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Master's Thesis of Sociology

**The Survivalist Subjectivity of
90-Hou Self-entrepreneurs
in the Chinese Entertainment Industry**

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The Survivalist Subjectivity of 90-Hou Self-entrepreneurs in the Chinese Entertainment Industry

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Abstract

This research draws upon a qualitative investigation of Chinese 90-Hou (九零后, i.e. people who born from 1990 to 2000) broadcasting jockeys (BJ) who had contractual relations with live streaming agencies to analyze their labor practice and the regime of heart in the gamification system. The study answers the following questions: (1) what does 90-Hou's working as BJs consist of in the gamification created by streaming agency and platform; (2) how does the work of BJ shape 90-Hou's subjectivities in their labor practice; (3) how would 90-Hou BJs reconstruct their subjectivities for further development. Using the theory of youth survivalism as the conceptual framework, this study argues that 90-Hou BJs have illustrated a behavioral pattern of "affective labor". Through the interactions with the audiences, what BJs produced is not material production but emotion, affect, and a sense of connectivity, which requires them to mobilize, reflect, negotiate and reconstruct their subjectivities and heart. This research demonstrates that 90-Hou BJs by examining how they become affective survivalist for 'winning' in such survival game.

This study draws on qualitative data collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations. First, I conducted interviews with 12 BJs who had contractual relation with streaming agencies. Most interviewees were recruited from Tik Tok, a leading streaming platform in China, using the method of snowball sampling. Additionally, I interviewed 5 managers from streaming agencies to augment my understanding of the streaming industry. Second, I conducted ethnographic observations from March 2020 to August 2020, including 3 weeks of participant observations of my own experiences of working as a BJ and 6 months of non-participant observations on BJs' streaming practices on Tik Tok and their interactions with fans in the chatting rooms.

The results are presented in three sections. First, streaming agencies and the platform created a gamification system where the survival of BJs is determined by Da Shang(打赏, virtual gifts), which forces BJs to orient their behaviors towards the maximization of profits and audiences would control BJ by Da shang. Second, situated in the profit-oriented gamification system, BJs must instrumentalized their subjectivities, including their capacities of relationality and leisure, personal tastes, and gendered embodiment, to obtain more economic repays by producing pleasures for the audiences through affective interactions. But, the tension of intimacy and survivalist gamification system on the basis of the rule of Da Shang has led to these

young adults to quickly adopt the crucial logic of survivalism and self-exploitation. The finding shows that survival heart of young BJs in response to the oppression of intimacy and survival gamification with the desire for wealth and popularity, and they voluntarily returned to the constraint of the oppression. This caused BJs to feel powerless and exhausted in the unchangeable system. Third, the prospect of thriving in the rapidly growing Chinese live streaming industry provides them an illusion of hope on the bandwagon for obtaining more wealth as well as a positive sense of the future despite their current suffering (it is extremely necessary for the journey of becoming adults). BJs' self-account shows that being BJ is similar to operating an one-person enterprise in which they are the bosses of themselves, meaning that BJs need to utilize their social ties to obtain or transfer capital. But, being a BJ is a temporary work in their twenties, because the featured of 'having fun', 'connecting' can not help these youth to help them getting into middle class or contribute social reputation. Therefore, they would transfer into economic, social, and cultural capital by being a better BJ, which is for their future development.

In conclusion, the subjectivity of 90-Hou BJs have become a form of capital and a value of production. They mobilize their subjectivities to produce affective interactions as well as self-efficacies. Through profit-oriented interactions, BJs positively monetize virtual intimacy and spectacularize virtual statue to gain higher visibility and moneymaking potentials. In particular, the drastic development of the Chinese live streaming industry has contributed to their belief that youth must grasp current opportunities for survival speculation in class rigidity. Following the logic of survival, Chinese 90-Hou interpret their suffering in a positive way. That is, people must invest more for obtaining more resources. However, being a BJ is a temporary work, and these 90-Hou treat the work of BJ as a means to positively accumulate and transfer capital for self-exploration and future development.

Key Word: Broadcasting Jockeys, 90-Hou, subjectivity, affective labor, monetization, survivalism, gamification, self-entrepreneurship

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I . Introduction

1. Background

“Hello, everyone! It is Beijing time 10 PM. Welcome to my streaming room. If this is the first time that you came to my room, you could tap ‘following’ on the top of the screen to follow me. At first, let us has some warm-up music, OK?” (BJ Vincent, male, 26 years old)

“Welcome back... Oh, congratulate Huaer graded to level 5 of my fan club! Thanks for my family's support. If you can afford some gifts, please give me some encouragement, and if not, you could double-tap screen for helping me to increase popularity.” (BJ Fafang, female, 23 years old)

From morning to night, there are countless streaming rooms in various live streaming platforms where a group of Chinese young adults, broadcasting jockeys (BJ), sit in front of the camera and show themselves to strange audiences who might pay them by virtual gifts.

Live streaming is called “Zhi Bo (直播)” in Chinese, referring to the real-time record and transformation of video broadcast to audiences by the Internet. In China, the live streaming industry has experienced an explosive growth and has become the world’s largest and most competitive live streaming market (Chadha, 2016; Xiang, 2017) with over 100 platforms and 433.3 million users (covered 50.7% of Chinese internet users) in 2019. Especially, with the industrialization under the capital investment and support from the state, the work of BJ has transformed from a personal leisure into a general adoption of the market principle. In this sense, as the carrier of youth culture, the industry of live streaming has not only played a significant role in promoting the popular mass culture but also become a popular occupational choice for Chinese 90-Hou (90 后, the generation who were born from 1990-1999).

BJ is also called “streamer” and its Chinese is “Zhu Bo(主播)”, defined as people who stream games, music, outdoor sports, singing, dancing, talking shows, and other activities to audiences on streaming platforms. The work of BJs is characterized by three features. First, the labor of BJs is carried out on Internet platforms. Specifically, BJs produce virtual, real-time interactions with audiences using the means of video,

voice, and text. Second, the content of live streaming is diverse, including playing game, singing, chatting and dancing, and others. Third, BJs earn their income in the form of content monetization. Specifically, they receive virtual gifts from audiences and transfer these virtual gifts into real money, while the final amount they receive is shared by the platform and streaming agencies with the negotiated revenue-sharing proportion. Some BJs could receive hundreds of thousands of virtual gifts at one night, whereas some BJs persisted for one month but their income was still so negligible that they could barely make ends meet. Such work like ‘gold rush’ has attracted innumerable new BJs to join while many of the old BJs left at the same time.

According to the Tencent Questionnaire of 2017, Momo Streamer report of 2018, and Tik Tok Date Report of 2019, 90-Hou BJs constitute approximately 70% of the overall population of BJs, and there were 1.44 million BJs (the income was over ¥0) in seven live streaming platforms including Yingke, Huajiao, Yizhibo, Meipai, Momo, Apingtai, Kugou in 2019. The popularity of professional BJ resonates with Chinese industry transformation that has centered on servitization. Previous studies show that young workers are concentrated in sectors of typically key trends in contemporary labor of representative leisure services (Lucas 1997; Warhurst and Nickson 2007), and the high proportion of 90-Hou BJ reveals that Chinese youth are keeping pace with the transformation of contemporary labor in post-Fordism.

Compared to emotional labor which is mainly seen in traditional face-to-face services, affective labor like the work of BJ has a higher level of labor flexibility and individual autonomy which requires workers to invest personal capital and mobilizes subjectivities to produce exchange values and interaction rather than material commodities. Such labor is defined as affective labor by M. Hardt and A. Negri. In this context, the production of emotions, sensations, or embodied experiences constitutes the true ‘product’ of the work (Lazzarato 1996; Hardt and Negri 2004; Weeks 2007) while the subjectivities and identities of workers—emotional expression, desire, leisure, and tastes—are shaped in the process. Furthermore, envisioning the economic implications of the live streaming industry, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese state has encouraged youth to engage

with the new digital industry using a series of political support and even direct participation, which greatly contributed to the rising of BJ as a popular occupational choice among Chinese youth.

However, it is noteworthy that the marketization of live streaming in the Chinese context has led to a particular pattern of BJs' work. Since 2012, venturesome capitalists have recognized the potential of the productive value inhibited in the work of BJ as it offers opportunities for the production of virtual intimacy and consumption. Thus, a considerable amount of streaming agencies has emerged, leading to the industrialization and professionalization of BJs as well as the formulation of an industry chain including capitalized platforms, speculative advertisers, agencies, BJs, and consumers. Platforms cooperate with streaming agencies to intentionally increase the number of contractual BJs and to select, cultivate and promote talented BJs. As a result, the rapidly increase of corporatized BJs has constructed a fantastic scene in the Chinese society—BJs are evaluated, trained, supervised and managed, while affective interactions in streaming rooms become increasingly conflictual, provocative and competitive. Certainly, paid labor is the economic foundation of survival in a broad sense, yet the practice of labor itself (Farrugia, Threadgold & Coffey. 2018), which impacts emerging adulthood (Jeffrey·J·Arnet, 2014). The initial intention of live streaming—as providing people, especially youth, a space to connect—has been transferred and covered with the pursuit of profits. Though everyone could be a BJ, it does not mean that everyone could successfully survive the competition, and violating the mainstream of pursuit on career security, millions of corporatized BJs choose such “instable”, “inform” even “low-end” work in social discourse for earning a living.

Why would they like to do this work? It is fact that sociometric speculation is one of reasons, but are any other factors determining their choice? Previous research has studied the live streaming industry on a structural level, focusing on the broad array of questions such the virtual interactional process, watching motivations and payment motivations of audiences and copyright issues. However, it remains relatively obscure that how the BJs, most of them in their early adulthood, construct their habitus and

subjectivities when practicing affective labor. Growing up after the Deng Xiaoping era, the 90-Hou generations have developed a strong sense of self-centeredness and modern individualism. Practicing the affective labor in which workers must provide pleasure and satisfy for clients, how would they reflect themselves and negotiate with the external world? In what ways does this working pattern restrict 90-Hou BJs? While the issue of unemployment in China is well documented, we know little about the labor production of 90-Hou subjectivities. Answering these questions has important implications, and this study will provide insights for Chinese youth's exploration of alternative identities and labor practices.

This study is set out from a basic question—how does working as BJs affect Chinese 90-Hou's subjectivity in a capital market dominated by platforms and streaming agencies?' Specifically, the study asks: firstly, what does 90-Hou's working as BJs consist of? Secondly, how does the work restrict 90-Hou's subjectivities, especially in survival dispositif created by platform and agency? Thirdly, how would 90-Hou BJ reconstruct their subjectivity with their perception of the significance of survival and the future perspective? Based on these questions, I employed qualitative methods to explore the behavioral pattern and the regime of heart of professional BJs who were working in streaming agencies. And it suggests that affective production in Chinese live streaming released a particular pattern of neoliberalistic subjectivities with survival logic, and these young increasingly negotiate with reality and reflect their identity for further step.

2. Literature review

1) The research of affective labor

With the post-modern transformation of capitalism, many scholars have paid attention to the theory and application of affective labor in social practice, while Hardt and Negri (2000) suggested immaterial labor (affective labor is one of immaterial labor) have been changed other labors and even our society. I reviewed and summarized these researches of affective labor, which could be divided into three

types: 1. explanation and criticism about the theory of affective labor; 2. the discussion of the social value and practice; 3. labor exploitation in affective labor and its resistance.

Primarily, the conception of affective labor is defined by Maurizio Lazzarato in *Immaterial Labor* (1996), which is the labor that produces information and culture rather than material production, and then Hardt and Negri (2000) further suggested the core of the new economy in post-Fordism revolves around service, knowledge, information, communication, and emotion, which contributed to the development of affective labor. Subsequently, there have been lots of studies about the practice of affective labor, especially the discussion about feminism and the labor value of women in affective labor. Helem W. Kennedy (2018) found women players in the program of Game Jam would operate 'hope labor' in which they have positive perspectives of their communities and future so that women players always would like to afford extra work. Similarly, Raven (2016) focused on the black women who joined the reality show 'OWN' and documentary 'Light girl', where their affective production was freely used by the director teams for creating more audience ratings and emotional value. And Penn Tsz Ting (2017) analyzed the affective labor of women peasant-worker in the beauty industry of Shanghai. This revealed these women workers positively received physical and mental change for creating better service as well as creating new life way for these rural women, and especially in the beauty parlor industry, there is reciprocity with affective labor that includes the workers as well as the clients.

Meanwhile, affective labor is frequently related to youth such as clubs, fans economy, Internet games. Affective labor absorbs life taste and gender embodiment of youth for creating subjectivities, which provides interaction and connectivity between workers-clients (Dabid Farrugia & Steven Threadgold & Julia Coffey, 2018). And the rapid rise of fans economy contributes to affective labor—the consumption desire and loyalty of fans promote their affective labor for supporting their stars, which they exchanged labor for affective repay including devotion, spiritual consolation, and optimism. As Negri(1999) suggested, affection itself could be award

for workers, these workers try to give different values and meaning to their labor according to their affective experience. Paul Thompson, Stephen Cox, and Rachel Parker (2016) found job satisfaction of the workers in the game company contributed to reducing the collective resistance and negative experience of work conditions.

Furthermore, with the sharp rise of Internet society, the researches about affective labor have extended from offline to online. Lin Zhang and Anothony YH • Fung (2014) suggested the association of game players plays the role to mediate/negotiate the interaction between players and game companies, which contributed to capitalizing affective production and connection with market logic. Likely, Tai Zi-xue and Hu-Fengbin (2018) paid attention to ‘Gold Farmer (金农)’, the players of Internet games, conducts repetitive work such as beating monsters to attain more game gold. They sell higher-level game IDs or directly update the client’s ID. For gold farmers, ‘having fun’ by playing the game becomes affective labor for economic repay. And based on the analysis of the interaction of athletes and audiences, Nathan Kalman-Lamb (2019) illustrated the endeavor of athletes can stimulate the hope and dream of audiences, which contributed to creating connection and identity in the process of watching sports. Moreover, the development of affective labor has contributed to ‘social factory’— beyond the factory, labor exploitation extended into daily life—especially the intrinsic motivation and the mobilization of subjectivity are crucial in affective labor. Phoebe (2018) claimed that the neoliberal relation of labor caused individual value/pursuit/desire to become labor production, which caused alienation and abstraction of labor.

In conclusion, whilst the study of affective labor has been the incipient stage, which needs more discussion and academic reflection, there have been more and more researches about its theoretical meaning and practical value. Especially, the development of the Internet makes affective labor become the produce and reproduction of daily life as well as produce obscures boundary of workplace and family life (Liu Rufang, 2019) which was differentiated by Marx theory. Thus, there is the quest for more empirical research about affective labor to contributes to its development.

2) The study about professional BJs

Not only In China but also in the world, the study about live streaming and BJs has been developed with the rapid rise of live streaming industry. According to current studies in China, the significantly breathtaking expansion of academic interest in BJ is widely regarded in 2016, as follows, these two graphs show the statistics of relative reports, articles, and researches about “live streaming(网络直播)” of 2012-2019 and “internet BJ(网络主播)” of 2007-2019 in CNKI. Thus, I divided its literature review into ‘before 2016’ and ‘after 2016’ for a better understanding of the transformation of Chinese professional BJs.

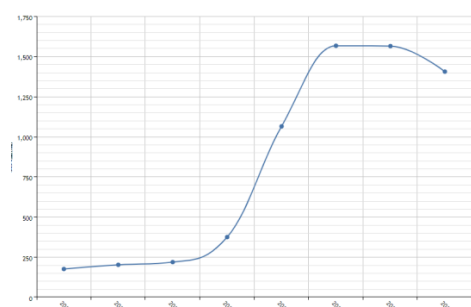


Table 1: The number of articles of live streaming in 2012-2019

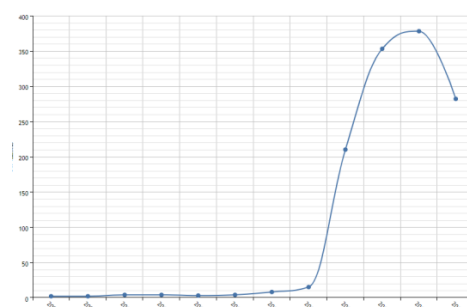


Table 2: The number of articles of internet BJ in 2007-2019

Before 2016, there were a few academic studies about BJ, while relative news and articles of commentators released negative discourse of BJs, especially money worship and deviant behavior of women BJs were dominantly criticized. At that time, good-looking female BJs took the use of vivid femininity to attract (male) consumers, and even some BJs deliberately exposed bodies and conducted pornographic performance to increase sensory stimulation for more virtual gifts. And the main pages of PC streaming have occupied lots of cover pictures that gave prominence to the body and fact of women BJs.

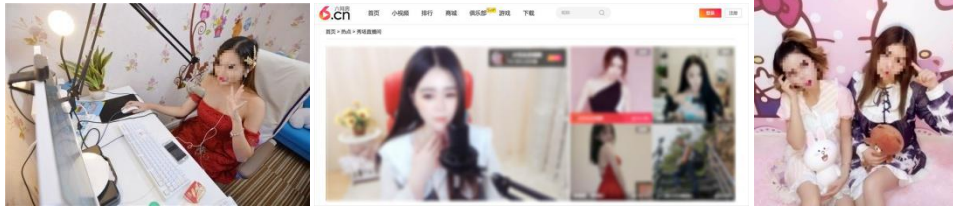


Image 1/2/3: The typical female BJ's style in the initial stage of live streaming

However, the popularity of E-sports streaming led to new researches about streaming platforms and BJs since 2015. Zhang Zhi-peng (2015) illustrated the development of game streaming platforms in China, and the platform itself had not only provided content but helped construct virtual connections between game BJs and audiences, which promoted production and consumption of content in this cyberspace. And the development potential of platforms and their business model (Lei Zuo-sheng, 2015) have been discussed with the expansion of Chinese live streaming. Despite that, negative stereotypes of show streaming and game addiction still caused that the social marginalization of young BJs. Besides, misconduct such as school bully, obscene performance, illegal gamble, even animal cruelty were directly exposed by live streaming, which resulted in the extremely negative BJ's discourse.

After 2016, the research of live streaming started to focus on the work of BJ, the interaction of BJ-audience, and the psychoanalysis of audiences. The interaction between BJ and audiences is the most frequent research theme. Dai Si-ming, Qu Tian-yao and Du Zi-cheng (2016) argued that live streaming provides a new possibility for Chinese atomized youth to seek a sense of belonging, as well as a new attempt to rebuild community in Chinese modernization. Zhou Bao-hua(2017) collected 2978 online questionnaires where he found singing streaming is the most popular in which its audiences are male-orientated, younger, and highly educated. Cai Kai-li(2017) found that the infrastructure setting of live streaming keeps conforming with modern habitus such as fragmentation, fast life space, consuming desire, and sensory stimuli. Also, Yu Fu-qiang and Hu Peng-hui(2018) claimed the participation of live streaming is a kind of consuming behavior of body and emotion, where the pursuit of emotional exit from real-world to had been attracting Chinese audiences.

Meanwhile, the public discourse of BJ has been gradually changed. In 2016, there was a survey about the employment attitude of 95-Hou (95 后, who are born in 1995-1999) from Tencent, which indicated that 54% of 95 Hou want to be BJ among those newborn occupations. Li Qi-meng and Huang Xue-bing(2017) suggested being BJ reveals the quest of young people, in "National Streaming Era(全民直播时代)", for self-identity and self-brand to independently create their cultural space. And the popular trend of being BJ drove the revolution of MCN (Multi-Channel Network) and streaming agency. With the advent of professional organizations, the contents of broadcasting started being more diversified, including games, makeup, fashion, mukbangs, cooking, studying, talking, and sports. Especially, shopping streaming had brought amazing economic prospects to live streaming industry since 2016 in which BJ takes the role of selling/marketing/advertising production (He Si-ting, 2017). The industrialization of live streaming has attracted more youth employment. According to 2018 Xiaohulu's White Paper, the number of new BJs on the entire Chinese platforms was 1.45 million in 2017, and this number rose to 2.17 million in 2018.

Then, the academic study on the group of BJs had been rising, and to be BJ has been accepted as a kind of job among Chinese public. According to iResearch's "The Marketing Report of China Live Streaming in 2018", platform users generally had a positive attitude towards being BJ. Similarly, 73.4% of users agreed being BJ is a professional job according to the survey about the Report of Professional BJ in 2018. Lian Si and Tang Pan-fei(2018) investigated youth BJs in Beijing, and they indicated live streaming provides an opportunity to young BJs for profit-pursuit and exploring new careers. Likewise, Cai Long-qian(2018) claimed new BJs have to experience emotional adaptation, control, and management to evoke emotional compensation from audiences, which emotion could produce economic benefits. Hu Peng-hui and Yu Fu-qiang (2019) took a quantitative method to explore the relation between display rules, performance strategy, interactive frequency, gender, and so forth in the emotional labor of BJ. And they found the alienation of BJ subjectivity is not an inevitable result, instead, it might lead to self-achievement and self-efficacy. And Zhou Hu-yong, Li Bo and Yi Ming-xue (2020) focused on intensified labor disputes

between BJ, platform, and agency, which cause the impairment of BJ's labor rights. The paper of Wang Wei (2020) adopted the theories of emotional labor and stigma, it explained how BJs overcome shame through economic desire and emotional involvement.

Besides Chinese researches, there have been a lot of related studies in other countries, and live streaming is also typically popular in South Korea, especially Mukbang (eating streaming). Mukbang BJs calmly and deliciously eat the food of unusually large amounts and high calories in the front of the camera, while they are asked to keep slim bodies. In such a dilemma, they conform to the oppression of the body and appetite with the pursuit of profit and reputation, which has caused dualistic suppression on these youth (Moon Young-eun, Shim Ji-soo, Park Dong-sook, 2017). Also, Lee Donghoo and Lee Seulhi (2017) interviewed the Best BJs of AfreecaTV (the most famous platform of live streaming in Korea) for exploring their labor process, and found that the perception of AfreecaTV and imaginary affordances make this labor more cognitive, communicative, and connective, while "balloon" (the virtual gifts in AfreecaTV) is the impetus of BJ's labor value. And Lee Sejin(2018) compared the content of personal broadcastings in China and Korea. Moreover, Jamie Woodcock and Mark R. Johnson (2019) explored the immaterial labor of Twitch. tv through the ethnographic research of game streamers in the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and Poland. In their study, BJs' broadcasting was examined as "character" where the content of playing becomes work in which BJs need to improve, optimize, and convince their performance. Johnson. Mark R (2019) examined the experience of broadcasters with disabilities, mental health issues, or physical health issues, and concluded live streaming could be seen as a potentially emancipatory and entrepreneurial space for this group.

In summary, with the rapid rise of live streaming in the entire world, plenty of scholars have explored this new social phenomenon, including economy, management, law, communication, and media studies. However, there are still a few pieces of research based on sociology and the absence of observing practical experience and meaning construction on the view of 90-Hou BJs. It is no doubt that

many young BJs started broadcasting due to loneliness, economic pursuit, and leisure, but the labor of Chinese BJ reveals a special pattern with Chinese marketization. Thus, this study is based on the affective labor of Chinese BJs and tends to analyze the culture, heart construct and practice of 90-Hou in the wave of capitalization and commercialization.

3. Theoretical frameworks

1) Youth survivalism

The ‘*survival anxiety*’ is a crucially modern heart-set of 90-Hou in recent years, especially since the market economy and neoliberalism have strengthened the competitive environment. Although there is no specific theory about youth survivalism in the Chinese context, the eventualization and problematization of their survival dilemma have been predominant in current researches. Here, I applied the theory of youth survivalism and then discuss its application in the Chinese context.

