts of professional auteurs engaged in the making of micro film as advertisement, such as *Watching Football Game* (2011) which is a commercial of Canon camera made by director Wen Jiang.²² In addition, SARFT released the *Supplemental Provisions of Administrative Measures for the Broadcasting of Radio and TV Advertisements* in 2011. It restricts the freedom of TV commercial delivery further (Li, 2012: 63). Under this situation, more and more advertisers shift their attention to develop micro film as a new advertising mode and to use the Internet as an alternative platform (ibid.). They either cooperate with video sharing websites to fund new talents or invite famous auteurs to make micro film as advertisement (Zhang, 2012: 103). Sometimes, they sponsor the micro film festival to increase the exposure of their brand (ibid.: 106).

As argued above, the engagement of advertisers in micro film is essentially the invasion of commercialization. It does not mean that micro film is equal to advertisement, but it indicates that micro film is becoming gradually commercialized. Notably, the influence of micro film commercialization is twofold. On the one hand, commercialization indicates significant investment into the micro film industry. Hence, the overall quality of micro film is improved and the role of micro film is enhanced with more professionals’ participation. On the other hand, the development of micro film is encountering the same dilemma as the development of film. That is, how to balance the artistry and commercialization becomes the biggest challenge for micro film nowadays (Chen, 2012: 58; Li, 2012: 63; Zhou, 2012: 41).

²² It can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMCYgXrxPMw> (in Chinese).

2.4 Summary

By investigating the genealogy of micro film, the potential drawback of linear historical discourse, which considers the history of micro film progressive, is avoided. Instead, the genealogy of micro film illustrates how short film, *egao* videos and advertisement collectively influence the development of micro film and contribute to the hybridity of micro film.

Yanping Lv suggests dividing micro film into two main categories: non-commercial micro film and commercial micro film (Lv, 2012: 56). The non-commercial micro film stresses the expression of producers' emotion and viewpoint, just like spoof videos. Producers tell a story with images aiming at communicating with audiences or satirizing the society, instead of persuading consumers to buy products (Bang, 2007: 1). This kind of micro film is generally made by amateurs, but it does not mean that the quality of the non-commercial micro film is necessarily inferior. Sometimes, professional directors also participate in producing a non-commercial micro film. Even though, most of these films are actually funded by video-sharing websites or commercial enterprises, their micro film is not essentially commercial-driven (Zhang, 2012: 105). In contrast, the commercial micro film refers to using micro film as a form of advertisement. In this kind of micro film, stories serve for the promotion of products or brands. Therefore, it entails a strong sense of commercialization and is regarded as an outcome of an invasion of capitalism in the market (Quan, 2012: 38). Nevertheless, even in commercial micro film, the presentation of the story, or narration, is still the core. That is, the direct introduction of products or brands is replaced by the cinematic narrative. All the commercial elements are integrated into the plot and audiences commonly receive these elements unconsciously (Dong, 2012: 22; Sun and Qian, 2012: 99).

As cinematic videos, both non-commercial micro film and commercial micro film insist on the principle to tell a complete story. The motif of micro film can vary in genres such as romance, detective, action, comedy, family drama, propaganda and so forth (Zhang, 2012: 92). The producers also can be different, from amateurs and semi-professional students to professional and famous auteurs (Dong, 2012: 23; Zhang, 2012: 106; Zhou, 2012: 41). However, the only standard with which one can evaluate a micro film is how the story is elaborated. As noted by Li Sun, content is the king of micro film, despite of its hybrid tendency (Sun, 2012: 123). In short, whether producers can tell a story well determines the success of a micro film, which is its shared similarity to short film.

Chapter 3: Micro Film as a “New” Medium

I have argued in the previous chapters that micro film is essentially a form of cinematic video which demands each film to have a complete story, impressive characters and dialogue. The medium of micro film offers spectators multiple sensory experiences and creates a sense of autonomy with regards to the navigation among and between various instances of micro film. Furthermore, micro film possesses a hybrid tendency because it absorbs and transforms other cultural forms, especially short films, as evidenced by the amateur videos of *egao* and shift of advertisements towards micro film formats. Nonetheless, there is another important idea about micro film which cannot be ignored: micro film is a kind of online video (Ye, 2012: 47). Zhaoqian Cui notes that from the process of making to distribution, micro film does not leave new media (Cui, 2012: 42). Therefore, micro film is considered the product of new media and its development relies on the specific features and functions of new media (Hong, 2011: 49; Meng, 2011: 100; Ye, 2012: 47).

The innovations of art consistently correspond to the evolution of various forms of media (Meng, 2011: 100). In this regard, the rise of micro film is a response to the breakthrough of new media technologies. To put it specifically, the popularity and easy accessibility of digital videos and personal computers have provided the material foundation of the production of micro film (Hong, 2011: 50). In addition, video-editing software which is very simple to operate and easy to access also facilitates the popularity of micro film (Fang, 2012: 45). Today, more and more people also use digital cameras or mobile phones to record micro film footage and edit this sound, image and metadata using software on personal computers or mobile devices. From this perspective, new media (which I will seek to define later) can be considered common tools to make micro film. Changhui Hong and Zhijun Meng claim that using new media as a tool to make micro film is cheap and easy, which contributes to the “micro” feature, that is, short making period and small investment scale, of micro film (Hong, 2011: 50; Meng, 2011: 101). At the same time, new media are the only platform with which to distribute micro film (Zhou, 2012: 41; Fang, 2012: 46; Zhang, 2012: 92; Meng, 2011: 100). Based on this evidence, Xiaomeng Chen argues that micro film is a kind of presentation of new media discourse that signifies an open system where everyone can participate (Chen, 2012: 34). She continues to describe micro film as individualized, immediate and interactive, which are new modes of communication brought about by new media as platforms (*ibid.*: 35). Moreover, the fact that micro film is short in terms of content time can also be attributed to new media, but in terms of audience expectations. Changhui Hong notes that in contrast to the centralized attentiveness of spectators in the cinema, the

attentiveness of new media users is more often than not described as scattered (Hong, 2011: 50). More precisely, it is difficult for new media users to merely focus on one online video for an extended period of time (relative to both cinema and gallery formats). The question of youku.com's chief editor Xiangyang Zhu "Why do we not make the video shorter?" is not surprising (ibid.). Similarly, Zhijun Meng, a communication lecturer at Wenzhou Vocational and Technical College, concluded that the most significant influences brought about by new media are the changes of users' habits of viewing and modes of thinking (Meng, 2011: 101).

Today, many researchers, especially the aforementioned ones, attempt to make the relationship between micro film and new media explicit. However, nearly all of their publications avoid answering the two most fundamental questions. The first one is exactly what Chinese researchers refer to when referring to "new media".²³ In fact, new media is a very general concept. Without a clear definition, the notion of new media is too hollow to contribute to micro film research. Thus, clarifying the notion of "new media" is the first task. I will eventually argue that it is problematic for Chinese researchers to adopt the term "new media" to study micro film and I will suggest using a new term. The second fundamental question left unanswered is how to specify and classify the "new media" to which Chinese researchers refer. As mentioned above, researchers consider micro film as the product of "new media". Namely, the specific features and functions of "new media" are an overwhelming element to contribute to the development of the characteristics of micro film. Since micro film researchers seldom study the specifics of "new media" in depth, I argue that the current research on the relationship between micro film and "new media" lacks sufficient elaboration and hence, is unconvincing. Therefore, the second task in this chapter is providing this elaboration on the functions of "new media" as it specifically relates to the making and viewing of micro film. In addition, I will argue that the specific features of "new media" mean that micro film is a new "medium" which possesses a double logic of collective individuality. Following this, I will analyze the fundamental problem in the development of micro film. I will argue that the fundamental problem lies on the current way to define micro film, which cannot reflect the distinct characteristics of micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium.

3.1 Defining "New Media"

²³ In the following, I will use "new media" to indicate the terminology new media that Chinese researchers refer to.