Survivalism means the transformation of animality and snobbery in modern society, that is, the *deceptive relation of self-instrumentalization* is more dominant rather than authentic relation of the inner self (Kim Hong-joong, 2015). The conception of survival originated from the sports field and it has been used in other scenes since the second half of the 20th century. In the imaginary frame of survival, the fundamental modality of the social relationship becomes an *arena* that is constructed through the performance of the differentiated stratification and social power logic (Kim Hong-jung, 2015). With the imaged existence of winning or losing, the social agent makes use of all the resources for attaining winning, which is exactly survivalism (Kim Hong-jung, 2014). And there are 5 new meanings of survivalism: 1. the conception of survival is not saving one’s life in risk or disaster, instead, it means “*do not be eliminated*” or “*fall behind*” in the competition. And such survival competition is embedded into all aspects of life and life process; 2. Survival is toward a further step *for the future* rather than the current victory. As Bowman indicated, in post-modernity, everything is liquid and nothing is stable, and survival is also an

eternal extension. Current survivors perhaps enter into the next survival game without any interval; 3. The self-government that individuals have to take all of the current resources to transfer into other capital is extremely necessary. Not only economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, but emotion, hope, resilience, mindfulness, imagination, creation could be transferred as capital, which one should exploit the maximum of all potential capacity; 4. Survival has not been an extremely outstanding success, instead, it means mediocre stability; 5. Survivalism connects authenticity and functionalization. The differentiation(self-achievement/identity) and normalization (socialization) are unified with survival pursuit.

In survivalism, the conception of dispositif is defined as the technique that contributes to obtaining, transferring, and accumulating more survival capacity. Foucault indicated dispositif on the relationship of discourse, but this conception could be extended to daily life. Agamven (2010) explained that dispositif originates from the crossing of power relations and knowledge relations in which are both heterogeneous assembly and network of the elements, and it is embedded into power with specific strategic function, including discourse, institutions, laws, philosophical propositions, etc. Also, the trap of authenticity causes the authentic pursuit of survival to be transferred into social conform (Spicer, 2011).

In this sense, it is predominant that youth survivalism could be applied to 90-Hou. For Chinese 90-Hou, the reform of Chinese market economy has brought drastic development to Chinese as well as caused class differentiation in the social structure. With the recognition of the transformation of a competitive society, parents of 90-Hou started to invest more for their only child, especially in middle-class families, which contributed to competition among 90-Hou in reverse. From kindergarten to employment, the stress of grades, scholarship, entrance exams, resume management, employment, promotion, marriage, and housing contributes them to struggle in case of being eliminated. And, the expansion of university enrollment extremely caused the devaluation of diplomas as well as the break of the relation of school-work. Unemployment and low income further intensify the survival dilemma. Despite they got into labor market, the pursuit of max efficiency and profit under market logic has

caused overwork, promotion race, and labor exploitation. And the employment of “iron rice bowl” (铁饭碗, e.g. civil servant, teacher and work in the state-owned enterprise in the generation of 90-Hou’s parents)” is not only difficult but also become an extremely competitive system. Hence, class solidification contributed 90-Hou to recognizing the unchangeable system. In such problematization, 90-Hou feel powerless in the negotiation with reality. These Chinese youth claim they are “Sang(丧, giving up struggle with difficulty)” and “Fo Xi(佛系, decreasing desire for keeping calm mind)” for reconstructing their heart.

Nonetheless, 90-Hou have positive expectations and confidence in the national future, which is resulted from 90-Hou have experienced the rapid rise of Chinese economy and social change. And, consumerism and entertainmenism with fast modernization contribute these young to having more desire, which causes impatience, testiness, and fickleness mentality (Zhu Hui-xie, Wang Meng-yi, 2018). 90-Hou have no pursuit of being political heroical figures like their parent generation and who they appreciate are the successive entrepreneur and entertainment star. This is also one of the reasons why so many youth are enthusiastic about, that is, following the hot major, hot field, hot investment without deep understanding and professional analysis. However, 90-Hou who obtained modern education than their parent generation have the stronger capacity of independent, rational, and critical reflection, which creative and resistant heart is dominant for this generation. But, their resistance is relatively soft which is expressed by the internet, and young people pay more attention on improve themselves for individual survival and happiness goals. In this sense, survival is not merely an ideology, but it is formed through the behavior, regulation, dispositif, and desire, which become a kind of social fact in post-modern society. (Kim Hong-jung, 2015) Therefore, survival has been dominantly applied to understand problematization on 90-Hou generation. For live streaming, the rapid capitalization caused competition between young BJs. “How to survive and make it helpful for next competition” becomes the main problem for professional BJs. In this research, survivalism is adopted to explore the practice pattern of 90-Hou BJs.

2) Affective labor and subjectivity

Affective labor is defined as the work which *mobilizes, performs, enacts* subjectivities and produces social relationships in post-Fordism, and it describes the true 'product' of this work is the sensation, emotion, or embodied experiences constitutes (Lazzarato, 1996; Hardt and Negri, 2004; Weeks, 2007). Compared to Fordism that the boundary between production and consumption is comparatively clear, post-Fordism refers to the model that production and consumption are mixed with the labor of providing information and interaction (Huikyong Pang, Hyunju Oh, 2018). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), Paolo Virno (2004), Maurizio Lazzarato (2004), and Franco Berardi (2009) believed in the post-modern era, immaterial labor has become the new hegemony of global capitalism in many ways, and most of the service jobs have been operated based on the continuous exchange of emotion, information, and knowledge.

Firstly, affective labor is a crucial part of immaterial labor. Immaterial labor is a concept proposed by Maurizio Lazzarato (1996), which refers to the labor that produces information and cultural contents as its commodity. And this labor is collective because it only exists in social networking and communication. Then, Hardt and Negri carried out a more specific explanation about immaterial labor based on Lazzarato's illustration. They suggested immaterial labor is to produce immaterial goods, such as service, culture, knowledge, and communication. Then Hardt and Negri (1999), based on the critical thinking of classic Marxism, illustrated the concept of "affective labor" to describe such affective practice through real or virtual communication and interaction¹. Affective labor reveals the inherently emotional nature of immaterial labor that has made everything productive including information, culture, and emotion². Specifically, Hardt believed that the ultimate production of affective labor should be social networks, organizational forms, and life rights. And Negri (1999) believed that the emergence of immaterial labor makes everything

¹ Michael Hardt (1999), 'Affective Labor'. *Boundary 2*, 26(2).

² Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri (2004), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press.

productive, even subjective. Likewise, Viron (2004) indicated immaterial labor deeply intertwines between subjectivity and the production/reproduction of immaterial value in contemporary capitalism.

Secondly, affective labor is different from emotional labor. The conception of emotional labor, which was illustrated by Hochschild(1983) in her book of *the Managed Heart*, is defined as “Aiming at earning a salary, the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display”, and it denotes a requirement to “induce or suppress authentic feeling for sustaining the outward countenance” In other words, emotional labor requires workers to control their emotions and mental states with display rules to make their clients feel comfortable and satisfied. But, what is the difference between emotion and affect? Tracing back to the origin of theories, affect is originated from Spinoza and then developed by Deleuze who claimed affect is a process that individuals separate from the existing experience of organization and regains new perceptual experience, which is the continuous flow of existence or action(Puissance; Wang Minan, Guo Xiaoyan, 2016)³. Affect is a kind of effect on body state through variously intensive otherness (Michael Hardt, 2007). That is, it is not merely a unidirectional "stimulus-respond" but a continuous flow of pre-personal, disordered physical power. It comes from the deep biological instinct of human beings, which is the microscopic perception that is driven by life. In other words, affect is the dynamic adjustment of what life instinct operates relationship between self and the surrounding. And Hart and Negri believed that affective labor can “trigger” the behavior in a particular thinking mode, and its essence is to produce or control subjective actions, which are dynamical and closer to the "contact of mind and thought". Compared to affect, emotion is a specific sense of a subject or an event, which could be captured by consciousness in emotional action. Emotion is closer to thoughts and feelings formatted by objective external. And emotional labor emphasizes that the worker is asked to express active emotion to exploit labor value for “exchange value” in the commodity economy. Thus, ‘control’ is dominated factor of transformation from the individual (laborer) feelings to social emotion.

3 Wang Minan, Guo Xiaoyan, Deleuze and affection, Nan Jing, Jiang Su Ren Ming Press, 2016 (11).

Thirdly, affective labor is one of the results of post-modernization. With the expansion of modernism and post-modernism, affective labor becomes hegemony among labor forms. Chinese social development reveals a different pattern with western countries, which mixes modernization and post-modernization. Since Chinese reform and opening up, the "increasing needs of material and cultural on Chinese people (人民日益增长的物质文化需求)" have gained legitimacy, and then hedonistic consumer culture is subversion and rebellion against previous asceticism. The rocketing increase of Chinese consumerism promotes cultural consumption brings new landscapes in society, which accordingly promotes the development of affective labor in Chinese content. In the practice of affective labor, laborers constantly use cultural capital to gain more economic repay. Furthermore, affective labor implements refined processing of the consumer's body, needs, and taste so that knowledge and information could be commercialized to create a service economy (Liu Fang-ru, 2019). Particularly, media users conduct "free labor" for platforms—users create various contents and communications to express their emotion and meet social needs—but their contents, information, behavior preference, and personal attention are used by capitalists to transfer more profits. Hence, the exploitation of affective labor is more precise and furtive. The individual emotion generated by affective laborers not only provides positive personalized feeling but also provides them with a new way of 'being' in the social factory.

For live streaming, BJs make virtual intimacy 'valuable' to attain the support and economic reward from audiences. The interaction in live streaming stimulates is more like a daily-life greeting without special meaning, which contributes make the common participation and connection construction in the daily life of BJ and audiences (Li Bing, 2006). In this context, the boundary of labor and work has been blurry when the interaction is combined with profit pursuit in affective labor. On the one hand, BJ needs to perform in a way that audiences like to attract more audience; on the other hand, the live streaming of some BJs is not only performance, but also are a personalized expression. In this process, emotion and affect jointly affect BJ's behavior. As Jamie Woodcock & Mark R. Johnson (2019) suggested that the labor of

gamer BJ is both the emotional labor of Hochschild and the affective labor of Negri and Hart. Besides, the status and socialization perception of emotional labor are helpful to the labor logic of BJ affective labor. Therefore, the theory of affective labor is mainly used in this research but emotional labor will be effective to understand this new digital labor.

4. Research Method

This research focused on Chinese 90-Hou BJs who were born in 1990-1999, and they are working or worked as professional broadcasting jockeys with contractual relation of streaming agencies. Despite there have been lots of researches about live streaming, a few studies are on the view of BJs themselves. Hence, I tended to explain meaning construction and the heart regime of these youth through analyzing their habitus in improvisational performance as well as in labor practice of online-offline. For the main question—‘how does working as BJs affect BJ’s subjectivity in marketized infrastructure that is constructed by platform and agency?’—I had broken down this task into three smaller research questions

1. What does 90-Hou’s working as BJs consist of?
2. How does the work restrict 90-Hou’s subjectivities, especially in survival disposition created by platform and agency?
3. How would 90-Hou BJ construct their subjectivity with their perception of the significance of survival and the future perspective?

I adopted qualitative interviews with 12 BJs and 5 managers of agencies, and I conducted non-participant observation on Tik Tok streaming while joined into fans chatting rooms of those BJs with permission. Then, I was introduced by manager 2-4 to be a BJ in his agency where I experienced BJ training and practical broadcasting. Also, I collected relative news, report, and statistical materials of Chinese live streaming to analyze the social environment of BJ work. The specific research methods of this study are as follows.

(1) Research subject

Tik Tok was the observed platform. Since 2017, the short video platform, Tik Tok⁴, has launched the new block of live streaming. Relying on the advantage of high market share and huge user base, the live streaming of Tik Tok had been considerably popular for Chinese BJs. And nearly 70% of Tik Tok users were under 35 years old while the portion of BJs who were between 24-30 years old was the highest, which was nearly 40%, and 20% of BJs were between 18 to 23 years old. In other words, 90-Hou made up the majority of Tik Tok BJs. In 12 BJ who I interviewed, 9 of them chose Tik Tok as their streaming channel while 2 BJs even moved to Tik Tok from other platforms.

Then I collected and analyzed the news, recruitment information of job search websites, and statistics reports of Tik Tok or other platforms. Every platform would have openly annual reports about their own BJs, such as the Report of BJ Industry from Momo⁵ in respectively 2017/2018/2019, the Data Report of Tik Tok in 2019, and the Report on Steaming Economy of Taobao in 2019/2020. At the same time, through the news research of Baidu (百度, the biggest search engine in China), I collected relative news with the keyword of 'internet streaming(网络直播)', the keywords in employment information of recruiting BJ in Zhaopin website (智联招聘)⁶, including recruitment requirement, job description, salary, and workfare. And, aiming at exploring the labor regulation, organizational structure, and labor relation for these BJs, I also analyzed training materials from interviewed managers and the performance regulation of Tik Tok.

The last but the most crucial data was interview texts with 12 BJ who worked or were working as BJs, including 3 males and 9 females, and all of them are 90-Hou,

⁴ Tik Tok(抖音) is a Chinese video-sharing social networking service owned by ByteDance, and is launched for the China market in September 2016. In 2020.01, Chinese Tiktok users were 400 million. It stated from UGC (User Generated Content) platform which allows users to create short videos of 3 to 60 seconds including short dance, lip-sync, comedy and talent show. It has acquire great success in China, and in January of 2020, the Tiktok users were over 400 million. Further, Tik Tok also has expending international market since 2018. It has been made available in over 150 markets, and in 75 languages, including the United States, South Korea, Japan, India, etc. Tiktok started to launch livestreaming from the end of 2017.

⁵ Momo (陌陌) is a mobile video social platform based on geographic location which was launched in August 2011 and live streaming function was opened in April, 2016.

⁶ <https://www.zhaopin.com/> (智联招聘), one of the most popular recruitment website in China

while 10 of them broadcasted on Tik Tok, other 2 BJs ever worked in MOMO and Douyu platform. The contents of these BJ were entertainment (singing, dancing, chatting, and music instrument). For better exploitation of labor practices of professional BJs, 2 individual BJs, who had not contact with any agencies, were also interviewed. In the meantime, 5 informants who worked or were working as managers or founders of agencies were interviewed, whose age is 25 to 33 years old. These are a few in the previous study that researchers interview agency managers, which provided new perspectives. The specific description of 17 informants is as following.

NO.	name	gender	age	Education	follower	Show category	career	others
1-1	Douzi	female	24	master	12 k	singing	3 months	MOMO platform
1-2	Dabai	male	27	becholar	53 k	game	3 years	
1-3	Doudo	male	26	senior school	21.3 M	talk(cross-dressing)	4 years	
1-4	Fangfa	female	25	bachelor	1048	talk	2 months	
1-5	Wangco	male	21	bachelor	92 k	talk	3 months	
1-6	Huali	female	27	high school	5400	sing	7 months	
1-7	Paofu	female	22	becholar	31 k	talk	8 months	
1-8	Miao xi	female	21	becholar	780	talk	3 months	
1-9	Yinying	female	24	master	1.1 M	singing, talk	5 years	
1-10	Resu	female	21	bachelor	19 K	movie	6 months	Douyu platform
1-11	Linan	female	22	bachelor	8670	sing	3 months	Individual BJ
1-12	Vincent	male	26	master	68 K	talk, life	3 months	Individual BJ

Table 3: The list of BJ interviewees (*k= thousand, M=million)

NO.	name	gender	age	title	previous occupation	work aging
2-1	Sicheng	male	25	Chief operating Officer	Wechat manager	3 years
2-2	Jide	male	28	Director	e-business	4 years
2-3	Chengyou	male	28	shareholder	entertainment show PD	3 years
2-4	Fasi	male	32	Chief operating Officer	soldier	5 years
2-5	Wangbuer	male	27	manager	English teacher	3 years

Table 4: the list of manger interviewees

(2)Analysis method

This research mainly adopted 3 research methods to analyze this affective labor of Chinese professional BJ: the analysis of literature, depth interview, and non-participant observation.

Literature analysis is based on relative news, statistics, reports, and training materials to explore the development flow and labor rules of BJ, which is adopted in

Chapter II and Chapter III. Such literature was divided according to the year to clarify how Chinese live streaming has developed and how social discourse about being BJ accordingly did transfer. Discourse is structured verbal/image as well as a kind of social interaction, which reflects social reality. The studies about social discourse have indicated that texts are the representation of producing and understanding discourse and social-cultural produced by social interaction (Van Dijk, 1988: 29). According to critical discourse analysis, the exploration of discourse is intensely relative to the social context. And texts are produced in the power relationship that is inherent in its own symbolic meaning (Choularaki · Fairclough, 1999). In this context, social discourse could contribute to reflecting the social background of meaning construction of Chinese 90-Hou BJ.

Then, the main data collection consists of semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. The interview about the narratives of 12 BJs and managers was mainly adopted in chapter III and chapter IV. In qualitative research, researchers must take various methods of gathering data in a natural condition, and qualitative study not only is kind of research implement for exploring social fact or subjective behavior but also is meaning construction in the interaction with research objects (Deni, Lincoln, 2005; Chen Xinagming, 2013). The In-depth interview in my study is based on a semi-structured outline and conducted with 1:1 in which every interview lasted 50-90 minutes. I contacted BJs by snowball sampling or random sampling by sending personal messages on Tik Tok. And, the question formulation is chronological: (1) the imagination and expectation on the job as professional BJ before starting; (2) the recruitment approaches with current/last agency and what help was obtained from agencies; (3) the practical experience and impressive events during broadcasting; (4) method of improving streaming show (self-development) and the evaluation of current work; (5) what perspective of being BJ and the future plan. And These questions were fluctuant along with the answer from interviewees. I would explore their desire, anxiety, hope, illusion, and survival dilemma in the experience of being BJ.

Also, considering the difference between “front behavior” and “backstage behavior”, after interviewing, I kept watching and observing their streaming show twice to three times if they still were broadcasting. Every observation lasted 30 minutes. During each observation session, I wrote down my observations and notes by hand. In the meantime, I got into their fans' chatting rooms on Wechat⁷ with the permission of these BJs. Besides, I directly experience the training of BJ and broadcasting process with help from one of the manager interviewees, which lasted nearly 3 weeks in April 2020. It contributed to gathering more training material, and have a better understanding of the work process of being BJ.

II . Learning to be a professional BJ

1. The industrialization of live streaming in China

Instead of a platform-based model such as Twitter and YouTube, live streaming in China has formed to become a market-oriented industry, which is the joint result of capital speculation, the government of the state, and enormous needs of youth employment. The history of Chinese live streaming can be divided into the 1.0/2.0/3.0/4.0 era. The watershed is in 2016, which I have mentioned before, when the popularity of mobile streaming APP created ‘the National Streaming Era (全民直播时代)’. The social discourse of being BJ has transformed from a subculture of the marginal youth to a new economic driver. Here, I collated relative news, reports, and studies to explain the social background of the imaginary of being BJ.

The first stage is “the Streaming 1.0 Era” before 2011. The advent of PC streaming such as 9158, Liu Jian Fang, GuaGua started the first chapter of video streaming in China. Before that, there was only voice streaming, which was the means for gamers and netizens to communicate with each other. 9158—the pioneer of PC streaming—created a streaming mode called Show Streaming(秀场直播) in 2005. Show Streaming is the dominant mode of live streaming in the 1.0 era. Show Streaming operates in a similar vein of nightclub, where audiences pay entrance fee

⁷ WeChat is the most popular message APP in recent China.

and give tips to request special performances. The main content of Show Streaming was female BJs talking, dancing, and singing, of which the major customers were male audiences. With this mode of consumption in this period, many cases of obscene, violent, and immoral performances can be found, usually in the smaller platforms. These performances comprised of the negative discourse of BJs in this period.

Besides Show Streaming, Game Streaming was another important branch of Chinese live streaming, which contributed to the start of “the Streaming 2.0 Era”. In 2004, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television issued a notice to ban TV programs with content that relates to online games. Only in developed areas, such as Beijing and Shanghai, the programs about games were allowed to be broadcasted. Consequently, game enthusiasts moved to the internet and built game communities. In this same period, Twitch, a live streaming website for games, became an important space for many western youth started to take game streaming as their job. Twitch BJs usually had their income from the monthly subscription fee or direct transferring money from fans. Differently, in China, the platforms of game streaming adopted the ‘users-pay’ mode in which audiences buy virtual gifts to their liked BJs, and BJs can get income from those gifts. Interestingly, the design of virtual gifts is made in accordance with the streaming setting. In Game Streaming, virtual gifts are designed to look like game items, such as blood bottles and diamonds, whereas in Show Streaming, gifts are more feminine, with gifts such as rings and kiss are in display.

Chinese live streaming, moreover, had been fast growing with capital investment from magnate, internet enterprises, and advertisers, such as Tencent, Kugou, Neteas, IQIYI in the 2.0 Era. Depended on capital infusion, the cost of higher bandwidth, programming promotion, and exploitation of content had been affordable for platforms and even YY streaming platform successfully floated on the stock market. And the monotonous “nightclub show” had been gradually sifted out, while ‘content’ started to be as significant essence of streaming shows. Over 100 categories of contents such as games, outdoor, foodie, sports, film, and television constructed multiple ecospheres of streaming performance. Accordingly, the types of BJs have

been more multicultural and the work quest of content sets new challenges on them. At the same time, inform organizations that were constructed to provide support and education for personal, which is the initial form of streaming agency.

Then, the blowout rise was in ‘ Streaming 3.0 Era’, which is called “the National Streaming Era (全民直播时代)” in 2016. With the popular trend of mobile APP and smart devices, more than 700 online platforms were successively launched in China market. It was known as "the battle of thousands of streaming APPs(千播时代)", and the number of streaming users jumped from 193 million to 325 million. At the end of 2017, there were more than 200 companies of live streaming, and on main platforms. And the number of peak concurrent users was close to 4 million, while the number of streaming rooms exceeded 3,000 in peak hours. Meanwhile, the celebrity effect contributed to change the negative stereotype of BJ. Yinke(映客) and Huajiao(花椒), the pioneer of mobile streaming platforms, were successful to invite poplar singers, actors/actresses, idols to broadcast on their platforms and held entertainment activates where BJs of cyber world and celebrities of the real world appeared in the same scene. For example, in the Night of Huajiao(花椒之夜), the 30 popular Chinese celebrities including Fan Bingbing, Zhang Jike, Zhang Zhenyue were invited with 300 BJs together. And, Yinke sponsored the China concert tour of BIGBANG which was broadcasted. Yizhibo(一直播) held the fan meeting of Song Junggi in Beijing, who became a well-known Korean star in China because of the teleplay "Descendants of the Sun" in 2016, and the broadcasting of this fan meeting attracted more than 10 million viewings.



Image 4: The live photo of “the Night of Huajiao”, from: https://www.sohu.com/a/114455308_133037

Image 5: ‘千播大战’ in 2016, from: https://www.sohu.com/a/334786911_120043694

Significantly, mobile streaming means everyone could be BJ as long as he/she has a mobile phone connected to the Internet, which increased UGC⁸ and promoted a great number of grass-root celebrities. Notably, in 2015-2016, platforms and agencies provided a high proportion of sharing-revenue and high bonuses for attracting more talented BJs. This caused part of top BJs could acquire annual income of over tens of millions yuan. Even, platforms were transforming into "star factories", where some popular BJs had fanbases, release albums, hold concerts, join TV shows, and so forth. For example, the famous BJ, Feng Timu, even has become famous in Korea and was invited to attend DIA Festival. Besides, rural BJ is another particular phenomenon in China. Rural BJs, the village youth who remain in the countryside after Chinese large-scale urbanization, show pastoral life such as natural landscape, local food, and countryside ballad on platforms, which arouses Chinese homeland feelings(乡土情怀). And it not merely presents the new look of rural in modern China but helps some rural youth acquire revenue and change their life.

Next, Streaming 4.0 age is 'live streaming+(plus)' (直播+时代) means other fields, such as beauty, shopping, education, medicine, and so forth, take advantage of live streaming to create new growth. Especially, shopping streaming achieved the combination of market strategy and social media to the greatest extent. Being represented by Taobao (the biggest online shopping mall in China), it began "e-commerce + live streaming" to promote the mobile consumption behavior of Chinese people. Then Li Jia-qi(李佳琪), Wei Ya (薇娅), Zhang Da-yi(张大奕), such famous shopping BJs came to the attention of Chinese public, and the economic achievement they reached led the public to have more positive discourse and recognition of professional BJ. Simultaneously, more and more people want to BJ like Li Jiaqi. At the same time, education, medicine, finance, and even state institutions (court trials, live vote) positively join into live streaming to have more communication with Chinese public. In a word, the mode 'live streaming +(plus)' resulted in vigor and motive power for the career of being BJ. In the next stage, not

⁸ User-generated content (UGC), alternatively known as user-created content (UCC), is any form of content, such as images, videos, text, and audio, that has been posted by users on online platforms such as social media and wikis. It is a product consumers create to disseminate online product or the firm that markets it.

only content, new streaming technology has been explored, such as 5G and AI, which might give a span-new experience and development on streaming shows.

Therefore, the development flow of Chinese live streaming presented the process of “mess-booming-normalization”, and the industry of live streaming achieved extremely predominant commercialization and capitalization.

Moreover, the normalization of the industry of live streaming cannot be separated from the government from the Chinese state. Primarily, normalization and supervision regulated the operation of pornography, violence, and illegal behavior in streaming shows. In May 2016, the "Self-Discipline Convention of Beijing Network Live Steaming Industry" was introduced, which clarified relevant regulations of the basic norm such as real-name certification, watermark, BJ blacklist system, banning juveniles to register BJ, etc. On July of the same year, The Ministry of Culture issued “the Notice of the Ministry of Culture about Strengthening the Management of Online Performances” in which platforms and agency companies should take the main responsibility to audit and supervise the contents and behavior of BJs. Then, with the popularity of shopping streaming since 2017, China Media Commercial Shopping Committee take the lead in drafting and formulating the first national community standard of shopping streaming, including "Basic Specifications for Live Shopping Operations and Services" and "Evaluation Guide for Online Shopping Credit Service System". By the way, the tax system of BJ is also improved. Before 2019, the income of BJs is defined as service fee, which is asked to pay 20% personal tax, and it has been completed in recent years.

Meanwhile, to better management for professional BJ, BJ certification is worthy to notice. In September of 2016, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television(国家广电总局) issued the “Notice on Relevant Issues about Enhancing Management of Online Live Streaming Services”. It required live streaming platforms have to hold broadcasting license(持证上岗). But, the implementation of this license is not completed at that time(Zhang Yan, 2016). In October, the Center of Ability Training and Examination Training for BJ in Sichuan started the training project and issued ‘the Certificate of Bj Qualification’ after BJs passed the examination.

Especially, since 2018, a vocational school of Yun Nan reached cooperation with Taobao streaming to open up the subjects of live streaming, where students can learn the streaming technology. On July 6 of 2020, 9 new jobs are added into "the Professional Classification Code of the People's Republic of China (2015 Edition)", and shopping BJ is included in this list as the Internet marketer.

More crucially, the state predominantly encouraged youth, start-up businesses, and the agricultural industry to do shopping streaming in Chinese economic transformation. In 2019, the Ministry of Commerce issued a document that e-commerce enterprises should provide green channels like live streaming to broaden the sales of slow-selling agricultural products in COVID-19 of 2020. Interestingly, some rural basic cadres of local government directly exposed themselves in streaming rooms and sold local agricultural productions. For example, Luo Guangshaojiang, who is deputy head of Longmen County, Guangdong, sold more than 50000 kilogram of oranges in Tik Tok streaming, which the sales of nearly 400,000 yuan. The combination of the behalf of national voice and grass-root created new scenes, which are no longer separate as ‘governing and resisting’ or ‘mainstream and subculture’.



Image 6/7: the screenshot of selling goods by county magistrate in Tik Tok

As mentioned above, the discourse about being BJ has transferred ‘marginalized youth’ into ‘new economy leader’. And related industrial chain as well as policy support has been improved, while more and more Chinese youth chose to be

professional BJ. It is a rich pasture place for business (Hell & Whannel, 1967), and has been attracting young to devote enthusiasm, talent, youth (青春) for its increase.

2. Work dispositif for BJ on Tik Tok

1) The mutualistic relation of labor

(1) Agency and platform

The industrialization of live streaming has developed a complete industry chain, where the relation between BJ, platform, and agency constructs a supportive mutualistic (共生) system. The following graph illustrates such chain. BJ is the core worker who provides performance content and maintains consumers. But they need platforms where provide the labor vehicle for BJ's performance. And agencies help platforms to recruit, manage and cultivates BJs since platforms found they could manage countless individual BJs. In a word, agency is like to the labor outsourcing for platforms. BJ must the income of virtual gifts with platforms and agencies. In the meantime, the advertisers and capitalists invest or cooperate with BJs, and platforms or agencies can effectively connect such work opportunities to BJs.

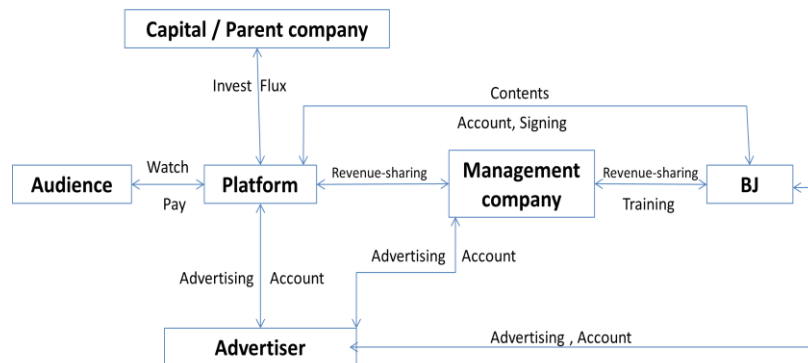


Table 5: the industry chain of Chinese live streaming

Here, we could focus on the role of agency, which is crucial work dispositif for professional BJ. Agency of live streaming is called Gong hui (工会) in Chinese, its literal meaning is labor association, but it is different from the labor association in Marxism. In essence, it is a kind of commercialized guild. There is no a clear definition of agency and it has continually changed along with the development of

live streaming. In the early stage, several BJs and intermediaries constituted ‘live streaming family (直播家族)’, which was like the civil organization on platforms. All of the members, sometimes, were BJs. And it belonged to neither platform nor other companies. The members of streaming families contacted each other by the internet, and the ‘patriarch’ provided performance guidance, management of streaming room as well as career project for BJ members. In turn, BJs would pay agency fee to patriarchs. Then, with the rapid expansion of live streaming, platforms were trapped in high administrative costs on innumerable BJs and competition with other platforms, while individual BJ also needed organizational shelter in the competitive market. Gradually, these live streaming families had transferred into companies. Also, some MCNs or internet enterprises like Tencent organized their agencies as the new branch of business expansion since 2012. Meanwhile, platforms invite agencies and provide extra support such as push opportunities, free propaganda, and cooperation of business activities to these labor outsourcing.

But, why Chinese youth would choose to sign a contract with agencies to share income rather than being individual BJ? There are 3 reasons in my investigation: 1. most agencies would persuade/poach young people or individual BJs with the temptation of excellent working conditions; 2. The proportion of sharing-revenue of contractual BJ is generally 5-10% higher than that of individual BJs. That is, platforms perhaps take more sharing-revenue from individual BJ; 3. Despite everyone can be BJ, it does not mean that everyone can be a good BJ. Agency provides training and organizational support as well as a sense of safety for these youth. In the perspective of agencies, they are obligated on discovering more new BJs and talents for providing more profitable content to platforms. As a result, the talent scouts of agencies attract more youth by all means, and they ‘wander’ in the place with a lot of 90-Hou, such as college, shopping mall, theater, job website, and cyber communities. For example, Yinying (female, 24 years old) joined the model club in her university and her manager was a friend of the person in charge of the model club. Then she was introduced to join that agency. Wangco (male, 21 years old) was an influencer and many agencies invited him to be BJ, whereas Paofu, Resu, and Miaoqi applied their

agencies after seeing recruitment information. In such cast net-like recruitment, 90-Hou are chosen to be BJ instead of what they want. As Manager 2-3 shared:

It is almost impossible that HR of other fields would forwardly contact employees and give such good conditions when so many youths cannot find job...fast, easy, happy, money... **the tempting promise caused many youths are being “selected” as BJs.** (Manager 2-3)

In this sense, I searched the recruitment notice from agencies, and the keywords, including “high income”, “base salary”, “easy work”, “active atmosphere”, “dream”, “self-challenge”, were frequent. Also, that poaching BJs is frequent. Douduo (male, 26 years old) was poached by a large agency when he became popular BJ, and all of my BJ informants received lots of poaching messages from other agencies. In turn, “managers accordingly prevent their BJ being poached by other agencies” (manager 2-5). This led to malignant competition between agencies. Once the BJ contract is signed, BJs must give the exclusive agency to use their image, ID, and content for commercial purposes. And BJs share income with negotiated percentage, including advertising fee. And every platform has a different proportion of revenue-sharing. Tik Tok BJ could get 45-50% while the other 50-55% is shared by platform and agencies, which is relatively higher sharing-proportion than that of other platforms.

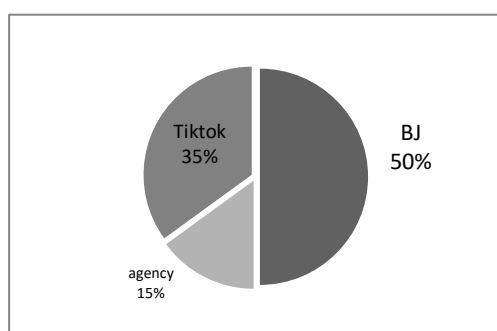


Table 6: the proportion of revenue-sharing in Tik Tok

platform	Proportion of Revenue-sharing
Hua Jiao	40-60%
Yi Zhi Bo	33%
Kua Shou	40
Ying Ke	31%
Hu Ya	30-50%

Table 7: The revenue-sharing for BJ in other platforms

2) Training of interactional techniques

Agencies provide series of training and support to contractual BJs. Primarily, BJs can use free streaming studio where is well decorated, and middle-larger sized agency would equip dressing room, dance room, recording studio, photo studio and so forth. And some BJs could enjoy free dormitories, such as Huali and Paofu .



Image 8: the streaming studio in an agency; Image 9: dressing room;

Image 10: a BJ dormitory with the studio

Next, agencies would give guidance about how to be a good BJ, which mainly illustrates the structure of platform, performance regulation of Tik Tok and performance techniques. And some potential BJs could attain customized talent-courses according to their personality and talent. In the meantime, the data of BJs' broadcasting (including, the number of viewers, the duration of streaming, and the amount of income exchanged by virtual gift) is monitored by managers on back-stage, and managers would give feedback to improve BJs' performance.

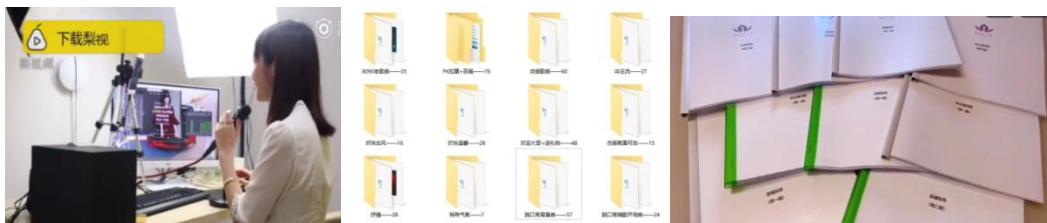


Image 11: the live photo of Duzi were broadcasting

Image 12: the music classification for different scenes

Image 13: the summary of performance skills from manager 2-3, and it was published in 2020.10

Among these, the most crucial training is verbal techniques of live streaming (直播话术). Verbal techniques are used in starting, welcome, self-introducing, soliciting Da Shang, expressing thanks, and ending.

“Welcome to my room! if you like my performance, could you follow me? I am a new BJ, and I need your support. ”

"Thanks, XXX, thanks for your gift, you let me have more faith in the future. Thanks for families!"

“This streaming will be end soon. Babies could follow me so that you will be reminded whrn I start tomorrow. I must see you tomorrow in the same time!”

(From the education materials that were provided by manger 2-3)

“As soon as you heard that, you would know that person is a BJ”, as Paofu said, these verbal techniques contribute to introducing BJ’s identity, promoting interaction, and stimulating virtual gift. In the training materials of manager 2-2, manager 2-3 and manager 2-4, all of them extremely stressed the importance of verbal technique. Interestingly, managers 2-3 created Q&A frame (回答套路) to help BJs increase interaction, evoke the curiosity of audiences as well as avoid the embarrassing question, which he explained as follows:

Manager 2-3: Okay, I want to tell you some Q&A frames. Now answer me, did you have lunch?.

I: sure, and you?

Manager 2-3: Then? look! the interaction is too boring. As a BJ, you should make theatrical performance. I would say—Oh, did you ask me whether ate lunch? I am so moved. After I alone came to this city, no one care whether I had lunch. Yes, I ate. I fired some vegetables and rice to eat. At first, I want to cook some meat, but girl, you know, I don’t want to be fat. And you?

I: ...okay...

Manager 2-3: Or, to say—why did you ask me whether having lunch? Will you invite me for a dinner?...Focus on the cause and effect of this question rather than the question itself. Make sure your live streaming is filled with interesting points that contribute to others being curious about you.

It leads to more topics and as well as contents. After you talk much with an audience, will you not be more familiar with each other?

Indeed, BJ has to know how to control and manage interaction with audiences whether they like it or not. It is a dynamic interaction, and manager 2-2 suggested a ‘cat-and-mouse’ game to keep the appreciated distance. As Hochschild(1983) described, workers, train inauthentic behavior to cover or suppress negative emotion to provide good “client service”, whose final aim is economic repay. With the training of agency, the work of BJ reveals more features of emotional labor.

2) Virtual carnival

(1) Room

Room (直播间) is the basic workspace for BJs, where a BJ exposes him/her on open ‘stage’ and has interaction with audiences. The room is the space of semi-anonymity. That is, ‘real’ action, voice, appearance, and surroundings of BJ are openly presented in the front of strange audiences, while audiences could experience "the real action" but their existence is merely virtual symbols such as ID, name, profile, user grade. We could divide three parts to explain its space structure.

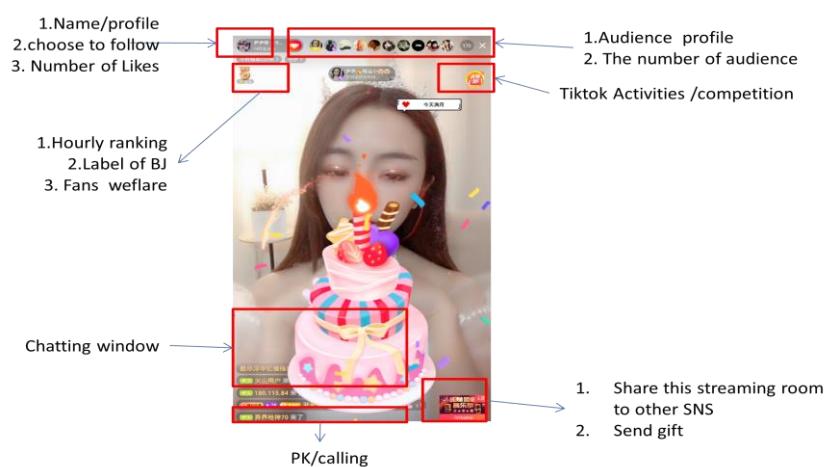


Image 14: the streaming room on Tik Tok

On the top, there is information about this room including BJ name and profit, the number of “Like⁹”, current audiences. In the center, the live-streamed performance of BJ is displayed, and the special effect of virtual gifts is shown here. On the bottom, there is a real-time chatting window and other functions such as PK/connection, beauty effect, and so on. When BJ is performing, the IDs of new audiences are scrolled on the chatting window, and their profiles are handed on the top of the screen. BJ would welcome when the audience while audiences give gifts or “Like” to that BJ. The comments sent by audiences scroll on the chatting window, while BJ reads these comments to give responses. The more comments, the faster the speed of scrolling is. Sometimes, the speed of comments scrolling is too fast so that the BJ only could choose partly comments to respond. And audiences can communicate with other audiences in comments. Also, BJ can force anti-fan to leave the room or ban their comment, and select administrator (管理员) from fans who have the same right to manage audiences.

Next, if we compared the room as an improvisational front stage, ‘My page’ is a lasting daily backstage. Many BJs wrote streaming schedules on My page, such as “Live streaming time: PM 2:00-5:00 and PM 9:00-01:00”. And My page extends and deepens the space of interaction between BJ and fans. That is, audiences could write or read comments about short videos, and then BJ or other fans could have text interaction. More crucially, “My page” is an effective instrument for Tik Tok BJ to construct identity. BJs could explicitly fill out the information about themselves (Davis, 2012), including self-introduce, location, age, hobby, and personal photos. And the content of BJ’s short videos such as foodie, talent show gives the label of that particular BJ in which Tik Tok marches these contents with according audiences. Also, the more popular a short video is, the more possibility that others could see that BJ. This is based on Tik Tok algorithm that I will introduce later.

⁹ In Tiktok, if audiences double click screen once, BJ will receive one “Likes”. The more “Likes” BJ received, the more possible platform push streaming room to other audiences. Namely, it is a method to improve popularity.

2) Da Shang (打赏)

Da Shang means the behavior that audiences gave virtual gifts to BJs, which consists of the main income for BJ¹⁰. In the Chinese context, Da Shang(打赏) refers to people with higher status give tips to the lower-level or subordinates for rewards or service, and “Shang” means appreciation. It is regarded as an implicit ‘social contract’ between audiences and BJs—“I provide service for you so that you should pay to me”—that is, it is paid consume in online gift economy rather than free online service.

And every streaming platform has its design of virtual gifts, which has been updated at intervals. There are 91 items in Tik Tok (until 2020.6), which the cheapest item is 1 Dou coin (抖币, virtual currency, 1 Doubi=RMB 0.1 yuan=~~¥~~ 365), and the most expensive item is 30,000 Dou coin (RMB 3,000 yuan=~~¥~~ 513950). Every virtual gift is encoded by specifically textual notifications and designed visual representations, and the visual designs of most gifts are related to money/ love/ trick while. The part of gifts and their price in Tik Tok is as following:



Image 15/16/17: some virtual gifts in Tik Tok

Continuous gift		Special effect gift		Fans gift	
Name	Dou coin	name	Dou coin	name	Dou coin
Heart	1	Sunglass	99	Fan card	1
Chicken	2	Koifish	399	Light stick	9
Lollipop	9	Unicorn	8888	With you	520
Flower	10	Romantic carriage	28888	Rhythmic	2999
Pick up	19	Carnival	30000	The heart of the universe	18888

Table 8: the price of different virtual gifts in Tik Tok

¹⁰ In general, “a BJ’s income= Da Shang +(basic salary + advertising endorsement + others)”. But some of BJs may by not have basic income.

In recent years, the ever-expanding repertoire of visual effects design increases the visual stimulation of these virtual items. And the special effect of expensive gifts is romanticized and gendered, such as flowers, fairy-tale carriage, magic mirror, and so forth. Especially, the virtual gifts always interact with BJ's body. For example, if a "sunglass" was sent, the image of sunglass would be attached to BJ's face on the screen (like to the last picture above), which is the virtualization of real interaction between BJ and the gift-giver.



Image 18/19/20: the virtual gifts of special effect

The special effect of visual gifts reinforces reaction from others, which increase the sense of being of that giver. People in the same streaming room, including BJ, may not care about who gave one 'heart (the cheapest gift)', but they will cheer and be excited when an expensive special effect gift was given. And the accumulated amount of Da Shang of every BJ is open on Tik Tok, which represents the degree of popularity or work value of that particular BJ.



Image 21: the given and received Da Shang are open for every Tik Tok user

3) Gamification setting

In recent years, the use of elements and principles of game design in non-game contexts for motivating desired behaviors of workers is defined as gamification (Deterding et al., 2012). When it is applied to BJ work, platform and agency effectively use gamification to manage BJ's behavior and motivate consumption of viewers, which is the dispositif of BJ career.

The first one of gamification is level. There are two levels in Tik Tok, one is user level, and another one is fan level. Both levels increase with the accumulation of Da Shang. The highest user level needs 2 million Dou coin (≈ 30 thousand dollars). And fans level depends on intimacy value (亲密值)—how much Da Shang that viewer paid to that BJ, the duration of watching that BJ—especially, fan level is one-one correspondence, and one user could have different fans level in the different room. But, if a fan had no interaction with that BJ for some time, the fan badges will be canceled. According to these levels, a user would be given different badges in which the color and icon are different.

UserLevel	Lv.0	Lv.1	Lv.2	Lv.3	Lv.4	...	Lv.10	LV.11	...	Lv. 19	Lv. 20
Dou coin	0	100	500	1500	3000	...	80000	120000	...	1500000	2000000

Table 9: the user level according to the cost of Da Shang in Tik Tok



Image 22/23: the various user level and badge with different color

Not only user level, but Tik Tok set level system for cooperative agencies. The classification of agencies is S, A, B, C—S is the highest and C is the lowest—the agencies of higher-level attain more push opportunity and performance reward.

The second is the quests. In Tik Tok, the income of Tik Tok BJ is constituted into two parts. One is fixed sharing-revenue generated which is 45% of Da Shang, and another one is BJ quests. According to the quests, BJ will obtain extra 0%-5% rewards of Da Shang. The quests included daily quests and weekly quests, as following:

Fixed	Daily Yinlang ¹¹ Quests		Daily Length of Streaming Hour	
45% of Da Shang	Performance	Reward	Performance	Reward
	Yinlang $\geq 10,000$	1.3% Yinlang	Length of streaming ≥ 4 Hour	20 Yinlang
	$1000 \leq \text{Yinlang} < 10,000$	36 Yinlang	$2.5 \text{ Hour} \leq \text{Length of streaming} < 4 \text{ Hour}$	10 Yinlang
	$500 \leq \text{Yinlang} < 1000$	8 Yinlang	$1 \text{ Hour} \leq \text{Length of streaming} < 2.5 \text{ Hour}$	5 Yinlang
	$50 < \text{Yinlang} < 500$	6 Yinlang	$0.5 \text{ Hour} < \text{Length of streaming} < 1 \text{ Hour}$	3 Yinlang

Table 10: the daily quest and corresponding rewards for Tik Tok BJ

In the daily quest, the more working hours and received Da Shang can be in exchange for more performance rewards. Accordingly, agencies assign quests to BJ, such as the least duration of daily broadcasting, the daily performance index of minimum Da Shang, daily times of PK, and so forth. Also, agencies set the incentive system. For example, there is an incentive measure in an agency of my study.

The Support Project for Rookie Tik Tok BJ:

1. If the Yinlang is over 100,000 in the first show, that BJ will be rewarded RMB 1,000 yuan;
2. If the monthly Yinlang is over 1,000,000, an opportunity of calling connection with a top BJ.
3. When monthly Yinlang was over 120,000, twice the opportunity for hot recommend.
4. When monthly broadcasting hours were over 160 hours as well as the Yinlang is over 80,000, twice the opportunity for hot recommend. (Above reward terms can be superimposed)

¹¹ Yinlang (音浪) = summation of the value of Da Shang. For example, a BJ received virtual gifts of 1000 Dou coin so that the Yinlang considerably is 1000. In Chinese, Yin(音) is music and Lang(浪) is wave

Also, if a new BJ could not finish quests, the agency might give due punishment. As Wangco said, “My manager asked me to earn the least amount of Da Shang every day. If I could achieve the target, my managers might blame me. ”

The third one is leaderboards and various contests. Such leaderboards and contests have become the battlefield for youth BJs. The leaderboard ranks BJs according to the amount of received Da Shang, and in Tik Tok, there are multifarious ranking lists, such as Hourly Ranking List(小时榜), Local Ranking List (地区榜). The most predominant one is the Hourly Ranking list (小时榜) that ranks streaming rooms according to how much Da Shang that BJ received within this hour, and it realigns by every hour. But only the top 100 BJs could get into this List, which is the symbol of the reputation for BJs. Especially, popular BJs are enthusiastic about ‘rush into list’ (冲榜), which not only helps them obtain more Da Shang but also improves social status to some extent.