We employ the term new media to capture our sense about the rapid change of technologies common to the media landscape from the late 1980s onwards. “New Media” as it were is for us nowadays more like a sign, indicating progressive differences when compared with old media, or in other words, traditional media, such as radios and televisions. Seldom do we have a clear idea of what the definition of new media is, especially regarding its use in the production and consumption of micro film. Indeed, to question the makeup of the pure essence of new media remains difficult and complicated to answer singlehandedly. Different media scholars have several different ways to define new media.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin propose to define new media in terms of remediation. They believe that remediation is an overwhelming feature which defines new media and argue that what new media do in relation to their predecessors is “present themselves as a refashioned and improved version” (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 15). Actually, we can find a clue to their idea of remediation in the work of Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan’s argument in the 1960s that “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium” can be read as the theoretical basis of “remediation” (McLuhan, 2003: 203). If we draw out McLuhan’s argument further, we can assume that new media essentially translate “old” media into new forms. Just as books translate the spoken word into print and televisions translate radio into audio-visual signals, new media can translate everything, including mail, paintings, videos and film into digital data (which can then be further translated into other formats). Furthermore, if we maintain that McLuhan summarizes a general framework to define new media, Bolter and Grusin elaborate this framework into three instances. In the first case, new media may remediate older media without challenging them where ideally users will be unable to perceive the difference between the two. Nonetheless, “this is never so” (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 45). In the second case, the old media are presented after having been refashioned by new media and “therefore [maintain] a sense of multiplicity and hypermediacy (ibid.: 46). In the third case, new media absorb the old media entirely, which can minimize the sense of discontinuity and make the user experiences integral. Additionally, Bolter and Grusin state that old media is refashioned in order to deal with the challenge brought about by the new media. In this sense, remediation is a two-way process. However, how can new media be distinguished from old media if both are involved with refashioning? Shall new media be distinguished on the basis of chronology? After having explored this position, I argue that it is problematic to define new media in terms of remediation.

John D. Leckenby seemingly solves the aforementioned problems by appropriating “traditional” media to replace “old” media in “The Interaction of

Traditional and New Media”. Essentially, his attitude towards the way of defining new media is quite similar to that of Bolter and Grusin since he asserts that new media is indeed not completely new. As he suggests, “old” and “new” present a continuum rather than an isolating and exclusive relation because “the ‘old’ does not disappear, but melds into the ‘new’” (Leckenby, 2003: 5). Nevertheless, he makes a contribution to the discussion by replacing “old” media with “traditional” media. By doing so, new media are defined as those which “are not yet fully established as customary institutions in a society” (ibid.: 6). Moreover, by adopting the notion of “tradition”, he relates “traditional media” to religious and social practices or customs, in order to explain the refashioning and change of the old media themselves.²⁴ However, I argue that his approach to defining new media is still problematic. How can it be determined if a specific medium is fully established or not? Furthermore, because computers and their use are today omnipresent, can we define computers as “traditional media”?

In 2010, Robert K. Logan proposed that new media should be defined as the opposite of mass media. In accordance with his viewpoint, old media, for the most part, are mass media, while new media are not. Even though the Internet and the World Wide Web do belong to mass media, Logan asserts that these two forms of media are accessed intimately and they incorporate interactivity - which contrasts the general understanding of the characteristics of mass media. Thus, he defines new media as “a class of media that are digital and interactive and hence differ from the electric mass media the McLuhan (1964) addressed in UM [Understanding Media]” (Logan, 2010: 6).

Generally speaking, “digital media”, where the most intuitive feeling acquired by users is interactivity, is an alternative term of new media (ibid.: 4). It is different from “old media” by the involvement of numerical representation and computing forms. According to Lev Manovich, the popular press identifies new media as Web sites, computer games, or CD-ROMs, for instance, which are distributed and exhibited by using computers (Manovich, 2001: 43). So it is reasonable to say an image exhibited on a computer screen is new media, while the same image printed on paper is not. In his book *The Language of New Media*, American theorist of digital culture and media art, Manovich agrees with this way to define new media by involving computers as a distribution platform. He believes that computers are not only responsible for distribution and exhibition, but are also sometimes involved in the process of production and storage. According to Manovich, media become new media when “all existing media are translated into numerical data accessible for computers” (2001: 48).

²⁴ John D. Leckenby references the Merriam Webster Online (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tradition>) to define tradition as “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom)”.

His emphasis on the shift of the role played by existing media - from information carriers to numerical data accessed and processed by computers - signifies the identity of computers as media processors and as final distribution platforms in his attempt at defining new media. In short, Manovich's definition of new media is on the basis of the transformation of "old media" into the data that are accessible by computers.

Likewise, I would like to bring Manovich's perspective into consideration alongside Raymond Williams' notion of media to define the "new media" to which Chinese micro film researchers refer. On the one hand, Williams considers the medium as an intermediate agency between a conception and a final work (Williams, 1977: 161). On the other hand, he states that a medium is "the objectified properties of the working process itself" (ibid.). At this latter level, the concept of the medium is beyond the sense of materiality. Instead, it is a social practice emphasizing the embodiment of the relationships among the medium which are constructed by material processes, such as printing and distribution. In this sense, I consider new media as both a specific material production that is reflected as an intermediate agency, and as a social practice. The most crucial point in the definition of new media is that new media are ultimately determined by digitalization. To be specific, digitalization as a process results in a series of changes in media production, distribution and application as the supposedly distinct characteristics of new media. To put it more specifically, the definition of "new media" is twofold. In the first place, "new media" are an intermediate agency between a conception and a final representation. They are represented as a digital material production to connect the intangible conception to the objectified production, with the World Wide Web as the clearest manifestation. In the second place, "new media" are a social practice. They reflect the working process that especially stresses the working relationships between "new media" and its users. That is, "new media" are the objectified properties of the process in which users actively participate in the "new media" production, distribution and application. For users, "new media" function both as a material means to exhibit the tangible content and as a representation of their active relations to the "new media" content. Take computers, the most common manifestation of "new media", for instance. Computers are not only a material agent with which to exhibit content on screen, but also a tool to support users' active operation and manipulation of this content. Simultaneously, computers act as a mirror reflecting the process of how users interact with content. It is notable that digitalization is the impetus of the rise and development of "new media" since it brings about a wide range of changes at an instrumental level, which constitute the defining characteristics of "new media".

So far, the definition of new media to which Chinese researchers refer has been clarified. However, the terminology surrounding new media is still problematic. In the first place, “new” is a relative concept. In short, it must be situated as the opposite of something considered as “old”. Furthermore, how new and old can be demarcated is a complicated and open-ended question. Secondly, “new” is a time-limited concept. That is, can new media of a decade past also be considered as new media today, especially in the context that media technologies develop continuously? Thirdly, as the discussion has shown, the literal meaning of new media is rarely meaningful to indicate the defining features of new media, which makes new media in essence a general term. Literally speaking, any medium can be termed as new media if there is a comparison possible. Therefore, I argue that it is problematic to adopt the term new media to analyze micro film. Rather, participatory digital media is a more appropriate term, since what Chinese researchers call “new media” are essentially those media which are influenced significantly by digitalization and that require user participation.

3.2 Participatory Digital Media Characteristics

In 3.1, I note that a series of changes in media production, distribution and use are presumed to be the distinct characteristics of “new media”, what I term here “participatory digital media”. But what these changes exactly are remains unanswered. Therefore, in 3.2, I will elaborate these defining concepts by examining the discourse about “new media” characteristics.

In his 2008 book *Media Technology and Society: A History from the Telegraph to the Internet*, Brian Winston stresses that our visions of what is really happening in the purported “Information Revolution” are obscured because we are immersed in the illusion of technological progress. In other words, we always take for granted, in the ideological sense, that the adjective “new” in new media equals better. Thus, we easily assert that new media indicates progress, without recognizing the nature of the changes when compared with existing media. In order to reveal the essence of the purported “Information Revolution” or “Digital Age”, Winston designs a model to “[treat] the historical pattern of change and development in communications as a field (the social sphere) in which two elements (science and technology) inserts” (Winston, 2008: 3). In this model, the development of a media technology should experience three transformations: ideation, supervening social necessities and suppression of radical potential, respectively. In 3.2, I mainly engage into dialogue with his concept of transformation in terms of ideation.