Moreover, PK (player killing) is one of the contents in Tik Tok. It was also called Lian Man (连麦), which means 1:1 fighting between BJ 1 and BJ 2 in 4 minutes. The BJ who attained more Da Shang is the winner, while the loser BJ must receive punishment (3 minutes). The draw is also possible sometimes. In PK mode, the screen interface is divided into two parts—one is the room of BJ 1 and another one is the room of BJ2—the audiences of two BJs could see the performance of BJ 1 and BJ 2 at the same time, but the chatting window and gift effects are not shared. Metaphorically, two alliances are created with the start of PK.

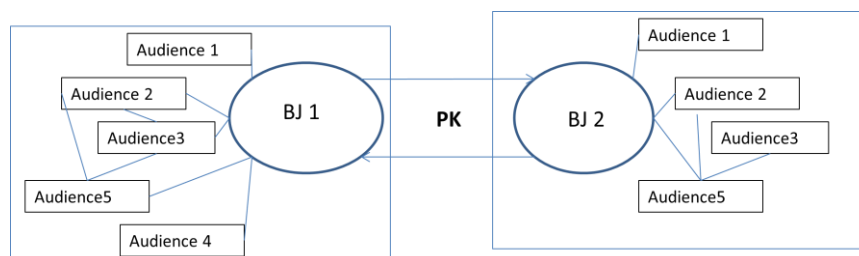


Table 11: the concept graph of PK

And two BJs positively solicit Da Shang, and the value of the virtual gift is accumulated as donation point (贡献值) which imitates the conception of hit point of games. Then, the punishment might be prearranged at the very beginning or required

by the winner later, and sometimes the right of deciding punishment could be given to the audiences of winner BJ.

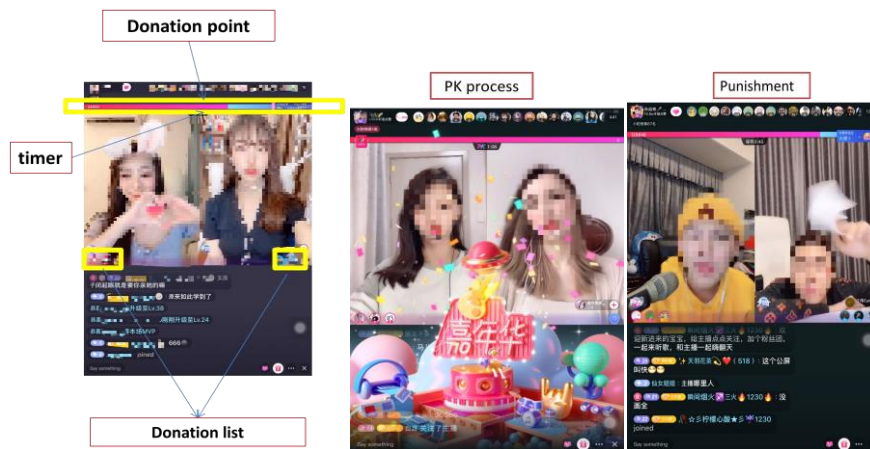


Image 24/25/26: the screenshots of Tik Tok PK

During 4 minutes, the landscape of PK is considerably fantastic. Punishment, timer, Health Point...all of the designs in PK is similar to 1:1 athletics. Such arena-like atmosphere is effective to evoke emotion and stimulate consumption. Generally, there are five reasons why BJs would like to PK: 1. to stimulate audiences to do Da Shang; 2. to promote the popularity of streaming room; 3. to meet more BJ and then ‘steal’/‘absorb’ more fans from opposite BJ (I would explain more in the next chapter.); 4. to enrich streaming content; 5. to expand social networking. By the way, the connection of BJ is according to MMR (match-making rating in games), which implements PK among BJs with similar levels. This metaphorically emphasizes the hierarchy system among BJs. Besides, some contests could last several months or a year, while some agencies would hold the intracompany competition. After these contests, Tik Tok or agencies would hold ceremonies and parties for their BJs, which is honor for outstanding BJs.



Image 27: the even party of Duzi’s agency

Image 28/29: live photos for the award ceremony of 2019 Tik Tok streaming

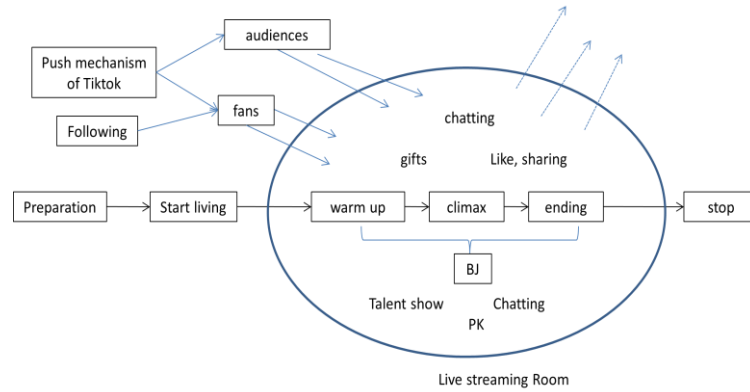


Table 12: the work process of professional BJ

In summary, for establishing a room, BJ must prepare content in advance. And Tik Tok would push different BJs to viewers, while viewers slide the screen until the content that they like appear. After audiences get into the room, the interactive space is constructed, where BJ performs, chats, does PK and viewers give virtual gifts, chats. And a ‘good performance’ is not unordered, instead, it is like to live concert including warming up, climax, and ending.

III. The dilemma of 90-Housubjectivity in the work of BJ

1. Instrumentalized subjectivity for affective production

BJ work is an interactive service in contemporary society, and this service industry, to a great extent, relies on young workers who are capable to provide vivid affection. Despite agencies teaching BJs performing skills and providing them with recommendations for content, image, and style, these are not effective in unpredictable real-time interactions. As manager 2-3 relayed, “Compared to the idol cultivation system, it is difficult to shape BJs like on the assembly line of elite training. The reason is that the content of streaming performances is the interaction between a BJ andtheir audience, which is extremely changeable, momentary, and unpredictable.” Hence, the role of BJs is to lead this flow by their capacity for broadcasting, and they are required to create modes of self-presentation, the forms of aesthetic and performative embodiment, which contribute to effectively producing interaction with audiences. In other words, from backdrops, clothes, image setting,

and speaking, to off-line fan management, BJ triggers interaction in symbolic spaces where these youth have autonomy over their performance style and control over their work. It contributes to producing self-efficacy and emotional satisfaction.

And it cannot be overlooked that the role of the BJ is that of a laborer as well as a consumer—they are prosumers (产消者). BJs in the digital economy can shift their identity between that of customer and producer rather than unilaterally providing a commodity or service with ‘specified emotional energy’. As prosumers, the work of being BJ allows us to consider the significance of this labor itself both to the formation of particular experiences of ‘youth’ where 90-Hou become one of the key subjects of value in Chinese contemporary economy. However, the work I describe here takes place through young people’s authentic, pre-reflexive, embodied subjectivities into labor practices, and it is embodied, involving aesthetic presentations, styles of bodily comportment, and embodied interactions.

1) Disciplined body and mind

According to Hardt and Negri (2004), affective labor produces affects such as pleasure, enjoyment, and wellbeing in clients. BJs must adjust their body and mind for the sake of viewers’ enjoyment. Through interviews with 12 BJs and online observations, I found that BJs, especially new BJs, predominantly experienced the process of adjusting their mind and body into one of labor production, which revealed disciplined aesthetics and capitalization.

Primarily, BJs shape their bodily appearances to meet the aesthetic expectations of the public or a certain group through makeup, wardrobe, AI beauty, and even face-lifts. As Yinying reported, “The most important thing is [having a] good-looking face. One of the reasons why people like BJs is of course for looking at people who they deem to be pleasing to the eyes.” Beauty becomes such an absolute order for BJs because it is a form of capital (Baudrillard, 2006); under the externalization of disciplined aesthetics, the body of a BJ is transformed into the consumptive body from the natural body for the sake of audiences’ enjoyment. Especially in the current

environment of aesthetic fatigue over standardized beauty—for example, women BJs always have big eyes, a high nose, red mouth, small face, a pointed jaw, and so forth—even manager 2-2 said, “There assuredly are some agencies that encourage BJs to have plastic surgery by covering part of the cost of surgery.”

Among my informants, both males and females suggested that they collect and study fashion information such as costume matching, make-up, new items, etc. Especially Vincent and Wangco, the men BJs, whose keywords include *fashion*, *hipness*, and *cool guy*, had paid more attention to their physical appearance. Vincent regularly goes to the gym to keep fit as well as for his health, and in his short videos he shares a lot of information about fashion in Korea. Wangco preferred purchasing fashion items such as hats, rings, bracelets, and tattoos, which showed his identity as a fashion BJ, as his image setting. However, the effects of the disciplined body are more dominant for female BJs. Facial attractiveness had become the initial capital for these females, who always care about “As a girl, I do not want to be ugly in the front of others and I look forward appreciation about my appearance” (Fafang, 22 years old). Indeed, the interaction between young people’s subjectivities and the labor they provide is inflected by social arrangements such as gender and social class, and it is a fact that our society sets a higher standard on the appearance of females. Thus, adjusting their natural body in order to meet the aesthetic imagination of others has been a part of both inner and external discipline.

In the meantime, the BJ’s body becomes embedded in symbolic interactions where the BJ trains their body as an interactive implement. BJ manages the presence of their body every minute: if their audience gave gifts, the BJ must express happiness in their face and perform a bodily action like forming a heart or putting their palms together to express thanks.



Image 30/31: BJ must give bodily reaction when viewers gave Da Shang

Here, the scene of the BJ body is liquid in improvisational performance and interaction, and the BJ has an ‘affective body’ which is transformed into embodiment by facial expressions, actions, and sounds. And some audiences might ask a BJ to perform some bodily actions in exchange for Da Shang. It is a kind of suppression. But with the desire for more expensive gifts, a BJ would give more reaction as a result of monetized connectivity. And the interactions between BJs and audiences in is consequential to the reconstruction of the BJ body. Like this conversation in the room of Vincent.

(In the live room of Vincent, 2020. 5.10)

Wuming: BJ, why you wear a hat today

BJ: Mmmmm, it is because I got up late and I didn’t wash my hair. Now my hair looks strange, so I choose to wear a hat. Is it okay?

Eu: It is better when you have no hat, I think

Dili Baby: We’re just curious about the hairstyle now. could you take off your hat?

Wuming: Take it off ! Take it off

BJ: (took off hat) is it okay? ahh

Eu: it is found and better than I imagined. And wearing a hat makes you look thinner.

BJ: What did you imagine? That my hair would look like a bird nest?

Wuming: hahaha, if that, there may be many onlookers get into for your hair.

BJ: And... don't you guys see the outcome of my fitness. What is the hardworking I am!

Under the gaze of his fans, Vincent focused on the others' assessments of his body. If they praise, the BJ will feel being recognized, whereas criticism might lead to displeasure or an act of legitimating the difference of personal style or taste, as is the case in Vincent's explanation. Besides their appearance, Also, young BJs do considerable extra training for singing, dancing, and facial expression control, which is a kind of body labor in order to provide fundamental content. The work is not paid but these 90-Hou positively learn new skills because it would contribute to providing better performance for their audiences. Like Miaoxi (female, 21 years old) shared:

In my downtime, I joined in the singing train and lessons on communication skills, because I am a new BJ without any outstanding talent. Although BJ need not be very professional, the performance should not be bad because others will see me. If you can not perform well, no matter how you are good-looking, others would stay in this room. (Miaoxi)

For Miaoxi, extra body labor is not merely a part of working but is helpful to produce more enjoyable for audiences. This reveals BJs are especially required to have a service spirit in their career, as Yinying expressed:

Audiences are the people BJs rely on for a living because our income is from Da Shang. So, what **we should do is to make them enjoy the interaction until they would pay us**. I would express the best aspects of myself in front of the camera, and even I was not happy on that day, I must pretend to happy so that fans would enjoy themselves together. (Yinying)

Similarly, Miaoxi added, "Whilst there are [only] a few viewers, no comments, no Da Shang and I only could soliloquize in the 'stage', I could not express negative emotion because audiences might come in the next second, and if they saw I was upset, they would leave." For the new BJs, low popularity caused self-denial and mental stress. However, they must adjust the mentality for tiding over the embarrassment. And this proves again that BJs must provide a pleasurable experience

for their audiences, which requires that they always express pleasant emotions and give more consideration to the mind of fans.

Moreover, they must tolerate suffering physical pain in performance training. Duzi shared an experience from early on after becoming a BJ:

To sing better, I sang a lot in broadcasting and practiced my singing skills. This made me get a throat infection in the first 2 weeks. But I wanted to improve my streaming for attracting more fans as well as showing a better me. And taking proper sitting posture for 3-4 hours and stared at the screen in case I see any misleading message...My eyes were really in pain. (Duzi)

Whilst Duzi experienced pain, she thought it was necessary to give a better performance that can produce a better experience for her fans. In this sense, they recognized that adjusting their body and mind is a self-challenge. However, they also positively perceive such challenges in which they could transform their labor into Da Shang. By the way, the exterior change and increase of talents during the process of body train contribute these 90-Hou to promoting self-confidence to a certain extent.

2) Creating vibes for momentary enjoyment

Whilst appearance is crucial for BJs, it is noteworthy that some BJs are pretty popular despite not flaunting attractive appearances. Why is this the case? This is because they are able to create good vibes to embody the affection of audiences. Eileen Otis stressed that interaction defines service workers must endeavor to create, transfer, or enhance the emotional and experiential states of customers (Eileen Otis, 2012; Penn Tsz Ting Ip, 2017). Like Miaoxi explained:

A BJ is not a professional singer or an idol who pursues the perfect face and performance skill. And there are many BJs who have no talent. If BJs can create a good atmosphere and relationships with viewers, it is enough. (Miaoxi)

In live streaming, there is not immaterial production through BJ work; what audiences consume is *transpersonal affect*, *embodied feeling*(感), and *momentary enjoyment*, which contribute to the atmosphere of a carnival rite. Thus, a good BJ

should know how to create an enjoyable vibe to ‘vibe off’ of so that audiences to interact and pay for Da Shang. According to Hardt and Negri (2004), the “vibe” of affective produce is a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion. Lina (female, 22 years old) was singer BJ, and in her streaming room, there was no magnificent background, delicate makeup, AI beauty tools, or attire, even the lighting is dark, whereas her enthusiasm and music-dreams created her particular way of creating authentic vibes. This made her attract lots of fans in a short time. Similarly, Yinying also revealed:

To be honest, one of the reasons why my fans like me is that “I am pretty”, but another one, which I think is most important, is that my streaming show is authentic and natural. **I do not have an outstanding talent show**, but in my streaming room, we talk about daily life, gossip, chit chat between friends. **I think being BJ is precisely having fun together. I enjoy having fun with others.** (Yinying)

In her narrative, Yinying emphasized the importance of making work ‘fun’ in BJ her work, and thereby facilitating the possibility for moments of pleasure and enjoyment. Namely, the vibe should contribute to momentary enjoyment for their audiences in the real-time interaction. Manager 2-4, who had experience BJing, suggested, “Sometimes, you can clearly describe why you like staying in a streaming room of a certain BJ, but it must every participant feel enjoyable at that moment.” Indeed, the improvisational interaction and the ‘vibe’ of carnival created ‘indescribable something’ in which both the BJ and their audience share and circulate a moment of enjoyment in the room. More crucially, the young subjectivity of having fun, socializing, communicating is adopted in BJ work. BJs can sing, dance, chat, PK, and so on. The importance of being fun is to make their streaming rooms like a party or carnival. In this sense, a BJ enjoys ‘fun’ through ‘co-presentation’ with fans, while positive vibes and an affective atmosphere are successfully shared. This underscores that interaction and emotional embodiment in live streaming is not just for pleasing audiences, but also are the modes of emotional involvement for young BJs themselves. In order to do so, BJs must utilize their subjectivity to ‘have fun and

openly communicate with others, during which affective workers must authentically present that “I am also having fun now” because viewers are more likely to enjoy themselves if they feel that the BJ is also enjoying him/herself. If BJs themselves are not authentically enjoying themselves while doing this work, audiences will pick up on that to some extent.

In such an atmosphere, ‘affect’ produces relations between person and person. That is, the affective experience that BJs and fans are having fun together eliminate the boundaries between strangers, transforming them into ‘friends’ and even ‘virtual family’, as was described by Vincent in terms of the relational transmission of ‘healing and releasing’. He tends to make his streaming room like a living room where he is comfortable and relaxing for operating social interaction, which reinforces the sense of spending time with friends in the living room.

I: I saw that your live streaming starts from PM 10: 00 on My page, right?

Vincent: yes.

I: Why did you choose this time?

Vincent: em..... PM 10... I think it the time that almost audiences have relaxed after ending all of their work and missions for the day. Let’s think, in general, we get off work from 6:30 to 7: 30, and working overtime is also frequent. Then we go home, have dinner... it will be 9:30 or 10:00. It is the time people finished their daily work and have gotten the tiredness and stress off their back and can rest. I make my streaming room like a living room of an old friend’s home, where they can relax, express themselves, and enjoy.

Critically, Vincent was aware that eliminating the boundary between strangers and transforming their relationship into one of the friends, even family by creating a vibe. Here, the BJ has extreme autonomy over how to produce enjoyable vibe with their audiences. Also, the vibes of some streaming rooms might be more irritative than others, like that of Doudo, who does cross-dressing performances in funny and ill-tempered style.

In addition, PK is an obviously efficacious method of creating a vibe. This is because for a limited time PK creates many scenes of conflict and stimulation in a contest-like vibe, where the competitive, dueling, and exhilarating vibe quickly involves audiences into an interactive scene, and produces the sense of community by helping their BJ defeat the BJ who they face in battle.

Even if we always say that PK is just a game, no one wants to lose, right? When I saw my fans give gifts to me and try to help me win during PK, I felt so excited and my desire to win became stronger. I would make more effort to stimulate my fans and perform more. (Doudo)

What Doudo suggested resonates with Deleuze, that affective labor implements produce desire and subjectivity. In a limited 4 minutes, a BJ and his/her audience members must solicit more Da Shang, while the race-like atmosphere produces new affects that connect of BJ-BJ, fan-fan, and BJ-fans.

Therefore, ‘sharing enjoyment and vibe’ is a core part of work for BJs. From the different narratives of Line, Yinying, Vincen, and Doudo, it is found that personal taste affects the construction of vibes, but whether their style is quiet or noisy, the BJ’s aim remains the same: to produce embodied emotion, by breaking down the embarrassing or strange boundary between them and their audiences. Furthermore, BJ must understand the needs that people are looking for a comfortable environment, sensory enjoyment, more willful and unfettered imagination. Though we see BJs from diverse cultures and more than 500 million users whose occupations, class, ages, and cities are vastly different, BJs share a similar purpose: to create happiness together with audiences who have similar tastes. This resembles “the difficulty of predicting public tastes, the impossibility of exactly duplicating a hit” (Prindle, 1993), but BJs endeavor to produce “intangible feelings of ease, excitement, or passion” (Hardt and Negri, 2000) to create a carnival atmosphere, where everyone enjoys themselves, can release stress and freely express desire, emotion for escaping from reality.

3) Storytelling self-narratives in ‘my community’

The “scene” is an essential element of BJ work, referring to both image setting and storytelling narratives. This is because the actions of BJs contain an element of theatricality. In the creation of storytelling narratives, the personal tastes of BJs become the crucial line that connects virtual communities that are BJ-centered.

For any BJ, the setting of scenes not only determines what kind of audience they will attract, but also provides the code for performing behavior in unpredictable interactions. Manager 2-4 explained:

Whether it is facial attractiveness, singing, dancing, gaming, a voice actor, a talent show, or comedy...**a BJ must accurately locate him/herself with one core image setting**—what kind of BJ am I? What style should I construct? What kind of fans will like me? How should I dress and do my make-up? (Manger 2-4)

In this sense, the image setting extremely is affected by personal tastes. Though the original intention of live streaming mirrors the intimacy of real-world interaction, it seems to develop in the opposite direction—that is, storytelling in-character. However, such a character is negotiated, dynamic, and changeable in practical interactions. To be specific, when a new BJ enters into an agency, their manager gives them suggestions about their image setting according to the manager’s experienced judgment, but most BJs in my study indicated that they adjusted their image setting according to their tastes and practice. For Douduo, he experienced an obvious change of his character through countless negotiations with fans, and the current image he has vastly differs from his initial character.

At the beginning, I imitated the comedian Song Xiaobo (a popular Chinese male comedian) and then my fans said Song Xiabao put on lipstick, and I did that. Then they said since I put on make-up, why not try dressing like a woman?... so then I started to try cross-dressing performance. It was effective for attracting fans and earning more money, and I also mastered more skills for being BJ. So, step by step, I become a cross-dressing BJ. (Douduo)

Doudo negotiated with audience members to change his character, which resonates with the previous theorization that a “social agent presents and perceives themselves in special ways, receives feedback from others, and then accordingly adjust these presentations” (Burke, 2004; Goffman, 1955, 1959; Swann & Hill, 1982). And this character is not only consistent with group/public aesthetics and imagination of others but also based on the ideal image that a young BJ imagines in their inner heart. In other words, the character setting is the ideal “I”, or self, for a BJ as well as being socialized under the imagination of others’ gazes. For instance, Wangco(male, 21 years old) purposely portrays his character as a cool and rich man in his broadcasts.

Wangco: In my fanbase, most of them are men who like to imagine “I am another him”.

I: why?

Wangco: A fashionable, confident, ideal self that they want to achieve but cannot in reality... I am not rich, to be honest, but I achieved this character through my SNS where conveyed that I am a happy-go-lucky guy who travels to beautiful places, drives good cars and stays in upscale hotels, likes hip-hop and fashion. Even, some high school students[who watch me] always **tell me that they want to be like me in the future.**

I: So, what do you feel when you hear people say such things?

Wangco: To be honest, complacent! But sometimes I feel some bitterness. I will reflect on how I want to be the person in my dreams, but it has been hard to make it come true, even up till now. **As men, we talk a lot about growth, success, love, family, and business....**

As Wangco stated, the description of one’s performance might not be of the true self, but of the ‘truer self’. BJs mold their characters on their ideal self, which is an element of self-branding (Duffy, 2017) that becomes so deeply associated with these youth, and few of them ever perform out of character. Here, what occurs during streaming is the process of self-conception. In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be(Goffman 1959:19).

As Wongco said, the fact that the identity of his ‘truer self’ is recognized by others boosted his self-efficacy, and such personal taste of this ‘cool man’ becomes the key line that connects him with his audience members. These young men share common tastes, where both of that BJ and audiences become the content (scene) of the streaming room. Thus, some 90-Hou BJs share their worries and suffering that stem from the difficult transition into adulthood, in turn, their fans who are of similar ages share their knowledge, as well as encourage, and express empathy with that BJ. It is a kind of healing process for BJ and contributes to creating closer relationships to some extent. Similarly, Vincent described a sense of belonging when he met fans who like Korean culture or study abroad in Korea.

Vincent: I found friends who have the same hobby or similar experiences. I like G-Dragon and Korean culture. **The fans who also like these have many common topics with me.** And there are some Chinese overseas students in Korea like me. We usually discuss our life in Korea... ‘Ahh, I am not the only person who thinks so...’ I helps me feel less lonely and boring in my overseas life.

I: Would you meet these fans in real life?

Vincent: Sure, if they want to meet me. The “I” in live streaming is the real me. I **think audiences will feel my authenticity...** Meeting friends with the same hobby is nice.

Here, personal taste is significant for the construction of Vincent’s community. Similarly, Lina likes Jay Zhou and Xu Song (both famous singers who are popular among Chinese 90-Hou), and she often sings their songs in her room and many fans of her also are fans of these singers, which effectively constructed hie community with the same taste of music. From their experience, in the construction of virtual communities by live streaming, the process proceeds as “adoption-recognition of authenticity-connection” (Dai Si-ming, Qu Tian-ya, Du Zi0cheng, 2016). The recognition of ‘authenticity’, in particular, is key to promoting connections, and this is labor part of their subjectivity. In real-time and frequent interactions, performing as another character is not easy. BJs must demonstrate their authenticity in order to create a more genuine image. Both Vincent and Lina authentically shared personal

tastes to attract fans and produced a sense of community. Moreover, the substance of the chats between BJ and fans are sharing the trivialities of everyday life, and the authenticity of a BJ maybe the most crucial draw for fans.