Ideation, according to Winston, is a process in which the scientific competence moves up to the technological performance with the prototypes as the final product. In other words, scientific competence is a scientific imagination or conception in the human brain, which is formed on the basis of scientific knowledge and understanding. The technological performance is the objectified representation of scientific competence. Therefore, ideation is the process to realize the transformation from the competence in the performance and prototypes are the final products of the process. In this regard, the scientific competence is akin to the concept of technological imaginary. In *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, Martin Lister et al. maintain that the technological imaginary is rooted in the psychological theory. Due to the dissatisfactions with reality and the desires for a better situation, people imagine an “other” onto technologies, expecting to make a change (Lister et al., 2009: 67). In the sense of participatory digital media, I cannot tell if they are invented due to people’s dissatisfaction with the existing media. Nonetheless, with their knowledge and understanding of the science of “digitalization”, technologists do have an expectation and imagination of the changes in media production, distribution and use when compared with existing media. Then, technologists build the corresponding devices in the form of prototypes to perform and test their expecting changes and thus the scientific competence moves up to the technological performance. In other words, the expected changes are transformed into real changes in media production, distribution and use, which are the supposed characteristics of participatory digital media as argued above. In this sense, the characteristics that will be elaborated in the following are essentially the technological performance of participatory digital media. They are the changes at an instrumental level. It is notable that because the technological performance is determined by prototypes, the notion of the defining characteristics of participatory digital media does not mean the essential qualities; rather, it indicates a range of possibilities that participatory digital media can provide for users to perform.

Manovich (2001) uses “principle” when he discusses the characteristics of new media. Indeed, “principle” is a favorable approach to summarizing the differences between old and new media since it refers to a law that explains the nature of something. Nevertheless, in accordance with the dictionary, the definition of “principle” entails the sense of essentiality and absoluteness.²⁵ Hence, it is not appropriate to be adopted to identify the supposed characteristics of participatory digital media. Martin Lister et al. put forward an alternative terminology to avoid the risk of their claim being accused as “essentialism” when they classify the specifics of

²⁵ According to the Merriam Webster Online (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/principle>), principle refers to 1) “a moral rule or belief that helps you know what is right and wrong and that influences your actions”; 2) “a basic truth or theory: an idea that forms the basis of something”; or 3) “a law or fact of nature that explains how something works or why something happens”.

new media. They stress the term, “affordance”, as being useful since they believe that “affordance” “draws our attention to the actions that the nature of a thing ‘invites’ us to perform” (Lister et al., 2009: 16). In design theory, the term, “affordance”, refers to:

the perceived and actual properties of (a) thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used . . . A chair affords (‘is for’) support, and, therefore, affords sitting. A chair can also be carried. Glass is for seeing through, and for breaking. (as cited in Lister et al., 2009: 16)

In this spirit, I assume that “affordance” is the most appropriate term to discuss the necessary defining characteristics of participatory digital media.

3.2.1 Digital

According to the definition of participatory digital media which emphasizes the determining importance of the digitalization, the defining characteristic of digital is definitely the most dominant. It signifies the shift from analog media to digital forms.

“Analog” is considered as the defining characteristic of the major media in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Analog refers to “processes in which one set of physical properties can be stored in another ‘analogous’ physical form” (Lister et al., 2009: 17). In digital media, the form of all input data are numbers and thus, these data are called numerical data (Manovich, 2003: 19). Unlike the analog media being determined by physics and chemistry laws, data in digital media are processed and stored as numbers and as such are subject to mathematical processes. Nevertheless, digital data are eventually presented in the form of light, sound, graphics, diagrams, pictures, etc.

The process of digitalization is essentially the conversion of “continuous data into a numerical representation” (Manovich, 2001: 49). It consists of two steps: sampling and quantization. After sampling, continuous data are changed into discrete data, such as pixels. Afterwards, they are quantified as a numerical value from a defined range. In this regard, the numerical data in new media are generally discrete, waiting to be assembled into units.

Lister et al. deem that this mechanism of conversion of digital media is not something completely new while digital media “can be seen as a continuation and extension of a principle or technique that was already in place” (Lister et al., 2009: 17). Before the development of broadcast media, the major media took the physical

artefact as the preferred form of circulation around the world, for instance, copies and commodities. But in broadcast media, the form of physical artefact was converted into the signal in wave forms which are considered the further analog properties of image and sound media. In this sense, digitalization is better seen as a continuation of the principle to convert physical artefacts into signals.

In addition, the digital affordance of participatory digital media tightly associates with software. I have already pointed out that the digital data are processed and stored mathematically. In fact, these algorithms operate within the software. In other words, software entails the responsibility to “create, edit, present, and access” the digital data (Manovich, 2013: 32). For example, in terms of a digital video, from shooting and editing to uploading and viewing, all of these steps are all involved and determined by different pieces of software. Manovich even argues that there is no digital media at all, but only software as applied to media (ibid.: 34). I do not attempt to debate whether “new media” have become software or not, what I want to emphasize is that software is an indispensable factor in the research of participatory digital media.

In summary, there are three main points to understand the digital affordance of participatory digital media. Firstly, all the input data are converted into discrete numbers or numerical codes and they are finally represented in the form of sound, image, light and so forth. Secondly, what determine participatory digital media are the algorithms of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, rather than the laws of physics and chemistry. Thirdly, all digital data are controlled by software. Because of these three factors, it is generally acknowledged that participatory digital media are programmable.

3.2.2 Interactivity

If the digital affordance is the most dominant characteristic of participatory digital media, the significance of the interactive affordance just follows up as the adjective “participatory” indicates. Leckenby even regards the interactive affordance as a primary factor to differentiate between participatory digital media and other media (Leckenby, 2003: 4). Furthermore, Lister et al. note that interactivity is “one of the key ‘value added’ characteristics of new media” (Lister et al., 2009: 21). However, the meaning of the term “interactivity” remains ambiguous. It has even become a “buzzword”, which in American culture signifies constantly heard and used words while those who use it and those who encounter it have no clear understandings of these words’ meaning. This has been part of the media community since the 1990s (Jensen, 1998: 185). In this sense, it is not hard to explain why the term “interactivity” is still undergoing constant redefinition today.

Nevertheless, in terms of participatory digital media, I argue that the notion of interactivity is mainly connected to the active role played by “new media” consumers. That is, “interactivity” indicates a strong sense of consumer engagement with participatory digital media (texts) and a great range of consumer choices offered by participatory digital media. In this context, participatory digital media shift the image of media consumers as a passive audience for mass media, such as “couch potatoes” for television, to active participants who are even able to intervene into media texts to generate new meanings (Logan, 2010: 6).

Actually, the interactive affordance of participatory digital media is reflected in three phases: the navigation (or selection), the construction, and the distribution of media texts. In the first phase, participatory digital media users are considered as getting information by their own preference, instead of being given knowledge no matter whether they have an interest or not (Leckenby, 2003: 6). In 1993, Peter Lunenfeld drew a model to illustrate two paradigms of interaction, which he named as the “extractive” and “immersive” (Lister et al., 2009: 22). On the basis of his explanation, the extractive navigation is akin to the modern sense of hypertextual navigation.²⁶ By using the computer apparatus and software, users have the freedom to select information or text within a database according to their will. The immersive navigation is more common in digital games, especially in simulated 3D virtual world, since it emphasizes “the visual and sensory pleasures of spatial exploration” (ibid.).

During the phase of media text construction, users use the segments of the texts they selected in the navigational process to construct their own individualized texts; or they may have real contributions to the text by writing something back. The former is merely the end result of the interactivity in the form of navigation, while the latter is “registrational interactivity” which refers to “the opportunities that new media texts afford their users to [...] add to the text by registering their own messages” (ibid.: 23). In short, the major difference between these two situations is whether there is an “input”, which is contributed by users’ adding and changing actions, becoming a part of the original text.

Abovementioned types of interactivity belong to the realm of human-to-machine interaction; meanwhile participatory digital media provide the access to person-to-person connection though it is in essence computer-mediated and simulated communication between individuals or organizations. I assume that such connection happens more often in distribution of media texts. When users distribute media texts online to make texts available to other users (no matter if these texts have their input

²⁶ Since I define the third affordance of new media as “hypertextual”, “hypertextual navigation” will be elaborated in the following.

or not), they actually communicate with other users. In most cases, other users will make a response by adding their “input”. Lister et al. name this type of interactivity as “interactive communications” (Lister et al., 2009: 23). Services such as emails, online forum, social networks or portals are common ways users access “interactive communications”, which are forms simulating person-to-person dialogues. Thus, I conclude that the interactive affordance of participatory digital media suggests two-way communication with the exchange of information.