And, one's individual views also reflect tastes. Paofu had been a feminist storyteller to attract many women fans, and she directly scolded male audience members who wanted to harass her and criticized gender inequality in society today.

Compared to male fans, I have more female fans as woman BJ. We are like "good sisters (好姐妹)"... At the beginning, I wanted to attract men fans, so my image setting was that of a sweet girl, **but that is totally different from the real me.** Then, some male audience members came to my room wanted to molest me and said dirty words. I could not stand it and started to scold these men. Then, I received so many "good sisters" who are my fans now. It is very nice, and **I enjoy the time that we spend 'roasting' common experiences that females might have.** (Paofu)

These episodes that Paofu discussed with her fans were things she experienced herself or saw reflected in real life, which became narrative materials used to evoke her fans' enthusiasm to communicate. Moreover, in order to evoke emotional resonance, BJs must be gifted storytellers, and an engaging story drawn from the personal narratives of that BJ can construct a captivating scene, potent for producing affective responses. Doudo became successful as across-dressing BJ, which was an extremely difficult and controversial experience, and then he shared his story about how he grew from a mediocre into a successful BJ.

(In the streaming room of Doudo, 2020.6, 10 PM)

Doudo: I received an interview from an overseas student who is in Korea yesterday. They want to know why I want to be BJ and why live streaming is so popular in China. It is not that popular in foreign countries.

Ton: For what? For money! (laughed emoji)

TikTok No.1 zhi: Earning money, or else?

Doudo: We talked neatly for 1 Hour. From “how did I start” to “hopes for the future”, I reviewed my growth process. In this way, it was really not easy! Ah! really not easy. (Exciting)

If one day@: But you are a top BJ now!

Doudo: I was just an ordinary boy who had no money or education before. Accidentally, I started broadcasting. In four years, various things I experienced and the various people I met...

Ton: the Attack story of Doudo.

The personal narratives of Doudo not merely attracted fans, but also bolstered his authenticity. These narratives always are extracted from BJs’ own experiences, personality, knowledge, perceptions, and desires, which are then processed and remade according to their own self-reflection and the social culture of where they are received. Such affective labor as a BJ is also the process of employing human subjectivity into the objective world by objectifying one’s self-consciousness.

Therefore, there is no doubt that young BJs are ‘at work’ for income; it is work in which a young person consumes tastes and growth experiences that operate as the basis of their performance show (David Farrugia, 2016). Their self-narratives have been treated as a labor instrument for connecting her/his community where the center is that BJ.

4) Strengthened gender embodiment

The modes of gendered embodiment are crucial components of affective labor. Ever since live streaming first emerged, its connection with the gender embodiment unquestionably has never broken—good-looking women sit in front of the camera to attract male fans—and the recent trend is the increase of the number of male BJs. In a word, the field of live streaming is considerably gendered where heterosexual intimacy still is the crucial strategy of producing affect. Like manger 2-1 indicated, “Watching live streaming is like being in virtual love.” Both agencies and BJs consciously reproduce young masculinity or femininity when customer-facing, which involves BJ and viewers in the “fun” of creating dubious relationships. For this,

I analyzed how gender embodiment functions as labor implement for young BJs to mobilize their subjectivity.

The narratives about recruitment from agencies reproduce the trend of developing young masculinity or femininity. Manager 2-5 indicated that they only provide free dormitories for new BJs who they deem as having the potential to become popular BJs, and the most crucial criteria of this assessment include gender embodiment. Employers emphasized facial attractiveness with the perspective of the opposite sex or gender characteristics that attract heterosexual consumers. The estimation strengthens the gendered color in this work. Also, manager 2-2 directly pointed out how creating gendered connectivity is an essential part of BJ training:

Why would a Dage like to send gifts to a woman BJ? There are only two reasons—**wanting to be their friend or lover, but more is the latter**. So, as a BJ, especially female a BJ, one must figure out what that fan wants from them and what relationship they want to develop. If that BJ really likes that fan, there is nothing wrong with keeping things vague...If not, the BJ cannot directly reject them. So the best method is to play cat-and-mouse, don't reject them but **give more to imagine about theirs being a relationship between lovers**... (manager 2-2)

Indeed, the assumption that vivacious young masculinity or femininity contribute to interacting well with consumers in the service economy, and especially gender embodiment intrinsically creates a specific vibe of sexually charged relations by affective interaction. This gendered interaction is efficacious for creating profits and increasing customers. In this sense, the narratives of Paofu and Miaoxi illustrate well such predominant gendered embodiment. Paofu has a cool temperament, but her manager judged her appearance is 'suitable' for the character of a sweet girl, which it is a relatively easy mode for female BJ attracts male fans.

It is a fact that many male viewers watch streaming of female BJ 'purposively', and this is always **easier for soliciting Da Shang with gendered interactions**. So, I must perform like "a sweet girl". (How do you perform this role?) I just needed to **magnify gender stereotypes** and make male viewers enjoy their imagination. Some male viewers came to ask me for my private information, joked, and even flirted... let me say, I was so nauseated... (Paofu)

My image setting is that of a sexy woman, and in my short videos, I do not expose my face to attract viewers into my streaming room. it is easier for me to generate a profit because I am a new BJ without a special talent. And sometimes, I enjoyed the praise for male fans...But doing so caused others to focus on my body. (Miaoxi)

In the experiences of Paofu and Miaoxi, they had recognized that the monetization of the feminine embodiment is easier to attract fans, and performing ‘attractive femininity’ is what is expected and required. While Miaoxi could enjoy such gender expression, Paofu detested it because of contravention with her authenticity. And, not only women BJs, men BJs like Wangco and Vincent also were embedded into conventional heterosexual standards—i.e., how to be a cool guy that others like. The vivacious character of femininity or masculinity, been valued as a way of keeping audiences engaged in such a sexually charged affective atmosphere. It is unquestionable that some audiences often have sexual fantasies about BJs and hope to establish intimate relationships with them, and all of my informants were upfront about the effects of gender embodiment. That is, the imagination of a fantasy of lover relationship or the flirtation of gender embodiment is extremely effective in eliciting more Da Shang.

Moreover, there is, of course, also a contrast between man and woman BJs when they deal with this interaction. Due to such gendered interaction, female BJ keeps vigilant psychology in the construction of intimacy, and most female BJs in my interviews directly or indirectly showed clear psychological resistance.

I am a man and gaming BJ, and others have no “purposes” on me. **I also meet some brothers** who are in Chengdu. Last time, they met me nearby my home. It is pretty interesting... (thinking) some of them even live in another city but still come to meet up... **the feeling is amazing.. or wonderful. Live streaming made us become friends.** (Dabai)

I don’t expect to make real friends in live streaming, let alone a lover. Who would know if what they said is real or lie? So, I don’t want to bring the relationships [I have with them] into my real life. Yes, being BJ is my work, and the fans are the customers in my work... **It is risky for women, and I want to keep the moral line of mine.** (Miaoxi)

Here, we could see the gendered performance brings more challenges to female BJs, which occurs under a kind of socialized gender stereotype and sexuality. And the service-customer logic embedded into BJ's gendered behavior, and BJ is tasked with producing gendered embodiment. But the negative effect of exposing gendered characteristics such as 'sexual joking' and 'flirting' causes mental stress for female BJs, which results in a kind of alienation of affection.

2. Anxiety in the survival game

1) Threat of invisibility

In my interviews, Liu Liang (internet traffic, 流量) was frequently mentioned by every BJ and manager. Liu Liang refers to how a platform allocates the number of viewers to a creator so that users could see that BJ's rooming or view their short videos. In other words, it affects how many people could watch and engage with a BJ. The more visibility that a BJ attains, the greater the possibility of being popular and monetizing their content. In contrast, low Liu Liang means low popularity and income. How much Liu Liang a BJ could receive relies on the calculations and adjustments of the Tik Tok algorithm.

On TikTok, the algorithm constitutes new architectural frameworks for sorting, classifying, and ranking the mediated social contexts (Beer, 2016; Bucher, 2012; Diakopoulos, 2015). Tik Tok is a mobile platform where contents are rolling present on the user side, and if the algorithm does not push a BJ, viewers cannot see that BJ. Rather than using a traditional popularity-ranking algorithm, how TikTok's pushes and matches is based on user labels from big data—hundreds of millions of user's preferences, ages, gender, location, hobbies, occupations, and so forth are recorded to calculate the model of user portrait. Then, using these user portraits, the platform can accurately push 'customized content' to different audiences, which is also the reason why so many people become addicted to Tik Tok—what they received is precisely what they need, want, and like. In the meantime, the popularity-ranking algorithm has a considerable effect on visibility. It is based on the number of current audience

members and the amount of revenue generated through Da Shang. Recently, the ‘Likes’ that audiences give to a BJ by double-clicking on the screen¹² has also started to affect the popularity calculation of a BJ. Certainly, Da Shang is unquestionably the most powerful factor due to the monetary value of live streaming. And If a BJ is popular, he/she would have more Liu Liang for attracting bigger audiences, whereas it becomes considerably difficult for unpopular BJs to attain visibility. Thus, to improve their visibility, BJs have to apply various strategies and all of their resources for more Liu Liang. Huali (female, 27 years old) shared,

BJs make use of rules of gameplay in TikTok, like PK, the mechanism of push opportunity, the support for the new and paid ‘IDOU’ (e.g. BJs could purchase the Liu Liang). To be special, use of hot topics (趁热点), high-quality short video with more “Likes”, and the accomplishment of daily/weekly missions.. are helpful to increase their visibility...And in broadcasting, BJ could talk about some **hot topics of recent news, SNS, or TikTok in which people are interested.** (Huali)

This narrative shows that the drastic replacement of new/outdated trends in the digital environment intensifies the fast tempo of BJ work. Thus BJs must learn, improve, reflect, and innovate to catch customer orientation, which the implementation of their information-handling capacity is the way to mobilize their subjectivity into work.

If a BJ does not catch up with enough visibility, that BJ would be ‘out (淘汰)’ from the view of people. Here, the result of this survival game is not merely giving qualification trials to or rewarding outstanding BJs, instead, the loser of this game is out—that is, she becomes invisible. And the changeable digital environment and complex algorithm mean that winning currently does not guarantee everlasting success—a popular BJ might suddenly become unpopular while a little-known BJ perhaps catches his/her big break tomorrow—in a word, the algorithm creates, more crucially, an unknown survival game among BJs who have translated ‘having fun’ into ‘having a meal’. Here, the threat of invisibility, as the result of failure in this

¹²Double clicking results in one “like” being given to that particular BJ.

game, construct the trap of survival authenticity (Kim Hong-jung, 2014) in which BJs believe the pursuit of survival is the ultimate objective. In other words, they have recognized the pursuit of ‘not getting out’ is what they should keep doing, and thereby they put all kinds of resources into achieving this goal. Among my informants, the greatest concern of their work is not only how big their audience is currently, but how many people in their audience would come later or whether the number of fans would increase tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, etc.

The most worrying thing is no Liu Liang, I think. It means others could not see me, and also means I would have less income. When I had many viewers, I felt happy, but, meanwhile, I would feel anxious because I recognized it might be temporary. (Huali)

Like Huali, the mental status of BJs is always affected by Liu Liang, and the unknown survival game causes a threat of invisibility that both engenders a sense of insecurity. The resultant anxiety, Miaoxi told me, makes her lose sleep. Even Doudo, who had over 20 million followers, experienced a tough time when his Liu Liang was limited between April and September 2020, when Tik Tok changed its streaming policies 8 times. Also, Wangco complained:

Last month, my Liu Liang was pretty good, but Tik Tok changed its policies so that the number of current audiences in streaming rooms decreased and there were fewer viewings in my videos. So, my income has dropped this month. **When I see that there are only a few people in the room, I really do not want to broadcast anymore.. no confidence.** (Wangco)

Here we see that a BJ's career is intensely intertwined with the policies of the Liu Liang but BJs could not make decisions about anything on it, which resulted in feelings of powerlessness as well as resignation towards digital hegemonism. Incidentally, Tik Tok adopts manual patrol and AI technology to supervise every room in real-time. If a BJ had irregularities during their stream, the platform will punish that BJ by decreasing their Liu Liang, pausing streaming for 1-7days, or banning their ID.

Furthermore, the amount of visibility (Liu Liang) is regarded as virtual capital and indicates the status of a BJ; it can be transformed into other forms of capital such as reputation, opportunities for offline work, and so on. As Paofu said, “In this era, Liu Liang is equal to money, which brings more benefit than itself. Every BJ is striving to get more Liu Liang.” According to BJ’s Liu Liang, the hierarchization is augmented through various quantified figures, numbers, and symbols, such as the number of fans, and how much Da Shanga BJ received. And this hierarchization causes wide difference of capital between head BJ and ‘little’ BJ. As Paofu told me, “How much those ‘big’ BJs earn in one hour is way more than what we get for working for one week or one month.” This is primarily caused by the 80/20 Rule (Pareto Principle¹³) in the income gap between different BJs, and more significantly, head BJs have extreme hegemony in negotiations with the platform, agencies, and other BJs. That is, they can obtain more autonomous rights—for asking for higher shares of revenue, push opportunities, and so forth. In addition to Da Shang, a head BJ could receive advertising requests, and some fans would even send money directly to head BJ via WeChat Pocket. Popular BJs always skip from one agency to another according to which agency can give them the highest income and the most technical assistance. In a word, the rich become richer and the poor poorer, where these 90-Hou try to survive in hierarchization pressure of such law of the jungle of system.

2) The propertification of fans

Liu Liang brings viewers into rooms, and these fans whom BJs made much effort to attract are deservedly regarded by the BJs as ‘proprietary assets’. On the one hand, BJs must keep conforming to the loyalty of fans and preventing other BJs from ‘stealing’ their fans, especially in PK. On the other hand, BJs try anything they can to ‘absorb’ fans from other BJs. Such ‘fighting over property rights’ not only contributes to the sense of anxiety but also exacerbates the competition between BJs.

¹³The Pareto principle (also known as the 80/20 rule, the law of the vital few, or the principle of factor sparsity) states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes.

For a better understanding, I have illustrated the hierarchy of audiences in the field of live streaming.

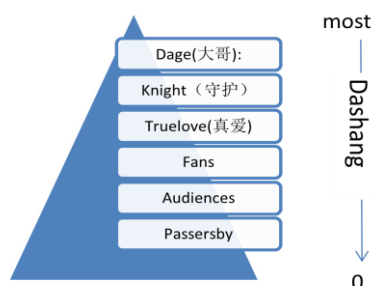


Table 17: the hierarchy of audiences

According to both how much Da Shang a fan has paid (objective) and the intimacy value (subjective) they have for a particular BJ, audiences can typically be divided into age (大哥), Knight(守护), Truelove(真爱), fans, audiences, and passersby. Dage is a crucial slang for Chinese BJs. Dage is not merely the viewer who gives the most Da Shang, but their behavior of giving Da Shang is extravagant in a manner which other viewers cannot afford, suggesting that Dage maybe people of wealth (high class) in the real world. And a BJ might have several Dages while some BJs have no Dage. As Miaoxi revealed to me:

The gap between first-tier BJ and us ‘little’ BJ is that we have no Dage. Even if there are only a few viewers, a Dage who gives many Da Shang is completely enough. **There is no meaning if you have many viewers but only a few of them pay.** So, scattered fans cannot satisfy the desire of earning money. If you have a Dage, the worries about money will go away. (Miaoxi)

Indeed, BJs recognize the significance of ‘rich’ audiences for them in profit-oriented calculations. In other words, BJs are compelled to realize that their careers are dependent on the wills and tastes of a small group of rich sponsors from the very beginning (Xiaoxing Zhang, Yu Xiang & Lei Hao, 2018). As Miaoxi explained, “Now, no Dage, [means] no BJ.” And Yinying shared her experience of maintaining Dage.

If a Dage is in my room, I of course give the best interactions and reactions to the Dage. (How do you do it?) When Dage comes in, I’ll call his name, ask whether he slept well

yesterday, whether he is busy...**just to make him feel that he is a VVIP in my room and experience pleasure.** (Yinying)

As Yinying's narrative shows, she paid more attention to the relationship with her Dages, because single Da Shang might be much more summation of virtual gifts from many fans. Also, BJs consciously guide loyal fans to compliment their Dagea. This can be seen in the following interaction from a sshow in August 2020, where other fans expressed thanks to a Dage together.



Image 32: the chatting text in a live streaming

(Translation)

(Lv.16) (fan lv. 11 of Xiao mianao) Mian wozhu :@Auspicious Dragon and Phoenix Thanks Dage

(Lv.2) Warm-up (flower) interaction (rainbow)Administrator: Thanks for @Beautiful Encouter sending the 'Hot Air balloon'(gift)

BJ: let us give music to our Dage! Thanks my Dage to give me Fairy stick!

(Lv.21) (fan lv. 11 of Xiao mianao) Good Dream: @Auspicious Dragon and Phoenix Thanks Dage

(Lv.2) Warm-up (flower) interaction (rainbow)Administrator: Thanks @(start) Free for give Heart!

(Lv.21) (fan lv. 11 of Xiao mianao) Good Dream:@ Auspicious Dragon and Phoenix Thanks Dage

(user 32004457 joined)

In intra-organization interaction, that loyal fans type unitive comments in the chatting window creates a sense of community, and BJ would lead their audience's collective attention to a person who pays more Da Shang, indicative of high status, which would then create a sense of community. This will be discussed further in the following chapter. Additionally, Yinying indicated that she would 'absorb' other fans or Dage through PK, while she must prevent other BJs from stealing' fans or Dage from her. Essentially, a Dage is a scarce and exploitable resource on any platform. As

a result, many BJs proactively strive for an opportunity to develop/maintain relationships with Dages, and BJs who have a Dage must be on guard against others who try to poach their Dage. And as Yinying mentioned, during PK, BJs positively appeal to fans of the opposite BJ, inviting them to come to his/her room and prevent his/her fans from leaving for the opposite room, which is a dominant method for ‘stealing’ fans.

[In the PK of Kele(BJ 1) and Chijiang(BJ 2), 2020.9.04]

BJ 1: The Guagua of my fans is in your room?

BJ 2: No

Guagua: I am still here...

BJ 2: Guagua! if you want to come, just feel free to come. I will warmly welcome you!

BJ 1: No no, don't listen to him. Just stay here. Our family is the best.

BJ 2: Yoo. Last time, I lost to BJ 1 so how can you come to give some medical fee to me? BJ 1 is not a good man, believe me!

BJ1: What? why am I not good? Don't slander me! Warning! If you lose later, you will face serious punishment.

BJ 2: Guagua, Will you see him tease me? He is not really a good person! Come here! ...

In the above scene, two BJs battle for this fan, which constituted a performance with more interesting highlights, and such a war over fans contribute to the embodiment of the sense of being. The above excerpt depicts a relatively ‘gentle’ war, and some BJs even taunt, insinuate, provoke, even prank their competitors in PK. Also, some BJs would send private messages to fans of other BJs and even slander other BJs to break their relationships, which is a common occurrence in wars over Dage or significant fans. Duzi reported, “Because pornographic performance is forbidden, some BJs in my agency send photos of sexual posts or sexual connotations fans chatting room or personal chatting to maintain fans and attract Dage.” Similarly, manager 2-3 told me, “One of my BJs sent private messages to other BJs’ Dage saying ‘good morning’ everyday for 3 weeks. Then she successfully attracted the attention of that Dage, which helped her receive a large Da Shang.” Indeed, many

managers like manager 2-3 encourage their BJs to proactively coach Dage, and when a BJ has successfully poached a Dage from another BJ, it is regarded as due to their incomparable abilities and considered a personal achievement. Some BJs even chose deviant behavior or conspire with agencies. Manager 2-4 told me the following:

I once had a BJ who took cooperated well to attract a targeted Dage. Accidentally, I knew there was a Dage who is the CEO of a company in our city. He is about 50 years old and used to getting up early in the morning when he liked watching live streaming of singing. Then I asked this woman BJ to broadcast in the morning, and I gave her push opportunities until that Dage could see her. Also, she changed her ID to something similar to the real name of that Dage. Eventually, that Dage noticed her whose singing is good, and thought it is 'fate' when found her name is similar to his name. Then, we were successful. (Manager 2-4)

Likewise, some managers would have private contact with Dage, and promise to return a percentage of the money to the Dage. And some BJ could receive help from their agencies who use fake IDs to give Da Shang, which promotes popularity and operates conformity or competitive behavior of other viewers. Certainly, BJ must return the cost of the 'false Da Shang' to the agency. Incidentally, whilst Dage are crucial for BJ-career, other fans including knights and true lovers are comparably important, especially for some BJs who do not have Dage.

Furthermore, such competition over proprietary assets of fans causes extremely distrustful and bad relations among BJs. In particular, it fuels anxiety in BJs because they are worried about the loss of these proprietary assets. Fafang experienced that a woman BJ tended to 'steal' her fans by sending private messages to her important fans, which led her to break off her relationship with that BJ as well as lose trust in other BJs. Yinying added, "I think the relationships between BJs are very competitive rather than being ones of friendship. Even if we are seemingly friendly, the competitive relationship is more dominant. Comparison, competition, even fighting..." Besides, such propertification of fans reveals the parasitic relation between fans and BJs, and it is not fixed assets. The room is a semi-open space where viewers can freely enter or leave.

The viewer can come or leave as they like. **Someone said he would come back tomorrow but I have not seen him anymore.** In the beginning, I believed what they promised me. But, as time went by, I expect nothing from others (Huali)

Like Huali, almost every BJ worries about relationship maintenance when it comes to their fans, which is extremely fragile in the cyberworld and restricts BJs' subjectivities. Indeed, such virtual intimacy is sufficiently precarious and unsafe, and the left is possibly temporary as well as permanent.

3) Intensified self-government of better content

Since 2012, 'content' has become emphasized in the performances of live streaming, and various content including games, sports, and mukbang emerged when audiences developed more diverse needs for content consumption. Despite the content of entertainment BJs being primarily talking, singing, or dancing, the quest for diversity, quality, creation, and updates to their content is ever-present. In this context, 90-Hou BJs must intensify self-government of better contents. Fafang's content includes talking and singing, but she felt her performance was boring and in need of change:

I think I should be more 'open' in interactions with viewers, even if I am a quiet girl in reality. My content is too 'dry'. I should make jokes, play words game with viewers for creating a better atmosphere. And I plan to learn some talent too. (Fafang)

Fafang thought that the reason her stream was not popular was highly correlated to its content that is not abundant and attractive, and then for an extended period of time she became anxious about changing her content. Similarly, Wangco had reflected on how to develop his content, especially since his Liu Liang decreased starting in April 2020. He told me that he is planning to add home fitness, introduce shopping information, and so forth. While I observed his shows, he continually discussed with his fans what kinds of content he could do during broadcasting, while his fans positively gave some suggestions.

And the quest for better content persistent. This is apparent in my conversations with Yinying and Doudo, who were among the more successful BJs I interviewed. They said, “If I broadcasted the same content every day, my fans might get tired. When other BJs have created new content but make no progress, I will gradually lose popularity.” Thus, to improve their content, 90-Hou BJs invest large amounts of energy and time into self-development. Among those I interviewed, primarily, BJs chose to join the training programs of agencies like Miaoqi and Paofu. But, such organizational training is not for every BJ. Manger 2-5 suggested, “We only provide customized training and support for outstanding BJs. There are too many BJs, so we can't spend time, energy, or money on every BJ.” In line with this narrative, most of my informants indicated that a few agencies would provide cultivating, customized, and recommendation opportunities for new BJs, and told me that only some potential BJs or ‘top’ BJs could receive support. Secondly, BJs adopted self-studying in their off-hours, which was the most dominant form of self-development for these youth. Dabai studied video editing, and Vincent collected performance materials including music, news, crosstalk. Thirdly, BJs would learn from other BJs and directly get help from BJs who had come before them.

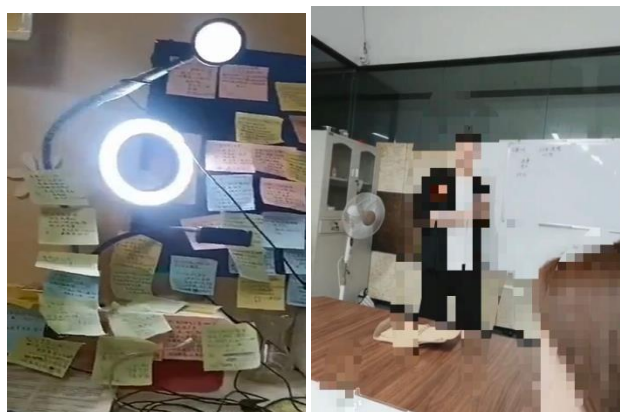


Image 33: The memo about daily reflection and contents collection from a BJ of manger 2-3

Image 34: BJ Doudo wasleading a class for new BJ in his agency

In this sense, content forces these youth workers to constantly be self-developing amid the fast-changing trends in digital media. BJs must actively prepare content

before broadcasting and innovate their content at set intervals. If not, a BJ might be 'out' from the view of audiences soon.

3. The tension from relationships

1) Monetized desire and morality

As mentioned earlier regarding the work dispositifs of BJs, these reveal that the affective interaction of live streaming has been monetized by virtual symbols where Da Shang-oriented mechanisms affected profit-oriented behavior. As 90-Hou, these youth pursue authentic connections and self-identity, but they also aspire for more economic compensation through their work, which is both the starting point of being BJ as well as the destination. This does not mean that BJs should lie to create a false image or behave illegally to obtain benefits. Instead, BJs quickly adapt to the rules of the profit-oriented game in Tik Tok, and monetize their interactions with fans, especially Dage or potential Dage, including by packaging their online identities, objectifying the value of connections, and spectacularizing virtual status to gain higher moneymaking potential.

I would welcome everyone who came to my room. But if the user level is high, I might call that ID twice so that that person would like to have reactions with me... The reason why some people like Da Shang is that they tend to improve their sense of being. (Vincent)

As Vincent described, BJs would positively connect with high-tier audiences. In other words, BJs tend to draw a clear line between fans – particularly rich ones – and those of others. Besides, BJs create 'the list of price of admission', by which they create a boundary that is commercialized by the purchasing capacity of audiences. That is, according to how many Da Shanga viewer has paid, a BJ would exchange access to different connecting channels to that viewer. In the following picture, these BJs wrote that if a fan reached a certain level (levels 6 and 7 in images), they would get access to fan club or be given personal contact.



Image 35/36: The bid price for purchasing BJs' private contact

Furthermore, some BJs set a more special list of consumption levels, such as, “If a fan’s level is over Lv. 2, they can access the fan chatting room. Giving me Porsche (an expensive gift)–[means I’ll give you] my WeChat ID. For Lv. 10 fans–my private contact” (the fieldwork of BJ Ling, 2020.8).

Yet some BJs suggested that doing so was to manage fans and prevent interference. This resonates with the behavior in which a BJ bargains with their viewers about the price of Da Shang-reactions (song, dance, action). For example, “If you give me a ‘Hot-air balloon’, I will show you a hot dance” was directly marked in the streaming room of BJ Xiner (fieldwork, 2020.08.16). And in the excerpt below, a BJ constructed the relation of intimacy and Da Shang.

Congratulations to Feier upgrade Level 7 of fan. Everyone! The higher level you are, the higher status you have in my heart. (Fieldwork of BJ Yibo, 2020.8.27)

Here, BJ tried to make fans consider only Da Shang to be a real representation of intimacy. Yet some BJs suggested that doing so was to deal with the interference which many strangers send them private messages for asking personal contact, this behavior resonates with *relation-based commodities*. Hence, the market logic has been working in how they interact with a special ‘price’ rather than their authentic subjectivity. In a word, the profit-oriented system as well as their stimulated desire compels BJs to follow ‘market logic’ to manage their behavior. Consequently, BJ’s emotions and interactions are “sold” at an express marker price and the concept of real money is resolved by virtual special effects. Most BJs would feel anxious when Da Shang is absent, due to individual expectations.

And the imagination and stimulation of a deluge of Da Shang contribute BJ to be in affective resounds—“a generalized and ongoing indebtedness, gratitude, expectation, memory, sentiment—in short, lively social feeling” (Hyde, 1979, p. 84; Xiaoxing Zhang, et, 2019).

I clearly remember that time I received my first ‘carnival’. I just instinctually said ‘thanks to XX for giving me carnival!’...wait! ‘carnival’?! I was so surprised at that moment and stood in amazement for several seconds. Others (audience members) commented that ‘Wow, Daiba received a carnival!’, and everyone seemed to be excited. (Dabai)

However, Dabai said such stimulation gradually makes him desire more expensive gifts and non-inductive in authentic interaction with fans. Similarly, Wangco indicated, “I also thank those fans who support me but cannot afford too many gifts. But, I need money. The money is the most real for me.” In this sense, these 90-Hou already recognized the essential of these monetized relationships. Here, they would reflect whether it is moral to use emotion to make profits. Lina and Wangco shared,

Some of my fans are students, so I always let them [be despite them] not getting my Da Shang because they do not have income. However, I also expect more Da Shang. (Lina)

I have a girlfriend and I think I should keep my distance from women fans. But, to be honest, I want to have some women fans because women fans might pay more to male BJ compared to male BJ-male fans. So, [whether should I lie] to say I have no girlfriend or not...? (Wangco)

Like Lina and Wangco, the tension of self-dilemma is palpable in their reflections on the monetized relations they have with fans. Wangco added, “In fact, being a BJ means that I have to *ingratiate myself with others*, even apple-polish. I do not like this and I am not that kind of person. I think if a person always plays up to others, the personality will be lost. This will hurt my esteem.” Here, the descriptions—“I am not that kind of person”, “personality”, and “esteem”—in this narrative suggest that Wangco is individualized and egotistical, which is one of the characteristics of the 90-Hou generation. Compared to the 70 Hou and 80 Hou, 90-Hou dare to resist the

mainstream and insist on their pursuit of equal relationships. But the work of BJ in the logic of service labor causes the dilemma that these 90-Hou might be lost authentic self in this profit-orientated system. This caused self-alienation to some extent.

Moreover, not only in the relation of BJ-fans, but BJs have to deal with the relations with other BJs, agencies and so on. Such complex interpersonal communication is immensely strenuous, both mentally and emotionally. As Dabai describes, the scenes of interaction in the room are likened to the collective behavior in the real world, and everyone has their own position and interest demand. BJ must take the role of adjusting the relations in the virtual community

Once, one woman fan quarreled with another man fan in the streaming room because she disagreed with what that fan said to me. I did not know which side I should be on. And everyone was focusing on how the two of them fought rather than my game, even they continued to quarrel in the chat room after the broadcasting. (Dabai)

Here, how to balance the relation in interaction becomes nerve-racking for BJs. The suppression of intimacy asks BJ to be talented in dealing with interpersonal relationships. And for Miaoqi, whose image setting is sexual woman, there are always some male viewers who tend to harass her, ask her for personal contact, or directly ask her to be their girlfriend. She told me, "If I want to get a salary, I have to sustain this stress of relationships. But I will keep my moral line." Indeed, it is a fact that the trade of eroticism exists. "There are some illegal platforms or agencies that would encourage female BJ to have a meeting with Dage, or send nude photos in a chatting room with fixing a price. After all, the advent of live streaming coincides with the dubious relationship"(manger 2-1). Here, the suppression of constructing intimacy contributes to the tension of their subjectivity. Duzi shared:

At that time, our company asked me to join in the selection of the spokesperson. At first, I thought it would be a good experience. But, in the interview process, they (senior managers) let me try on a swimsuit in the scene, and asked me to choose one cup of wine from three cups, a little bit of wine, medium glass of wine, and full glass of wine, and strange question

like “If our company encountered crisis and we needed your help, would you ask Dage to help us with sacrificing your interest ?... I just felt [so offended].(Duzi)

The negative experience was much more than she had psychologically anticipated, and it became one of the reasons why Duzi was determined to quit her agency in the fast development stage. Whoever audience or agencies, they believe that BJ should act as they require with the exchange of economic pay. In such monetized intimacy, it is not easy for BJ to independently mobilize their subjectivities.

2) Obscured labor exploitation

BJs must use all kinds of resources, strategies, and attempts to attract more Da Shang, and they must ruthlessly pursue self-development, which are, in many cases, self-exploitation. In this context, labor exploitation is obscured. On the one hand, the gamification system itself ‘guides’ and ‘entices’ BJs to focus on how to achieve individual hegemony of survival and success rather than resisting labor exploitation. The profit-driven infrastructural design has caused the idea of “everything is for sale/consumption” to affect their subjectivity.

The agency did not provide me much help, and I think it is because my streaming is not good enough now. But my agency [promised] they would provide me professional guidance, a studio, and a photography team when I have better performance. (Fafang)

Like Fafang, rather than resisting such a system, she tended to improve herself first and identify with the hierarchical system. These youth deeply recognize that it is extremely difficult to change the external world, but they can change themselves to survive. To get to a higher level, these 90-Hou mobilize their subjectivities to “I will work harder”, “I should try to other styles to challenge”, and “to learn more skills and shoot better video”. It caused the trap of authenticity in survivalism wherein these youth have a stronger desire for survival.

Meanwhile, the schema of ‘dream= earning money’ is materialized and reinforced by external force. In the following pictures, managers demonstrated the success and

achievement of other BJs on SNS, including their bank statements, screenshots of daily achievement with the explicit number, and even the luxury car that BJ purchased by working hard.



Image 37: the bank statement of BJ salary;

Image 38: the daily performance of outstanding BJ;

Image 39: a manger advertised a luxury car that his BJ bought with the income from Da Shang

Not only economic stimulation, but these employers must add the motivational contexts of the bootstrap ideology of self-government, where the value of "hard work pays off" is emphasized. This exaggerated propaganda constructs 'illusion' for employees—only through working hard and following the guidance of the agency, a BJ can succeed—to encourage self-exploitation. This trap of authenticity cause these Chinese youth

On the other hand, the labor relations between agency-platform-BJ are not clearly defined, which makes it difficult for BJs to protect their labor rights. Because professional BJ is an extremely new job in China, there is a lack of related laws or regulations to define this relationship. The arrangement—managing and managed, supervising and supervised, commanding and commanded—is weak in the labor relation of BJ, which is different from the traditional "capital-worker" relation. In the meantime, agencies is crafty to avoid the obligations of employers, including welfare and work protection, and these employers tend to encroach the fruit of BJ's labor with the least cost. Dabai experienced labor disputes with his agency.

When I was a popular BJ with 50,000 fans, I should have received a base salary of 12,000 yuan and the Da Shang of December that is valued at over 50,000 yuan. But I found only 20,000 yuan of wages in my bank card. **The platform took 30%, agency took 40% and I only had 30%.** Even agency would extract 70% of my base salary. Without practical helpful guidance and support, the agency still could ‘eat’ my labor value. But they **used cooperation contracts rather than labor contracts**, and there was no contact ID which means it is not recorded with the Labor Bureau—no force of law—so **I cannot protect my rights.** (Dabai)

Similarly, the agency of Huali deducted her wage for the reason that she used [free] dormitory but her work performance was not up to standard, but this term was not marked in her contract. Further, if BJs decide to leave the agency, the agency might threaten them with liquidated damages or canceling their broadcasting ID. As Duzi reported, “When I decided to leave, they took out our previous contract and asked me to pay 10,000 yuan in liquidated damages. Otherwise, I have to continue work for them”. And giving up the ID that is the value of all their paymeans that all that the BJ accumulated and endeavored or paid in that period will be disappear. Ironically, agencies ‘enjoy’ the profit produced by BJs, but they provide nothing for those BJs as they promised in recruitment. “All of what an agency does is funny business so that they can just skim our earned income” (Wangco); this is a sentiment that came up frequently when my BJ informants talked about agencies. What managers promise during recruitment has become bait for attracting more youth who are socially inexperienced.

In the labor infringement, if young BJs want to pursue compensation through legal proceedings, not only will there be mental and economic damages, but also the lack of related laws means that they might not provide legal recourse. As a result, many BJ only could choose to bear this labor infringement.

Meanwhile, the problems of well-being are prevalent among these youth. The most frequent problem is insufficient rest. Evenings and nights are the “peak times” for live streaming, meaning that many BJs choose to broadcast at these times. As a result, BJs must stay up or sleep during the day and be awake at night, which causes

physical harm. Vincent continued to stay up for 3 months and did not even sleep on the day of our interview. Miaoxi and Fangfa had symptoms of endocrine dyscrasia and then they suspended broadcasting for several days until their symptoms became better, at which point they went back to work again. Even some punishment of PK could harm BJs' health, like Doudu who suffered from indigestion, but he was once even asked to drink 10 raw eggs in PK. This made him painful.

Moreover, professional BJs are banned from resting for more than 2 day. Due to the precarious connection with their fans, BJs are banned from suspending their broadcasting (断播) for more than one day per week. This, of course, means that vacations are virtually impossible. Dabai experienced this result of suspending his broadcasting:

I clearly remember what Li Jiaqi talked about the suspension of broadcasting. He said, **“if we assume there are 1,000 of Taobao BJs, my fans will see other 999 BJs when I do not broadcast on that day”**. I made such a mistake. After I quit my previous job, I decided to travel for some time. But when I got back, I found that many fans had disappeared, and the atmosphere was very cold in my room. (Dabai)

In the description of Dabai, the visibility of every BJ is easily overwhelmed in the rapid renewal of the digital environment. The constituted work leads them to break the connections with other parts of life. Huali told me, “Wake, go to my company, start broadcasting, end, go back to my dormitory and sleep and...like a hamster... When I met friends, I found that I do not know what teleplay is or what new restaurants have opened, because I did not have time. Also, They dose not understand my work.” And, BJs are asked to expose personal off-line life for maintaining the relationship and constructing an image, which makes the blurry boundary of work and life.

All these conditions reflect the central dilemma of BJ work: it should be free but also suppressed, and BJs would go back to this suppression for pursuing survival. Being BJ should be free with strongly characteristic self-expression, and workers can achieve self-efficacy, emotional compensation in interaction, which created positive

experiences. However, the requirements of affective production in BJ work compels them to adapt their youth subjectivities into a labor instrument, including their tastes, how to fun, connectivity capabilities, and so on. Especially, the gamification and profit-oriented intimacy of the service industry causes them to be anxious about their survival. They spend great amounts of personal time on self-development, which becomes self-exploitation. Thus, we must ask: who are these BJ? why did they insist on this work, and how did they negotiate self and reality in the survival game?

IV. The entrepreneurial self with survival logic

In chapter II, I introduced the social background, labor relation, and dispositifs of TikTok BJs, and in chapter III, I analyzed how BJs mobilize their subjectivities to produce the value of their labor, which has proven to be a form of self-instrumentalization. The infrastructure of gamification is elaborately constructed by agencies and platforms, where the profit-oriented system contributes to BJs's strenuous pursuit of individual survival by obtaining more Da Shang. Consequently, there is a dualist feature in BJ work. They have created unrestricted self-expression and construct intimate relations with viewers by means of performing authenticity, but the survival dispositif and individual desire have constituted restrictions on the mobilization of their subjectivities. In this chapter, I will explore how 90-Hou BJs reconstruct their subjectivities amid such a dilemma.

Primarily, the conception of the entrepreneurial self is applied. According to Foucault in 1978-1979,¹⁴ the entrepreneurial self denotes that the mode of the entrepreneur is extended by individuals into non-economic fields, and individuals operate themselves as a kind of business with the aim of attaining economic compensation in the market. In this sense, the economic production of a worker is analogous to a micro-entrepreneur, where the subject of labor is both an owner of capital and its producer. Further, the human capital of that worker is precisely the

¹⁴ Foucault M, Davidson A I, Burchell G. The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979 [M]. Springer, 2008.

machine that produces profits. In other words, Foucault indicated that the laborer is an economic agent with a unique subjectivity. If the environment is easily affected by the regulatory role of the market, that worker will certainly improve their various capacities to fare better market competition.

In the Chinese context, the Chinese government announced a plethora of reform policies that reinforce market-oriented innovation, and as a consequence, the market has taken on the crucial role of distributing resources. In the market economy, the quality and quantity of resources, an individual could possess, has been dependent on the human capital of that particular individual (Wang Ning, 2018). Hence, Chinese people have recognized the importance of accumulating social, economic, and cultural capital, and individuals should be eager to improve their self-government. For 90-Hou, they are already habituated to attaining resources through various competitions in this era during which the market mechanism has permeated into most aspects of their life since the time that they were born. Furthermore, the economic system has continued to barrel towards neoliberalism since the 90-Hou generation has entered into labor market (Rofel, 2007). Chinese youth are increasingly cognizant of the state's retreat from society and aware that they must fight more for individual livelihood (Chris K. K. Tan & Zhiwei Xu, 2017) compared to their parents' generation, who enjoyed the benefits of the socialist system. The tremendous rise in new occupations in the internet economy attracts more and more 90-Hou in hopes of a gold rush. In the meantime, consumerism in the market-economy has encouraged 90-Hou have more variegated desires about what "the good life". Thus, 90-Hou must quickly adapt to various changes lest they "get out" amid the rapid innovation.

All of the BJs who participated in my study are 90-Hou and they either had ambitious goals of becoming top BJs or already had become popular BJs. Being a BJ is not simply for killing time or leisure activity, rather they must always be adjusting their body and mind and using various strategies to improve their work, which requires comprehensive abilities including learning, understanding, acknowledge, and personal traits. The algorithm and gamification of Chinese streaming fiercely exacerbates such "uncertainty", forcing BJs to marshal all of their resources to

compete, especially their affective capital including creativity, enthusiasm, moral qualities, resilience, mindfulness, dreams (Kim Hong-joong, 2015). In their descriptions of the work process, they were continuously reflecting, negotiating, and reconstructing their subjectivities for the negotiations between reality and their desires. Accordingly, I focus on their individual experiences and narratives for exploring how they react to such restrictions on their subjectivities, and how they become survivalists of affective work to project their own streaming business.

1. “To be my own boss”

1) The desire of 90-Hou BJ in the Chinese digital economy

90-Hou reap the benefits of economic development in the market economy, middle-class growth, globalization, and modernization. Compared to 80-Hou, who directly experienced the juncture of socialism and the market economy, 90-Hou is predominantly affected by the market economy itself. Consequently, the habitus of 90-Hou is more marketized in that they pay more consideration to individual capacity in competition and self-government for the goal of personal happiness. And it has been constantly expanding and improving the standard of survival, which is no longer limited to making a living, but the higher needs of education, employment, marriage, and medical care, which all strengthen competition. In a word, the 90-Hou's yearning for survival is transformed from a static standard of "sufficiency" into the dynamic standard of "development" (Zhao Yunting & Liu Yuankang, 2018). At the same time, and they are also more confident in Chinese culture and hold positive outlooks on the national future. But, the emergence of neoliberalism has made young Chinese recognize the gradual diminishment of the state's role in economic fields, and they are faced with the increasing individual risks of unemployment, marriage, high housing costs, and support of their only-child parents, and so forth. Hence, the survival dilemma constructs neoliberal subjectivity.

In this sense, 90-Hou are enthusiastic about plugging into profitable industries. Chinese timeliness, encapsulated in the phrase “grasp the opportunity (抓住机会)”, is

a well-known slogan in the 40 years of Chinese reform which entails that people should know how to be speculative in order to generate a great fortune amid a hot economic trend. For example, the wave of ‘venture into business (下海经商)’ encouraged the generation directly preceding the 90-Hou to become entrepreneurs rather than enlist in socialist civil services, thus generating a cohort of self-employed, private business owners, contractors in rural areas, and pioneers in border trade. Ambitious Chinese seized the drastic social transformation as an opportunity to create wealth and improve their social status. This historical reality has been affecting 90-Hou to pursue wealth in emerging industries. Since 2008, 90-Hou have gradually become the main force in the labor market, and this generation exhibits active differentiation in various methods of coping with survival (Kim Hong-joong, 2015). With this historic background, 90-Hou believe they should continue to pursue self-development so that they are able to grasp an opportunity when it comes, or reap benefits from some profitable industry. And live streaming precisely is one of such rapidly expanding industries.

Primarily, being a professional BJ is regarded as an opportunity or breakthrough in life, especially for disadvantaged youth or unemployed 90-Hou. One of the reasons for this is that there is a low barrier to entry for becoming a BJ—low requirements for education and background experience. According to statistics from Zhilian Recruitment (智联招聘, one of the most popular recruiting websites in China) in 2020, the educational requirement for positions related to live streaming was generally lower; the percentage of jobs requiring junior college and undergraduate degrees was respectively 18.54% and 7.11%, while nearly 70% of recruitment notices mentioned no educational requirement, and in terms of skill or work experience, the percentage of those that did not require any prior experience reached 72.61%. In this sense, the possibility of high incentives but low requirements has attracted 90-Hou who are at risk of unemployment. Additionally, the cost of starting to broadcast is relatively low, including the cost of a smartphone, internet, clothes, cosmetics, fill-in light, and the optional purchases of microphones and sound cards that some BJs make. This low investment relatively reduces the risk of failure. Dou Dou has been a BJ

for nearly 5 years. He was born in a rural area and moved to a large city to earn a living with his high school diploma, and the difficulties he faced seeking regular employment drove him to his decision to become a cross-dressing BJ who wears female clothes to create comedic content.

Because I do not have a good education, and it was very difficult for me to find a good job in the city. I had been a coal inspector. I had to touch coal every day, my hands and my face were always very dirty. I knew this was harmful to my health. But, what could I do? **I had no educational qualifications, no skills...** It was 2016. Live streaming started to become popular and some BJs were like stars who had music albums and joined entertainment activities. My friends talked about how being a BJ is profitable. So, **I thought I could give it a shot**, so then I started this journey of making my living by being a professional BJ. (Doudo)

According to Doudo, becoming a BJ gave him new hope for transcending his destiny. In this sense, being a BJ becomes an alternative way for low-class youth to achieve upward mobility. Like Doudo, there are tens of thousands of young Chinese people who move to large cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou that are regarded as Holy Lands replete with better living facilities and opportunities for them to live out their dreams. However, not only the forces of competition but also high living expenses in these big cities have suppressed these youth. Contrastively, In 2016 when Doudo first determined to become a broadcaster, news about the legendary stories about certain outstanding BJs making great fortunes had been capturing headlines, such as “That BJ made a great fortune overnight(一夜暴富)” and “XX BJ flaunted wealth(炫富)”. It gave 90-Hou the illusion that being a BJ is effortless and a quick way to earn money, which perfectly dovetailed with the imperious desire for wealth among contemporary Chinese youth. Even though they understand that it is an illusion, 90-Hou are enticed to join into the “gold rush”.

And though they could not become mega-rich BJ, the average income of a BJ still has been higher than that of other jobs. According to a report¹⁵ on professional BJs in 2018, the monthly income of 21.0% of professional BJs had exceeded 10,000

¹⁵ 《The report of BJ in 2018》, The income of 21% of BJ was over 10k, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2019-01/08/c_137725701.htm

yuan(≈1450 US dollars), and according to the report of Zhilian Recruitment,¹⁶ the monthly average wages of BJs was respectively 10,087 and 9423 yuan (≈1365 US dollars) in the third quarter of 2017 and 2019. This was similar to wages earned by white-collar workers.