However, it is notable that though the interactive affordance of participatory digital media suggests that users are entitled to freedom, this freedom is not necessarily unlimited. Manovich distinguishes among two forms of interactivity: the open interactivity and the closed interactivity (Manovich, 2001: 59). In what he calls “branching-type” interactivity, Manovich describes that users are active merely in determining the order within the fixed elements which have already been generated.²⁷ This is an instance of closed interactivity. In terms of the open interactivity, users are able to either modify or generate contents by various approaches. However, even in the open form of interactivity, there are still various limitations. Filter systems, copyright issues or end user license agreements (EULAs) all restrict the degree of affordance of interactivity from a user’s perspective. This corresponds to what media scholar Julian Kücklich claims in that “the freedom of the player lies in submission to rules” (Kücklich, 2004: 33).

All in all, there are two approaches to understand the interactive affordance of participatory digital media. In the first approach, interactivity can be classified as either the navigation of media texts without input, or registrational interactivity, which users make a contribution as a part of the texts. In the second approach, interactivity can be distinguished between human-to-machine communications, such as “extractive navigation” and “immersive navigation” and person-to-person connections, for example interactive communication.

In the context of interactive affordances of participatory digital media, audiences become users who possess a strong sense of active engagement. Simultaneously, the paradigm of information broadcasting shifts to the paradigm of information exchange. Such shift indicates that the relationship between participatory digital media and users is in the form of two-way communication rather than one-way broadcasting. More importantly, though users are entitled to a certain level of freedom, participatory digital media in fact exert a series of rules to control the range of this freedom.

²⁷ According to Lev Manovich, branching-type interactivity (or menu-based interactivity) refers to programs that offer users a range of choices to pick and users’ choices form a branching tree structure (2001: 57).

3.2.3 Hypertextuality

Beside digital and interactive affordances, “hypertextuality” is the third dominant affordance of participatory digital media. In Manovich’s words, the hypertextual affordance indicates the “fractal structure of new media” (Manovich, 2001: 51).

Literally, the prefix “hyper” signifies “above, beyond, or outside” (Lister et al., 2009: 26). In this sense, hypertext refers to a “text” that is linked to other “texts” above, beyond, or outside itself by hyperlinks or simple links (ibid.; Farkas, 2004: 332; Vuković, 2008). It is comparable to a network assembled of minor units that contain multiple paths or chains to other units and each unit maintains a separate identity itself. Manovich points out that constituent units organize a hypertextual work in a fundamentally discrete and non-hierarchical way (Manovich, 2001: 52). Deleting or changing a part of a hypertext will not render the whole text meaningless, which is in contrast to traditional media texts of which constituent elements are not independent. Thus, Katarina Vuković claims that hypertext is “a text without a center” (Vuković, 2008); instead, it is a networked system where minor units exist as nodes. Unlike the centralized model of radio and TV broadcast systems, participatory digital media distribution systems construct a web of paths, chains or trails. Within this web, the meaning of each node is variable because it depends on the larger structure formed by hyperlinks beyond the single node. Hence, media scholar Adrian Miles asserts that hypertext is the combination of nodes via different possible links in the form of a networked diagram (Miles, 2008: 116).

In addition, the ideological connotation of the hypertext is a non-sequential connection between different constituent minor units. Therefore, what the hypertextual affordance of participatory digital media represents is actually a non-linear paradigm. People may claim that non-linear experience is not something new since in the realm of print, it has already existed, such as skipping a certain amount of information when reading newspaper or magazine. Nonetheless, I argue that the non-linear experience of participatory digital media is much stronger. Participatory digital media provide not only the possibility to jump around some parts of a text, but also to access links to other texts on the same Web page or even on different Web pages.

Moreover, similar to the interactive affordance of participatory digital media, the hypertextual affordance stresses user engagement as well. Namely, even though there are various links provided in advance within a certain hypertext, the practice of linking or not and of which node is being linked still depends on the users’ choices. In this regard, David Farkas claims that the essence of hypertext is a choice that is made

by users to determine what is experienced (Farkas, 2004: 333). Therefore, the hypertextual affordance is still considered as an approach to maximize users' autonomy in relation to media texts.

Notably, the term hypertext is always associated with the idea of hypermediacy, which is commonly used to describe the effect of the hypertextual affordance of participatory digital media in organizing diverse mediated forms. According to Bolter and Grusin, the core of hypermediacy is the presence of the medium, since hypermediacy is a visual style that presents the process of the multiplication of diverse media forms (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 31). In participatory digital media, the most obvious practice of hypermediacy is "the heterogeneous 'windowed style' of World Wide Web pages, the desktop interface, multimedia programs and video games" (ibid.). In all of these practices, the presence of the medium can be perceived and it reminds users that there are wide ranges of choices they are able to make. Moreover, by associating diverse mediated forms, hypermediacy enriches human sensory experiences. In this sense, the hypertextual affordance of participatory digital media brings users not only a non-linear but also a multilinear and multimedia experience.

In general, hypertext can be seen as an assemblage of separate nodes, with hyperlinks as the pathway to make connections. Rather than being a centralized broadcasting system, participatory digital media provide a networked paradigm where each node is linked in a discrete and non-hierarchical pattern. Furthermore, the hypertextual affordance of participatory digital media offers users a nonlinear and even multilinear experience by inviting users to make choices via hyperlinks. Therefore, users' active engagement is also addressed in this type of affordance.

3.2.4 Automation

When users operate in the process of media text creation, manipulation and access, the operations are actually performed automatically by participatory digital media, or accurately speaking, by the software. In other words, humans are removed (or partly removed) from these processes by software. Thus, the automatic affordance is another characteristic of participatory digital media, and the final one I discuss here.

According to Manovich, the automation in participatory digital media creation and manipulation can be classified as "low-level' automation of media creation" and "high-level' automation of media creation" (Manovich, 2001: 53). In this sense, the low-level automation merely involves some simple algorithms and templates, which is very common in the majority of commercial software for image editing, audio manipulation, word processing and so forth. For instance, Photoshop can automatically modify an image by improving the contrast range. Or users can use

Adobe After Effects to make a series of relatively complex visual effects automatically. Compared with the low-level automation of media creation, the high-level one is much more sophisticated and intelligent since it involves a computer's understanding of "the meanings embedded in the objects being generated" (ibid.). Take Siri, the software present in Apple iPhone, for example. The application of Siri has to analyze and understand spoken texts from users before it can answer questions and perform actions correspondingly. But until now, the high-level automation is still in the research stage and has not yet been applied widely.

Additionally, the automatic affordance of participatory digital media is also reflected in the media text access, such as the search engines used to retrieve or access information from a gigantic database. On the basis of the criteria that Manovich employed to make a classification of the automation in media creation and manipulation, I would like to distinguish the automation in media access into low-level automation and high-level automation as well. The most common case belonging to low-level automation is the instantaneous access to the relevant information. After users click a button, a Web search engine will automatically connect to the relevant information by running a series of simple algorithms. Since the end of the twentieth century, Web search engines have been able to automate information searching by inviting users to click or type in key words as opposed to typing in a full natural language search phrase themselves. Nevertheless, with the over-abundance of information being stored and distributed among digital media nowadays, how to find media texts which have existed somewhere already requires more effort. Consequently, the need for the automation of media access at high level becomes urgent. One response is the popular service of Web recommendation. This involves the underlying data mining process consisted of collecting and analyzing the data of user's browsing behaviors and preferences (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013: 14). There are generally two main forms of Web recommendation. The first one is represented in Google's PageRank algorithm. When users search for what they would deem as relevant information, Google's search engine will determine the importance of a Web page by "the number and quality of [its previous] incoming links" and then reflects this rank in the order in which results are displayed (Pasquinelli, 2009: 153). The second form of the Web recommendation is more intimate. If the first form of recommendation focuses on the collective data, the second one takes the individual user personal data into consideration. For the "recommended" widget with links to online videos on YouTube, this is the case. By analyzing the data generated by the previous browsing action and watch history of an individual user, YouTube will make a judgment of the user's preference and automatically offer a personal and intimate recommendation. At the same time, YouTube also takes the preferences of other users

into account to recommend a video that has been watched by one million people for instance.

In conclusion, the automatic affordance of participatory digital media is reflected in the process of media text creation, manipulation and access. On the basis of the task difficulty, the automation can be classified into low-level and high-level. The former involves the activation of simple algorithms and templates to manipulate digital data, while the latter requires a computer to become more intelligent in order to understand a certain level of meaning embedded in the user generated text.

3.3 A Double Logic of Micro Film as a “New” Medium

In accordance with Williams’ definition of medium, micro film is also a new medium in the digital context, which is parallel to computer games or Web sites. Because micro film is regarded as the product of participatory digital media, the characteristics of micro film as a medium are inevitably influenced by affordances of participatory digital media. In the following, I will explore what the defining characteristics of micro film as a “new” medium are and how participatory digital media specific features impact the shape of these characteristics.

3.3.1 Individuality

The influence of digital media in human affairs constantly associates with the concept “personalization” and “participation” (Langlois et al., 2009: 7; Jenkins, 2006b: 574; Caldwell, 2011: 284). In 2005, Tim O’Reilly proposed the concept of Web 2.0 to describe the contemporary state of the World Wide Web, which is considered more interactive and democratic when compared with Web 1.0 (O’Reilly, 2005). Namely, Web 2.0 can be considered the clearest manifestation of the current state of participatory digital media, ranging from “social media, online video publishing and sharing, user-generated content, blogging, social networking and collaborative platforms like wikis” (Langlois et al., 2009: 2). According to Manovich, the logic of participatory digital media follows the logic of “individual customization” (Manovich, 2001: 51). In essence, the participatory digital media system still follows the factory logic of Henry Ford’s first assembly line which emphasizes division. However, instead of pursuing mass standardization which is the core of factory logic, participatory digital media highly values individuality (ibid.). That is, the logic of participatory digital media corresponds to the post-industrial society where “every citizen can construct their own custom lifestyle and ‘select’ her ideology from a large (but not infinite) number of choices” (ibid.: 60). In this sense, the label “individuality”

of participatory digital media logic is actually achieved by inviting users' active participation. Moreover, American philosopher Stanley Cavell states that "major films are those in which the medium is most richly or deeply revealed" (Cavell, 1982: 77). Following this logic, as the product of participatory digital media, a successful paradigm of micro film should be able to make full use of the features of participatory digital media, in order to reveal it a form of participatory digital media. Therefore, I argue that micro film is supposed to fit the same logic which values individuality over conformity by involving spectators to become users in that they are actively involved in the consumption and creation of micro film. To put it more specifically, the individuality of micro film is mainly reflected in two aspects.

Firstly, the viewing experience of micro film is highly personalized. In other words, micro film spectators are active consumers in the micro film industry. After the process of digitalization, media texts are all converted into discrete data assigned with a numerical value. It is widely acknowledged that digital data can be compressed into extremely small spaces (Lister et al., 2009: 18). Thus, innumerable data files can be stored and then constitute an enormous database. In terms of micro film, which is made by digital tools, and which operates exclusively on online platforms, it is stored as digital data virtually. Hence, I argue that thanks to the digital affordance of participatory digital media, an enormous amount of online micro film is possible. In other words, the digital affordance of participatory digital media lays the technical foundation for the possibility that micro film spectators are offered plenty of micro films with which to make personal choices according to their interests and tastes. Furthermore, because the data of micro film are actually stored in (or at least accessible by) a database and accessible for users, there is no fixed schedule and location needed for the playing (consumption) of a micro film. Thus, watching micro film is considered a private and self-directed practice for spectators when compared with watching television programs or films in a traditional sense (Chen, 2012: 35). As long as there is an access to the Internet, micro film can be watched anytime and anywhere (Sun, 2012: 122). Simultaneously, spectators are able to skip, pause or replay the chronological lapse of time when they watch a micro film. Furthermore, the hypertextual affordance of participatory digital media allows spectators to connect different micro films within the database by hyperlinks to construct their own path with which they navigate the abundance of micro film. In this regard, the connection between individual micro films is also determined by spectators.

Additionally, in the digital industry more and more products are being explicitly designed to be customized by users (Manovich, 2009: 323). Producers no longer focus on mass production, but the "production of small batches for carefully targeted groups"

(Taylor, 2001: 19). They start to provide customized service to their targeted customers in order to respond to the “shifting industry economy introduced by audience fragmentation” (Lotz, 2007: 128). Hence, I argue that the personalized viewing experience also can be enhanced by the individualized services that are offered by participatory digital media, especially by Web 2.0 sites. As argued in 3.2.4, the automatic affordance of participatory digital media provides a personal service of Web recommendation to users. That is, micro film spectators, who are the registered members of a particular micro film website, such as vmovier.com, will have individual access to a database where all the data are generated by their previous browsing actions. Through the analysis of this individual database, spectators can receive a range of personalized recommendations about other micro films from which to make a choice every time. Moreover, some micro film producers even attempt to make an individualized micro film by exploring the possibility of interactive plots (Chen, 2011: 61). More precisely, all digital data actually possesses an independent status. Therefore, manipulating only part of new media texts without having to deal with the whole is possible, which is contrast to the practice of changing or editing the piece of analog media (Lister et al., 2009: 19). In addition to the interactive affordance of participatory digital media, inviting spectators to engage into the micro film narrative is experimental. For example, the micro film *First Love* (2012) tells a love story between a successful businessman and his first girlfriend. The famous South Korean actor Min-ho Lee is the star. This micro film invites spectators to submit their names and photos online first. Afterwards, spectators’ names and photos will be added into certain scenes automatically. When the micro film is played, spectators become Min-ho Lee’s girlfriend and see their images shown in the plot. In other words, *First Love* becomes a totally personalized micro film which tells a love story between Min-ho Lee and spectators.

Secondly, the process of circulation and production of micro film is highly participatory. That is, due to the interactive affordance of participatory digital media, spectators in a traditional sense can be the primary workforce behind micro film distribution. Web 2.0 sites allow spectators to comment or rate a micro film online, and spectators’ contributions are generally listed around the video of micro film, which means that other spectators can read them immediately (Chen, 2011: 96; Li, 2012: 64; Sun, 2012: 122). In this sense, spectators’ individual comments and ratings constitute the review of a micro film, which can influence the popularity and ultimately the eventual distribution of the micro film. Moreover, the hypertextual affordance of participatory digital media facilitates the construction of the different Web platforms connection by hyperlinks. In this context, the migration of participatory digital media content from one platform to others becomes possible.

Hence, spectators are encouraged to share their favorite micro films to other Web 2.0 sites of which spectators are also registered members. Thanks to the sharing practice from spectators, a micro film can in fact spread virally.

In addition, spectators can participate further in the production of micro film. Dating from 2005, inexpensive recording devices, editing software and free Web platforms facilitate the boom of the placement of amateur videos online (Manovich, 2009: 319; Gerlach, 2014: 29; Jenkins, 2006b: 555). Micro film develops in this context which indicates that spectators become the laborers for the creation of micro film. In the modern sense, they are “prosumers” – the denotation of how users hover between producers versus consumers and professional versus consumer (van Dijck, 2009: 42; Valtysson, 2010: 205). Generally, micro film footage is recorded by a series of devices, which range from HD video cameras to low definition mobile phone cameras. Nevertheless, no matter which recording devices are used, most footage is manipulated by editing software applications on computers before being placed online and distributed. As discussed in 3.2.1, the digital affordance of participatory digital media indicates that algorithms that are applied by software determine all operations within participatory digital media. In other words, software is dominant within the participatory digital media environment, which results in the booming of the competitive software industry (Manovich, 2013: 32). In this context, a wide range of user-friendly software applications are designed which are consequently marketed to large numbers of users (Valtysson, 2010: 205; Punt, 2000: 64). Therefore, with the choice among several easily-operated and inexpensive editing software, making micro film becomes simple and cheap, which facilitates the mass participation in the practice of micro film production. It indicates the fact that making micro film is no longer the privilege of professional artists, while everybody has an opportunity to make their individual micro film about self-expression (Yang, 2012: 21; Zhang, 2012: 107). Notably, various participatory digital media platforms associated with Web 2.0 provide an important showcase for prosumers to circulate their productions, alongside with videos made by professionals, to a global audience (Gerlach, 2014: 29). In other words, the micro films that are made by prosumers are able to be exhibited into public space and these micro films accompany those made by professionals to constitute the entire of the micro film industry. Therefore, the sense of individuality is generated when spectators become prosumers and when they are able to watch their own works online.