Meanwhile, the unemployment is also serious among undergraduates. Whilst Miaoqi and Paofu possessed college diplomas, this did not mean that their job prospects were any better. They indeed struggled to find decent jobs due to an absence of ‘useful’ skills or experience. Miaoqi was determined to become a professional BJ at the beginning of 2020. One reason that precipitated this decision was that she lost her previous job due to COVID-19, and another reason was that she found it difficult to find other profitable work besides being a BJ. She told me that her university is not considered very good in China and her liberal arts major also seems “useless” whereas graduates with science or engineering degrees are more sought-after the market. In a word, a lack of ‘useful’ skills became an obstacle for her employment. This is a prevalent problem among Chinese 90-Hou. In this context, the enrollment of Chinese in higher education has continually risen, which in turn has resulted in the depreciation of the college diploma. And the Fourth Industrial Revolution has precisely increased the demand for talent in science and technology, but the drastic expansion of liberal arts majors has still outpaced that of science departments, especially at second- and third-tier universities. This is because the cost of science majors is higher than that of liberal arts. As a result, the structural employment market opened the eyes of 90-Hou to the ‘uselessness’ of certain majors. By the way, the fact that vocational education is absent in Chinese colleges also contributes to unemployment. As a result, large portions of unemployed university students join NEET post-graduation, and the meaning of graduating from university is paradoxical—it is necessary yet useless for employment, where the divide between school and work is more dominant. Duzi, who studied at a respectable university, stil

¹⁶ The average of the income of live streaming is 9424, not everyone is Li Jiaqi whose income could be over 100M, <https://finance.sina.com.cn/chanjing/cyxw/2020-01-02/doc-iihnzakh1488839.shtml>

felt anxious about her major not being beneficial for finding employment and chose to pursue a second major in commerce studies.

In the meantime, the precipitous development of digital entertainment has created new positions well as positive perspectives. While we spoke, Maoxi repeatedly emphasized the career prospects of being a popular BJ as highly favorable.

Especially in COVID-19, e-commerce is active when other industries also started to use live streaming to develop their business, and such a trend will be more powerful. **If you could be a successful BJ, not only virtual gifts but also other advertisers will ask the BJ to advertise goods(带货) for them.** It is profitable. (Miaoxi)

As Miaoxi reported, ‘live streaming+sales’ is extremely prosperous in China, and the Chinese government actively encourages its development. This contributed to more and more 90-Hou aspire to hop on the bandwagon for obtaining more wealth. Besides, some agencies provide a base salary and a free dormitory for BJs, like those that Paofu, Miaoxi, and Huali belong to. Paofu moved from a small town to a big city but she could not afford the prohibitive costs of renting a room during her internship. Then she found her agency, which provides her with a dormitory at no cost.

To be honest, it (a free single dormitory) is enticing. Renting a room in the big city is too costly for poor youth...In this city, if you're an intern, over 1/2 of the salary will be spent on renting... and it is sharing house rather than an apartment. And I am interested in the field of new media and the internet, but as a liberal arts student, I could apply for a position that needs technology, right?... I decided to have a try. (Paofu)

Similar to Paofu, Miaoxi lived in a dormitory made up of single rooms with the function of BJs' personal studios, while Huali lived in a shared house with other BJs. In this sense, being a BJ provides a temporary haven for these migrant youth.



Image 40/41: the free dormitories of Paofu and Miaoxi

Moreover, being a BJ becomes an alternative means of self-achievement for some 90-Hou who hold fast to the dream of becoming an entertainment star. At a time when live streaming has become a daily landscape of mass entertainment consumption on a similar scale to TV and movies, people pay much attention to who particular BJs are and what types of content they are creating. This contributes to creating a grass-roots culture as well as virtual celebrities whose popularity does not pale in comparison to that of ‘real’ stars. As Doudu confirmed, “The popular BJs were on account of stars who could release music albums, hold fans meeting like some reality show.” Furthermore, some entertainment trainees would start broadcasting before their debut in order to accumulate popularity or procure live expenses. Yinying, who had 1 million followers on her channel, had always dreamed of becoming a star.

At a very young age, I admired those celebrities who showed up on TV, so I wanted to be a star. However, **I recognized it is too hard to achieve as I grew up.** Until I started to broadcast as entertainment BJ, the advantage of my appearance worked for attaining popularity... **I thought it is another way for me to come true to star dream to some extent.** (Yinying)

Despite there being a gap between real celebrities and popular BJs, being a BJ is widely regarded as an alternative method of actualizing the star dream, as is true in the case of Yinying. This is similar to idols that could show the best image and talents on the stage, whereas BJ is the only protagonist of this stage to pursue self-actualization. It should be noted that many 90-Hou have one or more personal talents that could be used in their streaming performances. This can be traced back to the expansion of the education of middle-class families. 90-Hou grew up at a time that

corresponded with the popularization of interest-oriented education and extracurricular activities such as dance classes, piano classes, and painting classes. This is particularly so in cases where they are an only child, and their parents invested more and encourages them to join various talent classes or to self-study. Here, live streaming is regarded as multiple stages for 90-Hou where they are able to capitalize on these ‘spare’ talents or personal hobbies. Lina loves music and has studied piano since primary school, and being a BJ partly is viewed as a ‘consolation’ for giving up on her music dream.

To be honest, I wanted to a good musician. But, the tuition fee of Music College and daily cost will be relatively more expensive. And whether I could be a good musician or not, the career that I can do in the future will be limited,...**It is too risky for my family** that is in a developed but small town...and I have an old sister. **Then I just gave up and choose another major...** when I wrote my bachelor thesis, I really really really felt painful because it was not the major I wanted. (Lina)

After taking the National College Entrance Examination (高考), Lina seriously contemplated the incongruity of her family’s economic situation, her dreams of a musician career, and the future benefit rate. Then she decided to abandon her dream, despite still loving music. Here, becoming a BJ did not merely contribute Lina to having confidence in her musical dream to some extent.

Next, the desire for freedom and authenticity by broadcasting is dominant in the accounts of 90-Hou BJs. Growing up in a modern and multicultural environment, 90-Hou are part of an individualistic generation that is extremely focused on the authentic self of the inner heart and that has strong resistance psychology in regard to authoritarianism. By contrast, the suppression of personality in education and career is still prevalent. In this research, many 90-Hou quit their first job and then started broadcasting. Dabai once worked as an editor of a media company in Chengdu. As an outlet for his work stress, he started to stream his amateur gaming. Gradually, he found that live streaming not only improved his mood but also that the compensation was equal to what he was being paid at his salaried job.

For raising my salary over 10,000 yuan, which is a pretty high salary in Chengdu, I had to work overtime and stay up. When I heard messages or phone call sounds, I felt so abhorrent, powerless, angry, and upset. More importantly, my waist and spine had been injured working. Besides, **I did so much, what I produced through my labor, it not belong to me all, my boss would 'eat' much of that...** I started to be a BJ just as a hobby. I think there are more freedom and equality as a BJ and I thought I would not be at the disposal of a superior. **How much I did will be directly transferred to how much I could receive.** (Dabai)

Likewise, Vincent worked as an anchorman in China and had studied in South Korea while retaining the job but his salary was suspended while he was abroad. Becoming an anchorman was his dream since he was a child, but the mechanized workflow and monotonous routine he experienced after he was hired by a TV station as a news anchorman made him feel 'I am not myself'. So, he decided to quit his work and find his authentic self. Being a BJ is one of his ways of trying.

As time went by, I was very skilled at dealing with different news categories. I mean, when you get a piece of news and I would classify it into type A, B or C. Then I could use the accordingly method A, B or C to process it. Also, overtime was quite frequent which caused me to gain weight... **I felt I am not myself, my body is my body, my brain is not my brain, and they were working for a standardized work institution...** But in BJ work, I can control my work and take advantage of my capacity. I like it. (Vincent)

For Dabai and Vincent, they recognized the non-free of their previous work, and the cyber world became an escape from reality as well as liberatory space for eliminating external constraints. Here, a popular neologism—'996'—means the system of work in which employees toil from 9 AM to 9 PM, Monday through Saturday (6 days a week) without additional pay. Its wide use today reveals that excessive overwork has become a ubiquitous phenomenon, even updating the term to '906' and '997', which essentially reveals the survival pressure and a sense of powerlessness among 90-Hou. Also, the reason why some chose to become a BJ is out of respect for their personal values. "I am a night owl, and I hate getting up early. Compared to a nine-to-five job, flexible BJ work is more my style" (Resu). Some of

them choose to work harder and build a better resume to gain more competitive capital, while some of them search for new challenges for avoiding constraints. Among those, becoming a BJ has become a worthwhile choice in the minds of many. Wangco repeatedly emphasized that he wants to break the constraints of the Chinese education system and those placed on him by his parents, and he chose to rebel against his parents and school by rejecting the ‘normal way’.

School, family tradition...**they just suppress and want produce the same youth—ones who obediently study hard for good grades.** This does not mean that I dislike my family. It is just a difference of personal values... **I continued to consider ‘how I can be successful by my capacity’**....By my appearance and my taste of fashion and hip-hop, I started to try the cultural field. I remembered my first job was being a model in Shanghai, and I earn 2,000 yuan (≈300 US dollars) while my living expense was 1500 yuan/month. Then influencer and BJ...**I had no big illusion but I will try by using my capital of appearance.** (Wangco)

Wangco took his cultural capital to become an internet influencer and BJ, which meant that he could control the design, action, and performance according to his personal preferences rather than fixed rules and norms. This reveals the modernist trend of 90-Hou seeking self-domination and control over their destiny (Wang Xiaozhang, 2015). Indeed, modern individualism, as emblematic of authentic desire (Chun-yi Sum, 2017), has furthered the idea that youth persist in their dreams in which individuals have awareness, choice, and exhibit intentionality in the social context (Bugental 1964, 1965).

Also, there assuredly are some 90-Hou who aspire to be BJs. Fafang (female, 23 years old) had a dream of becoming a BJ. She felt that being a BJ was precisely matched with her aptitude—sweet-looking, big eyes, black hair, elegant and refined feeling—the typical Asian female femininity through being a BJ attracted her, and she enthusiastically confirmed she would persevere in this way.

Lastly, the sense of community is another dream of 90-Hou BJs, where they aspire to find a sense of belonging in the multiple cyber communities of live streaming. In China, the urbanization and modernization has contributed to the transformation of an

acquaintance society (熟人社会) into a stranger society. This is in direct contrast to the Earthbound Society (乡土社会, Fei Xiaotong, 1948) where kinship and geographical community are the roots of individual identity. Immigrant populations have been concentrated in urban centers due to economic pull to where the heterogeneity between individuals is greatly high. This contributed to the prevalence of *atomized individuals*. The need for emotional expression, heart-to-heart talks, and companionship cannot be met in real life. For 90-Hou, the [collective loneliness] is more familiar for those who grew up as an only child and moved to another city for their education and work after becoming an adult. Among my 17 informants, most were typical atomized individuals who had moved to another city. However, the authentic aspirations for connection make them seek a sense of community suited to their style. Live streaming has breached the boundaries of social status, class, age, and geography, and provides "symbolic solutions" to rebuilding communities belonging to youth, demonstrating the demand for youth groups. Therefore, it is a new vehicle to rebuilt communities and remakes their identity.

2) Individual capitalization

In the one-person enterprise of being a BJ, individual capitalization is crucial. Firstly, feeding ID (养号) is an essential way to increase their virtual capital. Virtual capital has a positive relation with the virtual status, and virtual capital can be converted into economic and social capital by Da Shang or other commercial activities such as advertising. Here, feeding ID denotes the various methods BJS package their ID for increasing the number of fans, likes, and views. Dabai shared:

Now, the methods (of feeding ID) are much more than 3 years ago. In Tik Tok, it includes short video, following hot topics, and using SNS to guide viewers to streaming room...The most effective way is through short videos because they are very popular now in China. We can imitate the popular videos of others and add some new performance to it for creating your characteristics. Or, to create videos with new ideas. If it becomes hot, it will bring more

Liu Liang. In a word, through the use of the algorithm, BJs could gradually feed their ID for accumulating more popularity. (Dabai)

In this description, the behavior for increasing virtual capital intensely mirrors how every behavior of a BJ is digitalized into virtual data, and such virtual symbols play a decisive role in their career. Consequently, the hegemony of data becomes “guiding” and “enticing” for survival behavior. Especially, A BJ is a person who has to express oneself, who has to speak, communicate, cooperate and so forth (Maurizio Lazzarato, 1996: 135). Thus, the production of BJ work is a factor of BJs’ long-time education, study, and practices of life. In this process, the methods of communication, performance, bodily action, facial reaction, and other performance techniques are processed as information and stored in their brain in which BJs are capable of selecting the suitable ‘information’ from their ‘database’ to produce vibe in different scenes. This is complicated mental labor. As Duzi revealed, “You must stay awake every second so you can soon give or lead fast reactions to audiences.” Also, BJs must devote significant effort to processing more “useful data”—that is, BJs invest vast amounts of time and energy into the self-improvement of their talents, socializing, and emotional performance. For Duzi, it was 2016 when live streaming industry was not yet fully developed, and she had little formal education from agencies or the internet. Then, Duzi would spend time summarizing the techniques of popular BJs. With the accumulation of cultural capital, she created her style in the performance.

At first, I did not even know what live streaming was. So, I looked other BJs who I am interested in or my manager recommended to me. So, **I would consciously learn and analyze the advantages of the BJs, such as evoking the emotion of audiences and creating atmospheres.** And then according to my personality, I adopted some skills in my live streaming. It was helpful to me. (Duzi)

Besides such performance techniques, some BJs like Vincent endeavored to learn complementary technologies and skills including photography, video editing, and SNS management. These skills do not merely contribute to BJ work, but are also

sought-after skills in today's labor market. As Miaoxi said, "I joined rhetoric training. Regardless of live streaming or other fields, to have a good tongue is crucial for an adult. Even if I resign, what I learned from being a BJ is still useful."

Hence, the mobilization of BJ's subjectivities causes the improvement of work to be equated to self-improvement. Such a phenomenon resonates with the theorization on survivalism by Kim Hong-joong(2015) who writes, "Labor flexibility and liquid life forces individuals to change his/herself according to the current scene through endless alterations and self-development." 90-Hou perceive what they invest into their BJ work as a sort of individual development rather than labor exploitation, which is the trap of survival authenticity. In order to be adults, young people should learn how to manage, control, and perform emotions in their interactions with others. Such interactive work contributed to these 90-Hou to wield this capital. As Daba told me, "One thing that has changed about me (after becoming a BJ) is an improvement to persuasiveness."

In this sense, the desire for individual capitalization might be alienated, and BJs are ensnared in the trap of authenticity under survivalism(Kim Hong-jung, 2015). Their enthusiastic work generates an even blurrier boundary between their work and personal life, and some of them even push themselves to the limit. That is, they not only continue broadcasting every day for 4-5 hours—some even managing 8-10 hours—but also perform plenty of off-line work such as preparing performance content, creating short video, and managing fans. In the case of Dabai, he aspired to maximize profits when he was on the rising stage. He suggested that "timing is important for BJs because the income is too unstable to predict, so the only thing I can do is earn lots of money when I can." He goes on:

I worked really hard to improve my broadcasting. I got up at 5 am and went to bed at midnight at that time. I spent 7-9 hours on everyday live streaming. In rest time, I learned techniques and skills about live streaming. So, I only slept 4-5 hours every day. (Dabai)

As a result, it caused self-exploitation in individual capitalization. However, whilst BJs realize the reality of their labor exploitation, they must negotiate with

reality and sacrifice more personal time and energy to improve performance, just as Dabai did. Here, being a BJ means becoming adventurous entrepreneurs who dare to try their hand at the adventure of capital investment in the unknown risk and uncertainty. Even if they fail, the loss might relatively less detrimental, as I have covered.

2) Social ties and reciprocity

90-Hou self-entrepreneurs not only stress the enhancement of individual capital but also BJ work is based on connections and interactions, meaning that the management of social ties is considerably powerful for their ‘businesses. Especially in Chinese collectivism, social networking is an extremely crucial means for people to exchange/transfer capital and create new opportunities with the rule of reciprocity.

Primarily, the meaning of reciprocity is used by BJ to stimulate Da Shang and connect close relationships with fans. In the Chinese context, the notion of ‘favor (情)’ plays a crucial role in people’s reciprocity, and the effect of these ‘favors’ is magnified to a great degree in the frequent interactions inherent in the field of live streaming. When a BJ receives virtual gifts, that BJ must express gratitude and perform bodily or linguistic reactions. Despite BJs constantly showing themselves and acting confidently, the performance of modesty is necessary, which how to balance the expression of confidence and modesty becomes complex mental labor for these youth. And some BJs like to highlight the reciprocal meaning of giving Da Shang. For example, “Thanks for your gifts last time. That provided my cat a good pet grooming (Then shows the cat to audiences)”, and “Even though I’m still a small BJ now, I will work hard with your encouragement.” In this sense, the behaviors encompassing giving Da Shang are not only related to consumption but also the ways of expressing Chinese ‘favors’.

Interestingly, many BJs would call their fans their families (家人), which contributes to the sense of community as well as legitimizes the behavior of more support, precisely conforming to the Chinese collectivistic context. Fafang shared:

I: Why you call your fans families?

Fafang: The family means someone who can unconditionally support and accompany a person. If no accompanying... they are just fans who just joined my fan club... but families, they keep watching my streaming show and sending virtual gifts with, and we spent time together... Who are people that really support me or not, I would feel as the time goes by. and whether having families is one of the fun of being BJ.

For Fafang, calling her fans a family created a sense of companionship for her, and it borrows the meaning of family as those who would provide selfless support and companionship. Such appellation particularly extends the connection between fans and BJs in the room as well as a sense of community in this virtual space. Duzi established chatting rooms with fans, which extended the virtual relationship to off-line life.

As if my broadcasting ended, the interaction had to be suspended. Then, we started chatting room and I added WeChat friends with a portion of my intimate fans. We chatted sometimes and gave likes to each others' posts on WeChat. Even though I stopped broadcasting, I still keep in contact with several fans. (Duzi)

When the interaction between BJ and fans is extended into other spaces besides the room, it is more effective at connecting reciprocal relations. The career of being a BJ relies heavily on maintaining affective bonds between fans so that the audiences will return to their room. To create the 'authentic bond', many BJs in my interviews tend to share their daily life with fans—life experiences, local news, gossip, weather, food, what they saw, who they fought with—these quotidian happenings contribute to everyone sharing the common, which makes the content of interaction between BJ-fan like an actual 'life flow'¹⁷ in a 'real' community.

¹⁷ The conception of life flow originates from movie method, and it proposes the pursuing original form of life and advocates the reappearance of life. And it has "seven antis", that is, anti-plot, anti-fiction, anti-typical, anti-storyization, anti-dramatic, anti-performance, anti-montage.

Based on these connections, it might bring unexpected compensation for these 90-Hou. On the one hand, the presence of administrators from intimate fans is effective in assisting BJs to manage their fanbase, improve their interactive vibes, and avoid anti-fans.

My administrators were the fans who had accompanied me for a long time. They had followed me almost from the time I first started streaming and they helped me a lot. With the increase of the audience in my streaming room, I did not have enough energy to care about everyone, every detail, or every question. For example, when I was singing, I did not notice or forgot to say thanks to one or two of them who gave gifts. Then my administrators would screenshot and tell me to say thanks... If there was someone abused me, they would step forward bravely and defend me. **I felt that I was protected and supported by them**(Duzi)

In the case of Duzi, her administrators had no salary and their main duties were to assist the interaction, such as positively helping their BJ receive more Da Shang, assist in controlling the atmosphere, and recording the highlight timing. It plays a crucial role in which they help BJ reduce the anxiety and tension to some extent.

On the other hand, as Duzi mentioned, these loyal fans would give psychological support to BJs and become key members of this virtual community. Lina similarly told me the following:

The feeling of being protected is really good. For example, if there is someone who scolds me, they will fight back at the person: “who are you! get out! if you don’t like, no one asks you to stay here!” and so on.. (laughing). And students said they do homework as they watch my streaming. They said, “you just continue singing, if no others talk to you, tell us, and then we will appear to chat with you” (laughing). (Lina)

Loyal fans have witnessed the growth process of a particular BJ, which means they are familiar with BJ’s style, personality, and hobbies, which provides new possibilities to reconstruct the sense of community for these atomized 90-Hou with the crisis of community disintegration in post-modernization. Fafang shared:

I am an only child who is not good at dealing with interpersonal relationships. My social circle was small. But I discovered that being a BJ enables me to meet different people who bring me different kinds of thoughts and knowledge. It is very interesting. (Fafang)

The interaction with audiences made Fafang more outgoing and helped her attain more information, which positively affected her. Similarly, Lina also experiences such “surprises”. She said, “Gradually, more and more people started to follow me, and some professional singers even contacted me, suggesting ways I can improve my singing skills. Also, some of the audience members taught me how to create better videos.” Especially, some BJs, like Dabai, Doudo, and Vincent, developed real friendships with fans, and they attained unexpected social resources or support from more intimate ties with fans. As for Dabai, he received a plethora of useful advice from audience members who had worked in different fields, when he started his agency.

...In live streaming, I met different types of fans and when I needed some help with a start-up, they gave a hand and recommendations, and some told me the law about taxes while some shared the experiences of register. (Dabai)

Through being BJ, Dabai not only achieved his goal of moneymaking, but he gained even more than he had anticipated as he learned additional knowledge regarding start-up businesses and received help from their consumers.

Next, the ties between a BJ and other BJs are crucial capital. The precursor of BJ agencies was an alliance of several BJs who constructed a BJ family, which then gradually evolved into the form of a company with industrialized live streaming. This confirms the significance of ties between BJs. Firstly, the interactions and networks between BJs can become content for their performances, which contributes to creating vibes and increasing the fun of interactive scenes. Fans also enjoy gossiping about the relations between different BJs, which links rooms to construct more complex networking in the platform. In this sense, BJs could ‘conspire’ to create more enjoyable vibes. For example, Fans of Vincent frequently asked him to connect with certain other BJs out of curiosity about how their meeting would play out. Also, a BJ

could taunt' their opponent BJ in PK, in a plot that they colluded to perform. Such taunting creates a more funny, dramatic, and attractive vibe in their production of affection. Yinying shared:

We (BJs) have a chatting room, and we would ask whether someone wants to PK or help each other in other things... **Sometimes, we would consult about how to create more interesting PK...** Indeed, in the PK with friend BJ, it is more relaxing and easy to have fun together. So **I tent to expand my BJ network in daily work.** (Yinying)

Yinying used the connections she had with other BJs to improve her work performance. In the interactions between BJs, the ties are more subtle with mutual profit. On the one hand, they are rivals. On the other hand, they need each other to improve their performances as well as needing social association. Thus, BJs generally prefer to express politeness to foster amicable relationships, even during PKs, which is useful in constructing a grateful image of personas among fans. For example, two BJs in PK must duke it out to win, yet they would maintain polite greetings and issue compliments from the beginning. And, BJs should avoid slandering or belittling. Winners of PK would sometimes even ask the loser to end their punishment, or altogether cancel or turn the punishment into something easy. This also contributes to improving their moral image in front of fans, which is not only beneficial for creating connections with their counterpart but also becomes a strategy of self-branding (Duffy, 2017). Notably, some BJs cooperate to produce 'water-injected'Da Shang. That is, BJ 1 enters into the streaming room of BJ 2 with the role as an audience member and then gave plenty of gifts. In turn, BJ 2 gives an equivalent amount or more of gifts to BJ 1 in the live streaming room of BJ1. This not only improves the popularity of each other but also advances the reciprocity between the two BJs.

Meanwhile, Yinying mentioned, these crews of BJs are around the same age, and they discuss work, daily life, creation of short videos, and share ideas, worries, and happiness regarding their growth, all of which provide practical and psychological support. However, these connections are based on a mechanism of competition, making alienation imperative. And these individual entrepreneurs emphasize

increasing profit with every action—rational and calculative—in other words, the relationships between BJs are circumscribed by the pursuit of profit. When I asked Yinying whether she is a believer in the true friendship between BJs, she answered, “I think the competition between BJs is dominant rather than friendship.”

In addition, there is mentorship(师徒制) among BJs. In such an arrangement, “little” BJs take “big” BJs as their masters, and the master BJs give guidance regarding performance techniques and introduce their apprentices in their own rooms or other SNS order to appeal to their fans to follow their apprentice BJs. Within this relationship, there is an expectation that apprentice BJs must give a considerable number of virtual gifts to their master or directly pay tuition. Some first-tier BJs even sell slots for apprenticeships through public auction. In the connections of mentorship, a network with a pyramid structure is formed. At the peak is 1 or 2 “big” BJs and the hierarchy among apprentices is constructed by the order of superiors (前辈) and juniors (后辈), where they must be united and absolutely help one another.