3.3.2 Collectivity

Even though I note the significant feature of individuality for micro film in 3.3.1, this is only one perspective on the characteristics of micro film. The digital revolution

creates an open world to stress the collective outcomes of Internet users (Gillespie, 2010: 353). Thus, the previous individually intellectual property shifts to “shareware”, something that is made meaningful by encouraging audience engagement (such as sharing) and new input (Jenkins, 2006b: 557). In this context, micro film values collectivity at the other end of its characteristics. I argue that the logic of collectivity reflects also in the process of micro film consumption and creation.

Katarina Vuković writes that both the Internet and the World Wide Web are essentially “global hypertextual systems, a continuation of spatial organization and the global structure of lexias and (now external) links” (Vuković, 2008). She indicates that the hypertextual affordance of participatory digital media establishes the possibility of connection between different participatory digital media objects via hyperlinks worldwide. In other words, the hypertextual affordance suggests a distributed and flattened network paradigm of the current media landscape (*ibid.*; Hui and Halpin, 2013: 104). Within this network, each computer (or each Internet user), even the previously isolated one, plays the role as a node to establish communication with other computers (or other Internet users), which is akin to a rhizome. Without an absolute center in the network and with the facilitation of the interactive affordance that permits the input from any node, the relation between nodes is like a conversation of which the nature is two-way (Manovich, 2009: 329). I argue that the network diagram is in fact the context of the other logic of participatory digital media that stresses collectivity.

Actually, in the 1990s, the Web was mostly a publishing medium which allowed global Internet users to access content produced by a number of professional producers (of course an extremely small number of non-professional users also produced online content at that time). Since the 2000s, the Web has become a communication medium serving communication between users in various forms (Manovich, 2009: 320).²⁸ In this context, a “virtual community” (Jenkins, 2006b: 556) is established around both real-world social relations or shared interests of users. To put it specifically, on the one hand, users are able to transport their real-world connection online to construct a place for virtual social networking. On the other hand, users also build social ties online without the necessity of real-world connections. Once the social network in both cases is established, Internet users can circulate and share particular media contents (such as films, music, and novels) within and beyond their own communities. Therefore, because the micro film is allowed to be shared to spectators’ social networking sites and can be seen by other users who belong to the

²⁸ Lev Manovich states that the online communication between Internet users includes “conversation around user-generated content, take place through a variety of forms besides emails: posts, comments, reviews, ratings, gestures and tokens, votes, links, badges, photos, and videos” (2009: 320).

spectator's online community, the consumption of micro film is a networked practice. However, it is notable that the networked consumption of micro film is unnecessarily built on the spectators' personally virtual communities which have been established; instead, spectators can consume a micro film collectively in a casual and temporary relation. Again, the quantity of available micro film online is huge. It is very common that any one micro film is invisible to most spectators. Nevertheless, on popular micro film websites, such as vmovier.com and Kankan.com, there is a list of currently popular micro films, and these ratings are based on the number of comments and likes, times shared and user ratings. At the same time, spectators are able to use the comments and ratings made by previous spectators on a micro film as a reference to determine whether or not to watch it. In these cases, micro film is actually consumed collectively by spectators who actually have no stable and fixed relations with each other but who have the potential to influence others' consuming activities. Hence, I argue that it is a collective contribution to ensure the visibility of a micro film.

Furthermore, in the perspective of Gerlitz and Helmond, participatory digital media has transformed into social media and the social Web, which is defined by "the participatory and collaborative production of content, its cross-syndication and the relations created between users and multiple Web objects" (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013: 4). The social structure created by participatory digital media shifts to the collective intelligence. Thus, in terms of the production of micro film, there is a trend that producers in a traditional sense cannot solely complete the creation of micro film. That is, the process of micro film creation tends to be cooperative. The interactive plot of a micro film can provide a strong sense of individuality to spectators. Simultaneously, it also suggests that the micro film with interactive plot is actually made with the cooperation from spectators. Without the engagement of spectators, such interactive micro film is not complete. Similar to the interactive affordance of participatory digital media, spectators' freedom to participate in the plot of micro film in this case is limited. The narrative of the micro film has already been set by the producers. That is, spectators are merely entitled to the autonomy within a range of pre-set selections. Hence, even though the spectators of *Exclusive* (2012) are able to determine that how the story is going, they have to make their decision from 2 plot structures and 5 endings which have already been set by producers in advance. Or despite the fact that spectators can watch their "own" love story with Min-Ho Lee in *First Love* (2012), all the stories essentially have the same narrative. Nevertheless, some micro films attempt to provide more freedom to spectators. Namely, producers collaborate with Internet users to make micro film. In 2011, Buick and Sina organized a competition of micro film scripts for weibo (namely, Chinese Twitter) users. The award-winning scripts will be made into micro film and be circulated online.

Additionally, the micro film *The Era of Streaking* (2013) represents another kind of collaboration. Producers made this micro film in the form of serialization and every component was 5 minutes long. They set the background of the story in the first micro film. Afterwards, Internet users were invited to contribute scripts about how the story would continue. Then, producers would choose one script to make it into the second micro film. The script provider would get a monetary reward and be offered a role to play in the micro film. Following the same process, the story continued by involving more and more Internet users who were simultaneously spectators into the creation of *The Era of Streaking*.

3.3.3 Summary

Participatory digital media facilitates the realization of “the utopia of an ideal society composed from unique individuals” (Manovich, 2001: 61). This argument reflects what I mean about the notion of the double logic of the characteristics of micro film as a “new” medium in relation to participatory digital media.

It is very important to note that the feature of collectivity does not deny the feature of individuality. Rather, they co-exist alongside each other. In the current media environment, the logic of participatory digital media values neither individuality nor collectivity; instead, it stresses both individuality and collectivity. Yuk Hui and Harry Halpin propose that digital social networking is actually “a technology for collective individuation” (Hui and Halpin, 2013: 112). The individuality and customization of media content production and consumption have been an inevitable trend to respond to audience fragmentation. At the same time, the facilities of online communication promotes the generation of a wide range of virtual communities based on the social ties in reality, on a shared interest or on a collective project. This is the double logic of participatory digital media, which indicates that the virtual association of the Internet users is close despite their geographical dispersion, and that users are able to contribute further to the consumption, distribution and production of participatory digital media content.

Likewise, micro film as a “new” medium has a featured of collective individuality which is influenced by the specific features of participatory digital media, or of Web 2.0 and personal computers specifically. That is, as the product of participatory digital media, micro film follows the double logic in its consumption, circulation and production as well. On the one hand, micro film possesses the feature of individuality. It follows the logic of participatory digital media that values personalization and customization. Micro film assures spectators that they are liberated from the previous standard and passive mode of content consumption.

Rather, spectators are able to consume only content which they personally select; the services provided by both micro film websites and by micro film itself are tailored to cater to their unique preference. Moreover, spectators become a crucial element in the circulation and the creation of micro film. Their practices of sharing and commenting are not insignificant, but exert a huge influence in determining the popularity and distribution of a micro film. Meanwhile, spectators are entitled to the rights to make their own micro film in a low cost and easy way. Besides, their micro film is able to be distributed online and is considered as an authentic micro film, sharing the equal status with other professional-made micro film.

On the other hand, micro film is a collective product. The status quo of the circulation of a micro film generally relies on spectators' collective efforts. Spectators' practices of commenting, rating and sharing can determine the popularity and exert an influence on the visibility of a micro film. Furthermore, it is no longer true that the creation of a micro film is merely the task for producers while spectators are only responsible for watching. Rather, making a micro film has become a collective work, which demands the collaboration between producers and spectators.

3.4 Problems in the Development of Micro Film

So far, micro film has developed for three years since it was formally proposed. However, accompanying the development, a series of problems was exposed, which also raised academic concerns. A journalist from China Shaanxi Broadcasting Corporation, Kun Che, declares that the development of micro film is rapid and presents a hybrid tendency. Nevertheless, such development results in a difficulty to understand micro film accurately and hence, there is a lack of formal regulation to guide micro film to develop further in a positive way (Che, 2012: 60). Likewise, Xiaomeng Chen states that micro film as an art genre is immature. Due to the low barrier of entry for the micro film industry, there is no guarantee for the quality of micro film, which is negative for the further development of micro film (Chen, 2012: 35). Moreover, according to my research on micro film websites, I uncover a phenomenon that some "micro films" on the websites are actually short films which participate in the short film festivals rather than the micro film festivals. For example, *Cargo* (2013), which was one of the finalists in the 2013 Tropfest Short Film Festival Australia, is distributed on micro film websites, such as 197c.com, with the label micro film. This phenomenon suggests the chaos in the micro film industry. Rather than attributing aforementioned problems to the immature development of micro film, I argue that the current way to define micro film is problematic, which is the root for the negative influence on the development of micro film. Zhijun Meng states that

micro film should possess unique features which can be used to distinguish micro film from traditional films and from online videos (Meng, 2011: 99). In this regard, I argue that the main problem of the current way to define micro film is that it does not reflect the distinct characteristics of micro film. Thus, the public understanding of micro film is ambiguous, which will be the most dominant barrier for the positive development of micro film in the future.

Primarily, I will review the most referenced definition of micro film in the Chinese academia today.²⁹

Micro film refers to the short video which is merely played on different new media platforms. It is suitable to be viewed in the moving condition during the leisure time. Micro film contains a complete story line, from beginning to finish, and has a full planning and production cycle, from scripts writing to post-production works. In general, its running time is between 30 and 3000 seconds and it is made within several weeks with a small-scale investment. The theme of micro film is various, ranging from egao and fashion to education and commercialization. A micro film can be presented in a single form or in series.
(translated by the author)

In general, most defining characteristics of micro film are reflected in this lengthy definition. Firstly, it points out the overwhelming characteristics “micro” of micro film in terms of running time, making time and investment. Thus, micro film is limited as a less time-consuming but more economical audio-visual art which is in the short form. Secondly, the definition stresses that micro film must tell a complete story and that must have a full production cycle. The second feature can be used to distinguish micro film from other short online videos, such as home videos, videoblogging (or “vlogging”), vidding and so forth. The latter forms are considered as either having no complete story line or rarely being edited and polished, not mention a full production system (Boylor, 2009: 224; Coppa, 2011: 123). Thirdly, “new media”, especially Web 2.0 sites, are the only platform for the circulation of micro film and therefore, micro film can be watched when spectators are on the move. Weifeng He deems that this is the core difference between micro film and short film (He, 2012). However, I argue that using the circulation platform as the standard to distinguish micro film is problematic. There is a risk that some short films are distributed online because they are unable to be circulated by other means for some unknown reasons. For these short films, the Internet is also the only platform for distribution. Hence, merely using different “new media” platforms for circulation is not unique to micro

²⁹ Nearly all the literatures I read about micro film use this definition but no literature points out the origin of this definition. In addition, what makes me surprised is that no literature that I have read so far criticizes this definition.

film and is not sufficient to differentiate micro film and short film. What is more, the fourth feature of micro film included in the definition is also not distinct since diverse themes and different presentational forms are also reflected in the short film and other online videos (see Copper and Dancyger, 2005; Voci, 2006; Nakajima, 2014). Therefore, this definition is not sufficient to define micro film in the Chinese cyber culture.

In the previous section of this chapter, I mention that microfilm is the product of participatory digital media since Web 2.0 sites are the only platform for the micro film distribution and because personal computers are the tool for users to edit micro film. In short, the influence of participatory digital media has permeated into every part of the production cycle of micro film. I argue that the intimate relationship with participatory digital media is where the distinct characteristic of micro film comes from. Hence, making full use of the specifics of participatory digital media is beneficial for micro film to develop “its unique properties in order to differentiate from traditional films and other online videos” (Meng, 2011: 99). I argue that the double logic of micro film as a “new” medium in the digital context is the clearest manifestation of how the specifics of participatory digital media contribute to the development of micro film defining features. In the double logic of micro film as a medium, I deem that two concepts are the most dominant: the interactive plot and the collaboration with spectators in the micro film production. Obviously, if short films are distributed online, Web platforms also allow spectators to comment, share, rate, construct individual watching patterns and so on. At the same time, with the facilitation of user-friendly editing software running on personal computers, it is also possible for amateurs to make a short film and upload it online. Nevertheless, the interactive plot and the collaboration with spectators in the film production cannot be achieved by short film since short film generally does not design for participatory digital media. That is, the producers of short film do not take the specific features of participatory digital media into consideration when they compose and finally make a short film. Therefore, I argue that the definition of micro film should include one more sentence that *micro film is required either to have an interactive plot by inviting spectators to participate into the narrative, or to be made by collaborating with spectators such as in selecting scripts, voting on performers and so forth.*

By involving an interactive plot or the collaboration with spectators in the creation process, the definition of micro film is more specific and highlights the argument that micro film is the product of participatory digital media. This new definition is beneficial for the development of micro film as a hybrid between an audio-visual art genre and a new medium in the digital context. Using this new way to

define micro film can avoid the dilemma that people cannot distinguish micro film from online short films. Then, it can efficiently prevent the phenomenon that the short films or cinematic videos, which are played online merely because of the lack of other ways to circulate, are labeled as micro film. That is, producers will be conscious that they are making micro film which has its unique characteristics and distinct standards. Moreover, the new definition suggests that the further development of micro film is required not only to focus on how to tell a story well, but also to stress the innovation of the creation of micro film. Producers are demanded to take the digital, interactive, hypertextual and automatic affordances of participatory digital media into consideration to develop new modes of interactive plot and new ways to collaborate with spectators in the creation of micro film.

Conclusion

In general, micro film is not only a new audio-visual art genre as what have already been recognized by Chinese researchers. Actually, micro film is also a new medium in the digital context. The finding that micro film is a hybrid between a genre and a medium in the Chinese cyber culture is the most important contribution of this thesis. Additionally, all the arguments of this thesis elaborate on the basis of this finding. Since micro film is new in the Chinese cyber culture, the research on it is very current and premature. The most obvious case is that the way to define micro film is still in debate. I argue that there are two main reasons for this debate. In the first place, the development of technologies blurs the distinction between two art forms, film and video. Thus, the debate on whether micro film is film or video is continuing. In the second place, the hybridity of micro film itself is the other reason for the difficulty to define micro film. In this context, the focus of this thesis is on the fundamental research, which contributes to an appropriate and accurate understanding of micro film.

The research on micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium in this thesis is conducted mainly from three perspectives. The first perspective stresses the issue on the art form which micro film belongs to. Actually, the issue of art form is the most frequent debate around the definition of micro film. Art is considered to share an intimate relationship with the development of media (Meng, 2011: 100). Thus, the development of technologies, especially the invention of high-definition digital videos, makes the previous rigid distinction between the art form of film and video, which was on the basis of material difference, become blurred. In other words, seeking a new approach, which is beyond the material difference, to differentiate film and video is key to make a convincing argument in the debate on whether micro film is film or video. As argued in the first chapter, the viewing position of spectators which is constructed by film and video for the ideal spectatorship is different. Hence, by analyzing the mode of ideal spectatorship of film, video and micro film, respectively, I argue that micro film is essentially a new type of video art. Rather than requiring a centralized attentiveness from spectators and shaping an image of spectators as a voyeur, micro film provides a multiple sensational experience for its spectators and encourages spectators' active participation. In short, film demands spectators' gaze in order to enter into the spectacle created by the film; while, both video and micro film invite spectators' glance aiming at providing space for spectators to perform actively. Nevertheless, micro film is different from other types of video art because it follows some conventions of filmmaking. More precisely, the success of a micro film depends on whether the story in it is narrated well, instead of

seeking sophisticated visual effects. In this sense, micro film is a type of cinematic video that demands a narrative with a complete plot.

As mentioned above, the second reason which contributes to the debate on the definition of micro film is the hybridity of micro film. In order to understand the hybrid feature, it is better to track the history of micro film. Correspondingly, the second perspective to study micro film in this thesis is a historical perspective. The current research on the history of micro film as an art genre is conducted in a chronological approach. Namely, researchers follow the single and linear historical logic to track the history of micro film. However, such historical logic is easily criticized as neglecting differences and complicated connections between micro film and other relevant cultural forms, which does not contribute to understanding the hybridity of micro film. Thus, in the second chapter, the genealogical history of micro film as a genre is tracked, which focuses on historical affiliations and resonances of micro film. The study of the genealogy of micro film indicates that the development of micro film mainly remediates short film, amateur video of *egao* and advertisement. To put it specifically, micro film is very similar to short film, in the first place. The dominant feature of both short film and micro film is condensed classical narrative. They are required to tell a full story well within a very limited time. Furthermore, due to the low cost, micro film presents the potential to replace short film as an entry for new talent to enter into the career of making full-length feature films. In the second place, micro film remediates amateur video of *egao*. The rise of spoof videos triggers the interest of ordinary people to comically present their views and achieve irony by making such videos. Being deeply influenced by the spirit of *egao*, micro film absorbs a comical way of individual and emotional expression. However, because of the fact that most spoof videos actually appropriate footage from commercial films or from mainstream media directly, spoof videos are always vulnerable in relation to the issue of copyright. Learning from the early copyright disputes of spoof videos, the principle of micro film is originality, namely, there is no piracy or appropriation of footage from other works. In the third place, micro film presents a strong commercial tendency because of the involvement of advertisers and financial enterprises (Qiu, 2013: 34). Today, more and more advertisers engage in developing micro film as a new mode of advertising. In Li Sun and Yigui Qian's words, such a kind of micro film is essentially an integration of film into advertisement, that is, the plot of the micro film as advertisement is required to be designed to serve the product or brand (Sun and Qian, 2012: 99). Indeed, the commercialization of micro film can improve the overall quality of micro film. Nevertheless, it also brings about a challenge - how to balance the artistry and commercialization for the future development of micro film.

The third perspective of this thesis emphasizes the characteristics of micro film as a medium in relation to the specifics of participatory digital media that is with the Web 2.0 sites as the clearest manifestation. Micro film is regarded as the product of “new media” by most researchers, because micro film cannot exist without “new media” in terms of creation, consumption and circulation. Meanwhile, as the product of “new media”, the characteristics of micro film are considered to be significantly influenced by the specific features of “new media”. However, researchers who propose such ideas leave two fundamental questions unanswered. That is, what are “new media” and what exactly are the characteristics of “new media”? Thus, in the first place, “new media” are defined both as an intermediate agency which is digital and as a social practice that reflects the active role played by the “new media” users, such as the World Wide Web. However, since the term new media is very broad, I suggest using “participatory digital media” to replace “new media”. It is notable that the digital revolution is the driving force for the rise and development of participatory digital media. In other words, the digital revolution brings about a series of changes at an instrumental level, which are represented as the defining characteristics of participatory digital media. Nonetheless, the defining characteristics of participatory digital media do not equal the essential qualities; instead, they indicate the possibilities which participatory digital media invite users to perform. Hence, the term “affordance” is adopted to discuss the specific features of participatory digital media. In general, there are four affordances of participatory digital media: the digital affordance, the interactive affordance, the hypertextual affordance and the automatic affordance. Due to these four affordances, the characteristics of micro film as a medium are presented as a double logic in terms of creation, circulation and consumption, that is, collective individuality. On the one hand, micro film values individuality. By offering the opportunity for spectators to choose what to watch, how to watch and upload their own work online, micro film is highly personal. In addition, spectators can receive the customized recommendation of micro film, basing on spectators’ references from the website where micro film is distributed and they are even in some cases invited to contribute to the narrative of the film text. On the other hand, micro film stresses collectivity. Such collectivity reflects mainly as the crucial role played by spectators. To put it specifically, spectators’ practices of commenting, sharing and rating facilitate the wide circulation of a micro film because these practices can determine the ultimate popularity of a micro film. Moreover, inviting spectators to become a part of the production process of micro film actually suggests that the creation of micro film should involve the collaboration between, in a traditional sense, producers and spectators. Therefore, the double logic of micro film

refers to that micro film is a collective cultural object which values individuality and customization.

Nevertheless, the micro film industry is currently in flux. The most common phenomenon is that public understandings of micro film are ambiguous; especially as there is difficulty in distinguishing micro film from online short film. Researchers like Xiaomeng Chen, attribute this problem to the immature development of micro film. However, I argue that the root of such problem lies in the current way micro film is defined. As a hybrid between a genre and a medium, micro film is required to possess distinct characteristics which are influenced by the specific features of participatory digital media. In other words, the current way to define micro film does not take the distinct characteristics of micro film into direct consideration. On the basis of my analysis of a double logic of micro film, I suggest that one more sentence should be added into the current definition of micro film. That is, *micro film is required either to have an interactive plot by inviting spectators to participate into the narrative, or to be made by collaborating with spectators such as in selecting scripts, voting on performers and so forth*. Indeed, this new definition of micro film will be criticized because most previously acknowledged micro films, even those which are regarded as pioneers in the micro film industry, will be excluded according to this new definition. However, I argue that only this new definition can entitle micro film to really being between a new art genre and a new medium with distinct characteristics, which is beneficial to differentiating micro film from other online video and online short film.

In general, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the fundamental research on micro film. In the first place, the three perspectives this thesis adopts are definitely new to the current discourse. Seldom have Chinese researchers studied micro film from these three perspectives. Secondly, the aim of this thesis is to seek the shortages of current fundamental research of micro film and find ways to cover them. Hence, all the arguments in this thesis improve the fundamental research in an appropriate manner. Last but not the least, the new definition of micro film proposed in this thesis is beneficial to a clear understanding of micro film as a hybrid between a genre and a medium. By adopting the new definition, the differentiation between micro film and other online audio-visual art is more obvious, which exerts a positive influence on the future development and regulation of the micro film industry.

Notably, there exists another important perspective of micro film research, which is in relation to the mobile culture. As argued in chapter one, micro film possesses three levels of mobility: moving images, physical movement of spectators and online navigation of spectators. Due to the limited space of the research in this thesis, I cannot investigate micro film from every perspective. In this sense, further research

on micro film can be conducted in relation to the mobile culture which is brought about by the development of mobile technologies.

Filmography

- 007 vs. Man in Black* (China, 2007) 9
- A commercial of Cadillac (Hong Kong China, 2010) 8, 42, 44
- A Murder Case Caused by a Mantou* (China, 2006) 8, 37-41
- A World without Thieves* (China, 2005) 43
- Annihilate the Gangsters on Niaolong Mountain* (China, 2006) 41
- Big Shot's Funeral* (China, 2001) 43
- Bus 44* (Hong Kong China and USA, 2001) 36
- Bus Uncle* (Hong Kong China 2006) 40
- Cargo* (Australia, 2013) 67
- Cell Phone* (China, 2004) 43
- Conquering Jun Mountain* (China, 1905) 35
- Courageous Love* (China, 2011) 10
- Crazy Dinner Party* (China, 2012) 41
- Exclusive* (Italy, 2012) 29, 65
- Father* (China, 2011) 10
- First Love* (Korea, 2012) 62, 65
- If 723* (China, 2011) 41
- Judith of Bethulia* (Italy, 1914) 34
- Love, in Sichuan* (China, 2012) 42
- Milind Soman Made Me Gay* (USA, 2007) 26
- Old Boy* (China, 2010) 9
- Sour Sweet Bitter Hot* (China, 2011, 2012 and 2013) 42
- Sorry Baby* (China, 1999) 43

The Big Girl (China, 2010) 37

The Divergent Road (Taiwan China, 2011) 10

The Empire of Spring Transportation (China, 2006) 9

The Era of Streaking (China, 2013) 65

The Evoque Effect (China, 2011) 42

The Promise (China, 2005) 8, 37-41

The Ring (Japan, 1998) 37

The Ultimate Winner (China, 2011) 10

Wall Street (USA, 1987) 42

Watching Football Game (China, 2011) 44

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