What compels BJs to construct such a structure of mentorship? For master BJs, the ties produced by mentorship could be helpful in assembling new founts of popularity for themselves from the fan bases of their various apprentices, and they receive economic compensation via ‘tribute’ as well as improving their social reputation. For apprentices, they perhaps find expedients to boosting their popularity, and it contributes to expanding their social network with other BJs. Hence, one stands to gain power, wealth, and reputation from the networking provided by a BJ mentorship, illustrating this as a survival technique in which they use social ties to strive for more resources. In this context, mentorship is essentially closer to an *investment behavior* for building profit-oriented relationships.

2. The government of heart

1) Rationalized snobbery

In the way that 90-Hou BJs startup their business, almost all of my informants emphasized the importance of their ‘*heart power*’. When faced with various dilemmas

or restrictions, the goal of becoming a BJ had motivated them. Among these objectives, “for money” was the most frequently mentioned in my interviews. This is not merely the result of the profit-oriented system of Chinese live streaming, but also it resonates with neoliberal developments in the market-oriented economy. As Doudo told me, “Many people say BJs are too vulgar and greedy for money. But *earning more is the most realistic in this society*.” The surrender of snobbery is dominant among Chinese youth who are faced with increasing pressures of stress from reality. Yinying divulged that her suffering can be transmuted into wealth which contributes a better life for her.

Yinying: Has earning money become my dream now? Yes. If you are rich, you could do many things you like. For 5 years, I’ve persisted in doing live streaming mainly because of money. When I am young, I should work hard and earn a lot of money, so that I could buy a car, house,...rather than being constrained by money...If a person has no money, it will be risky in this society.

I: Do you mean no sweet without sweat?

Yinying: The dream that I had in childhood was to be a good actress, but now, my only dream is to earn a lot of money. For us, the ordinary people, survival is the first. So, even though I know broadcasting is really hard and I am tired about it, but it is profitable.

Like Yinying, many 90-Hou cherished various dreams in their childhood or teenage years, but upon their transition to adulthood, these dreams turned only into the desire to earn money. During this transitional period, the pursuit of economic achievement becomes the common rule of code, desire code, and emotion form among 90-Hou BJs. Not only the prohibitive cost of housing, marriage, and living expenses, but also the increasing thirst for consumption, a better life, and success results in rationalized money worship. Consequently, rationalized snobbery has also been reinforced in the practices of being a BJ. This is made clear in the narratives from BJ Anni:

In the beginning, I just wanted to chat, have fun as well as earn some money... no ambitious aims. But, **my mind changed in competition and comparison**. Some BJs of the same agency stole my fans through PK...I must prevent that from happening...I got recommend opportunities from the agency, and **gradually, I became greedy did not want to get down from the throne**. (the fieldwork of BJ Anni, 2020.4)

Here, the desire for more Da Shang and higher status was critically exacerbated by the competition of gamification. Whilst Anni planned to be an authentic BJ, she gradually recognized the propensity for rationalized snobbery in her heart. It is imperative that being a BJ has indeed become intensely related to snobbery due to the emergence of the infrastructure of Da Shang-oriented interaction—BJs absolutely must be constantly soliciting virtual gifts, and negotiating with fans over what kind of bodily reaction, linguistic reaction, and even personal contact according to the size or number of gifts they receive. Indeed, the system that I introduced in previous chapters already reflects the specific money-oriented value in every interaction. As a result, every action, behavior, and expression performed by a BJ has gradually become money-oriented, resulting in profit-oriented intimacy. This goes so far as to impact BJs' hearts.

Da Shang comprises the stigma of BJs when they are caught in a dilemma in the interaction with fans. Goffman(1963) defined stigma as a logical result of human emotion, which is the special norm that others have particular expectations of certain groups and expect these people to carry out such expectations. For BJs, viewers always pay out of an expectation that a BJ will finish a required reaction such as singing, dancing, a requested action or other such performance, and in turn, BJs accept such instruction for the sake of obtaining economic compensation. When the Da Shang is relatively high, some BJs even expose more about themselves, give bodily and emotional reactions. BJs are used to unconsciously surrendering or consciously converting this stigma into a work rule, as illustrated by Yinying, who told me, "They spend money on fun and I earn money from them.". The snobbery is rationalized as value exchange, and the pursuit of money could shield stigma. We can

focus on the experience of Doudu, who is a man but does a female performance. . Most fans watched his show for amusement, so Doudu consciously added funny elements into his streaming show.

If it (doing BJ) could not earn you money, who would like to do BJ? **Only money is the most real.** Whatever they criticize about my dress and my performance, it is not important. Instead, if they criticized me, it is helpful to increase the popularity of my streaming room. If I can receive Carnival (嘉年华), why is it bad? So, even if I feel ashamed sometimes, **the reality that I earn a lot of money is more important.** (Doudu)

Doudu's confession stresses that economic profit contributes to rationalizing embarrassment and shame. Especially, what Doudu performed attracted plenty of anti-fans, and his parents, friends, and girlfriends also did not understand why he wanted to continue doing such a thing.

Besides me, I have one old sister and one old brother, and I am the youngest. They thought that being a BJ is a strange job and questioned why I did not find a "formal" job like others. But, the reality is that I earned money to change my destiny, and I also am more successful than other peers from my hometown. Through live streaming, I become that person who can earn the most money among my siblings, which gives my families a better life and pride than other peers... Of course, they gradually understood and keep silent. (Doudu)

Here, earning money becomes the 'weapon' for these youth to against the objections and questions of being BJ, which reinforced rationalized snobbery. .In this sense, rationalized snobbery worship became a spiritual pillar for Doudu, who enjoyed the changes that being a successful BJ afforded him, and the narrative of "the fact is we can earn money that others might not achieve" also resonates with what Yinying reported regarding money as the most effective tool in such a risk-laden society. The achievement of becoming a BJ causes changes in the lives of many Chinese 90-Hou, and they believe money is the most 'authentic' pursuit in this realistic and risky society. Also, the parents of Duzi, Yinying, and Miaoxi support them in their BJ careers but required them to keep their moral integrity intact. Thus,

90-Hou BJs authentically internalize the external standards and expectations of their job-identity

However, not every BJ can be successful like Anni and Doudu, and the snobbery magnifies their anxiety in labor practices. Especially, most ‘little’ BJs remain trapped in the survival dilemma. A reality check makes them recognize this work and breaks their illusion of BJ dream.

Huali: **At first, I believed I was good at singing so that there would be somebody who would pay for my talents.** Because many BJs have no talent, but they were able to earn money...why can't I?... then the days went by and went by... it already took me 6 months until I left that company.

I: I am sorry but could I ask why you gave up early?

Huali: On the one hand, I still had the illusion that I might suddenly meet a Dage. I just needed a little bit more luck. On the other hand, I just graduated from high school and went to vocational school for learning dessert making, and then I worked as a dessert maker, receptionist, waitress...The income was so little, and those jobs also made me tired... The most important thing was that I cannot earn money from those jobs....**I want to seize the opportunity to make a fast buck and then quit for BJ work.**

Huali had held fast to a powerful illusion that her talent for singing could bring her speculative wealth. And her working experience led her to embrace the dream of earning money by live streaming, but the cold reality gradually shattered her hopes. While Huali chose to give up, some BJs in similar situations have chosen to pursue more deviant behavior.

More crucially, the irregular income do not decrease the consuming desires, instead, the notion of ‘carpe diem’ is dominant in their behavior. Especially, when TikTok started to allow BJs to withdraw their income from revenue-sharing transferred by Da Shang daily rather than cut off points monthly, BJs not only frequently adjusted their consumption plans but also adjust their consumption with such reward mechanism. Wangco told me, “When I’ve earned a lot of Da Shang in a month, I bought something I like and take my girlfriend on a trip to a high-yield place

and I buy expensive gifts for her. Recently, I have had little income so those things are impossible now. I am distressed.” And Miaoqi said, “When I receive my first paycheck, I bought new phones for me and my parents, and saved the rest in the bank.” Thus, these narratives show that these Chinese 90-Hou adjusted their desires according to the amount of money that they earned, for coping with their unstable income. This does not necessarily mean asceticism, but it reveals the ‘carpe die attitude of 90-Hou to some extent.

And, the snobbery for the relatively outstanding BJ is more dominant, because the stimulation is more intense. Duzi considered taking a break from schooling and investing all his energy on broadcasting due to the extremely enticing stimulation of performance rewards.

I always had the idea that I should continue to be a professional BJ. Otherwise, when will an opportunity for me to earn so much money ever arise in our current society? My income was nearly 20 thousand monthly, and if I continued, it would be more. How seductive it is! I thought just to earn the money that is enough to buy an apartment (laughing) and then go back to school. It was really a heartbeat at that time. (Duzi)

Here, we can see that these young people’s desire for new phones, expensive travel, and housing highly resembles the consumption desires of the middle-class. It reveals that the mode of middle-class consumption is widely constructed by recent Chinese reforms and governs the cognition of these Chinese young people. In the context of the new digital age, 90-Hou are more exposed to the encouragement of middle-class consumption, which also contributes to the rationalized snobbery of these young BJs.

2) Exploring self-identity in authentic suffering

“As a BJ, it is too tiring, and this exhaustion is not in body, but the heart” (Doudo). All of my BJ informants indicated that broadcasting makes them feel considerably ‘tired hearted’(心累). ‘Tired heart’, a popular catchphrase among 90-Hou, refers to the subjective perception in which one can predict and imagine the

pressure that he/she will suffer in life, but recognize it as inevitable, making themselves as agents feel powerless, abhorrent, and fearful.

To BJs, they have to take care of Da Shang, performance flow, atmosphere control, PK, and work mission, and such multi-pronged duties means that a BJ has to intensely concentrate and quickly respond to comments from different audience members, for around 5-7 hours every day. They recognize the affective burnout they suffer day after day. BJ Vincent's recounted his experience as follows:

I have to be highly concentrated in the streaming room all the time. Contents, the flow of the performance, music, PK, soliciting Shang, and so on, I have to be on top of them at all times. After broadcasting, I could not rest. Making summaries, short videos, collecting materials, chatting with loyal fans...What I paid, in reality, is much much much more than what you see on the phone screen. (Vincent)

Indeed, the "people work" (Hochschild, 1983) that BJs complete real-time communication with uncertainty and flexibility costs them extreme amounts of heart effort. The long-time stress of emotion regulation and profit-oriented alienation of interpersonal relationships have caused emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, 1986). In other words, emotional control in highly frequent interactions has a significant effect on job burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Further, BJs are easily exposed to cyber violence, especially insult about their appearance, body, and personality. Dabai shared, "There is always somebody whose purpose of watching live streaming is to abuse others. Whatever you do and whoever you are, he/she does not care, and just criticizes."

With this in mind, I asked how these 90-Hou dealt with such an onslaught of mental suffering, and the answer was extremely consistent: the most effective, as well as the only solution, is simply enduring (熬). This indicates one who embraces some belief to persist in various suffering. Dou Dou became a popular BJ with over 20 million followers. When I asked how he coped with the difficulties of his BJ career, he told me that he 'endured'.

I: As you said before, with so many problems, how did you insist till today?

Doudo: **Enduring. That's the only method.** Once we grow up, we realize that happiness is very difficult for adults. But, people always have to grow up and face reality in life. 'What does not kill me, makes me stronger', all suffering is meaningful.

On account of his educational disadvantages, Doudo places his hopes on becoming a BJ, that it might help him break his "destiny circle", and enduring suffering was regarded as a necessary step towards realizing a better future. Among my informants, most of them left behind school and family in order to embark on the journey to becoming independent adults. In the transition to adulthood, 90-Hou have experienced various afflictions, but when face with the survivalist reality, whatever suffering they are dealt, all they can do is endure and positively change themselves according to reality. Thus, these 90-Hou hold the 'belief' that there is "no sweet without sweat"—which completely resonates with the spirit of 'endurance', and seems to indicate the meaning of being a BJ is always result-oriented. That is, suffering in their work becomes an extremely necessary rite for maturing to a real adult, for which authenticity is the embodiment of comforting identity—a qualified adult is capable of enduring, digesting, and transferring suffering in life—the journey itself is also meaningful.

In a word, they give positive meaning on this suffering. Especially in the process of becoming a BJ, the complex relationships and real-time emotional management contribute to these 90-Hou mastering more technique of managing their heart. This is regarded as the identity of being an adult. Resu shared:

Being a BJ is really tiring, but I started to know how to adjust myself in the anxious, angry, upset state... I think being a BJ is a process that I could frankly reflect on myself. And while streaming, I met different people, and they exchanged their stories. From these stories, I learn how different the world is as well as rethink who I am. (Resu)

Among BJs, there was a desire to embark on unconventional and arduous journeys to prove themselves (Thompson 2005, 145). In their self-expression and interactions with others, these 90-Hou, who are precocious but nonetheless just getting their footing in the world, the experience of BJ work leads them to reflect on their identity. From the beginning with choosing their image setting, these young people had to consider deeply what character I want to play', 'whether my authenticity confirms to this role', and 'what should I perform according to this role'. Then in their practical interactions with others, they received feedback about their identity and repeatedly confirm their identity.

Meanwhile, 90-Hou BJs actively develop multiple identities in their performance where they perform different "selves" when on stage. As Simmel(1972) assessed, the strangers of modernity attempt to realize their particular persona in various interactions. For 90-Hou BJ, how to keep their independence and persona becomes the fundamental problem underlying their service work. However, this does not imply that BJ could express false emotions, instead, they should choose a positive identity as one of their multiple roles in different situations. For example, Fafang is a quiet girl in reallife and is not good at social interaction, but she performed the role of being outgoing and conversable in her live streaming, which helped her uncover another aspect of herself. This is similar to Miaoxi, who created an image of herself as a sexy woman, which is quite dissimilar to how she behaves in her daily life. "It is a little embarrassing when I think back about it", Miaoxi explained, "but, I think this is another aspect of me because everyone has different aspects. The character play satisfies the illusion of my inner heart."In this sense, being a BJ provides opportunities for 90-Hou to construct multiple identities.

Moreover, the suffering of the heart endured by these young people derives from the negotiation between their desires and reality to a great extent. Their desire for popularity, money, and reputation as professional BJs has conflicted with the reality of gamification and profit-oriented intimacy. For that, these rational and individualistic 90-Hou have clearer self-cognition to reflect on 'what I want' in their practices. In my interviews, these 90-Hou made different choices after they reflected

on their identity and authentic desires. Some of them decided to give up, while some BJs courageously challenged themselves and others still exploited alternative methods to achieve their goals. From ‘whether I can lie to construct a character that others like’ to ‘whether I should monetize other’s emotions’, every choice for producing affective performance is equal to a self-challenge.

3. From temporary work to further step for the future

Being a BJ is not the long-term occupation for most 90-Hou, instead, it is more like a transition period during which these Chinese youth can accumulate capital and adjust their project. In this study, the longest spanning career of being a BJ was 5 years and the shortest was merely 2 months, and countless new BJs gave up within a single month. Among my informants, only Fafang and Douduo were committed to continuing to broadcast. Fafang confirmed his BJ dream, telling me, “I love the feeling of doing BJ work, and it is the job which I want to do.” Douduo explained, “Live streaming changed my destiny and it already has become one crucial part of my life. I also accumulated a lot of fans and popularity in these 4 years, so it is not easy to suddenly stop.” In contrast, the rest of the BJs I spoke with felt that it would be too difficult to be BJ all their life, so they denoted they have a “backup plan”. It reveals the temporary nature of this affective labor.

On the one hand, BJ work demands dominant youth subjectivity, which assesses having funds not counting as an areal job. Duzi suggested that BJ is not a formal job that could create social value as a ‘real job’.

The job of BJ still is not acknowledged by the state (besides shopping BJ, it is not included in the Chinese occupation list in 2020) and society. Despite more and more people agree with the statement “BJ is a professional job”, the stereotype about it being an “informal job” is more dominant. The most important reason that I gave up being BJ is I think being BJ cannot ‘create’ something. (What do you mean by that?) I mean, **somebody gathers in streaming and just chat, have fun... there is no... real... production or change.** (Duzi)

As can be seen in this excerpt from my interview with Duzi, the social meaning of work is a crucial factor for her in considering her employment, and the unambiguous production of having fun in streaming room cannot be insinuated into a ‘real’ job. In other words, being a BJ is not a ‘real job’ because of its association with having fun and youthfulness. The ‘real job’ is the normative definition of middle-class transitions through professional employment or a successful start-up business. But, only a few first-tier BJs like Fei Timo, Li Jiaqi, and Wei Ya o achieved upward class mobility while countless lesser-known BJs still struggle in the same status. In this context, many 90-Hou primarily regard being a BJ as a kind of temporary work until they find a general job or their economic situation becomes stable. Namely, the inclusiveness of the live streaming economy has brought a window of opportunity to these youth to find alternative ways of making a living. Linan started broadcasting when her employment plan was suspended during COVID-19, as previously mentioned. She told me, “It is impossible to find a job recently, so being BJ not only brings me some income, but it allowed me to consider whether I could continue my musical dream.” Two months following our interview, I contacted Lina and found that she has been working as a piano teacher in her hometown, she enjoyed this job which fulfilled her music dream with a stable income.

On the other hand, the anxiety of unstable income in endless competition and unequal labor-exploitation led these youth to recognize the essence of this industry, which violated their imagination of dual pursuit for authenticity and career. Huli shared, “For income, sometimes it was pretty good, sometimes I was really poor. In such an unstable situation, I felt powerless.” And they recognize that competition is imperative, as Paofu put it, “Countless of the older streamers left while countless younger ones come” (Paofu). More importantly, the limitations of laws and contract spirit have made these youth feel disheartened in the new work, which just is a wolf in sheep's clothing. That is, they criticized the capitalists in socialism who have taken advantage of young people’s enthusiasm, dreams, subjectivities, and affection to seek profits. The ‘ingenious’ design of gamification and performance rewards causes countless youth to become mere instruments in this capitalist wave. In particular, the

behavior of monetizing intimacy very much leads to self-alienation. In this sense, the large consumption of heart power has an extremely shortening effect on BJ careers.

As a consequence, 90-Hou BJs must continue reflecting on ‘how will I live in the next step’, as discussed in previous sections. Over the past 40 years, the question of ‘how to live well’ has been a crucial issue for Chinese people, as is evident by the flock to training classes for self-development, making the documentaries of their start-up business, listening to lectures, buying books, and increasing numbers of talk shows about how to succeed. But, in my interviews, most of the interviewees pondered this question for a long time and told me that it was a tricky question. Yet the answers that they gave me varied; these young people suggested that they still aspire to succeed because they believe the rapid development of Chinese society would bring more alternative opportunities for youth. Whilst the reality does not allow everyone to have particular success, Chinese youth hope for a middle-class life in which they have enough savings while being able to do work that they like.

In this sense, regardless of the many differences between 70 Hou, 80 Hou, and 90-Hou, the hope of a better life remains the same but it can be observed that 90-Hou place more emphasis on the ‘self’. That is, they not only aspire to find a good job but also expect this work to allow them to remain authentic. When they realized the fraudulence of being a BJ, many BJs, especially relatively successful BJs, eerily transform their virtual capital obtained by live streaming into economic, social, and culture capital for the future.

There are a number of methods of pursuing such transformations that I observed frequently in my fieldwork: 1. Advertising and shopping streaming (KOL); 2. Start-up business; 3. A part-time job with the combination of a standard job; 4. Employment in related fields.

For example, shopping live streaming has risen along with the new round of e-commerce development during COVID-19 under positive support from the Chinese government. Accordingly, many BJs throw themselves into starting and e-commerce business with their digital experience. Dou Dou attempted to integrate his resources including his fans, agencies, and advertisers to construct his e-commerce company.

Similarly, Vincent started an online shop of Korean accessories, where he independently stocked, listed, took photos, and delivered goods. Resu was planning to open an online store on Taobao to sell women's clothing and accessories, which was also her dream.

In terms of Lina and Miaoqi, they decided not to be professional BJs in near future, yet both of them planned to transition to BJing part-time with another formal income. “During the day, I go to work, and in the evening or on the weekend, I could broadcast. But, this needs a formal job does not require overwork” (Lina). Part-time broadcasting can generate additional income which is a technique of avoiding future risk by increasing one’s savings. Doing so allows them to maintain “another window for my leisure and hobby”.

In the meantime, the opportunity for formal employment in related fields like agency manager and MCN is a horizontal change. Paofu is determined to join her current agency as a manager for its shopping streaming. And Yinying was employed as a department manager at an MCN company in Guangzhou. Regardless of her cooperation with advertisers or BJs, it is far easier for her because she accumulated a considerable amount of social capital during her 4 years of BJing. More than that, the experience of being a BJ enabled these 90-Hou to reflect more on how to produce social meaning from their work. While they experienced negative things during their time as BJs, they still maintain a positive attitude and kindness. Like Dabai, he established his own streaming agency in Chengdu which has over 100 BJs in August 2020. He emphasized that his negative experiences of collaborating with agencies led him to the idea of establishing a ‘conscientious’ agency that truly and honestly helps and cultivates corporatized BJs with a highly promised revenue-sharing rate of 50%.

Due to my negative experience with agencies, I started to reflect on why there aren’t any fair, righteous and good streaming agencies?... and I certainly think this industry is full of potential... From the online studio to now an off-line office, I work hard to create a different kind of streaming agency. I do not know how far I will get, but now I have many clerks who try hard alongside me. It also is a kind of responsibility. (Dabai)

Dabai took practical action to change the inequality of the live streaming industry, and he believed that the world would become a better place through everyone's endeavors. In this context, there is another crucial statement was frequently mentioned by my informants. That is, they strongly identified with national development. Such a belief encouraged their entrepreneurship in the drastic development of China.

However, there is a subtle tension in this belief that is worthy of more consideration. That is, they have a positive attitude about the growth of their nation or the entertainment industry from a macroscopic point of view but have a relatively negative attitude in terms of individual hope.

I: You said that you certainly think this industry is full of potential, why is that?

Dabai: Especially, online commerce including live streaming keeps developing, and it revealed that e-commerce, the internet economy, and digital technology will be the main trends. Even if it is not good now, this is just temporary, and China has been developing. The change in Chinese society might being new progress for live streaming industry.

Similarly, in the interviews with other informants, they expressed such 'confidence'. Indeed, 90-Hou authentically experienced the rapid growth and change of Chinese society, which has given them more nation confidence. This contributes they have positive hope and even the illusion of great success in survivalism. However, the survival dilemma of 90-Hou BJ reveals the negative side of China's cutthroat society, the regime of heart has turned apathetic by incessant competition, or the breakage of authentic affection decries the boring modern life.

And the essence of BJ work captures something more fundamental. To this extent, being a BJ has acted as a stepping-stone for 90-Hou to achieve other future goals that advertise low admittance standards and many possibilities of high income, and provide an alternative entrance into the dream world. These actions reflect awareness of the significance of 'capital to their survival in the market economy of socialism,

like Wangco shared, “Nowadays, building up [something] from nothing, which our parents generations very much achieved, becomes too impossible for our generation, and now this is a world of the capital game.” Hence, these 90-Hou BJs mobilize youth subjectivity to use all their affective resources to struggle for survival as well as accumulate more capital for what comes next.

V. Conclusion: Survivalist subjectivity of Chinese 90-Hou

In this study, I focused on the social phenomenon of Chinese 90-Hou chose to be professional BJs for making a living in the rapidly growing industry of live streaming. Specifically, I explored their work dispositif, behavior and regime of heart in their process from learning to be a BJ to future exploitation, which revealed the survivalist subjectivity of 90-Hou in contemporary China.

Firstly, the commercialization of live streaming in China has transformed the representation of professional BJs from the marginal youth to the economic ‘darling’. Since 2016, ‘the Era of National Live Steaming’ has opened a new chapter for the entertainment economy, with millions of 90-Hou being active in the live streaming industry, which simultaneously promoted the development of the Chinese service industry. Especially, streaming agencies have been rapidly developed under the market-oriented mechanism to whom online platforms outsourced the responsibilities of recruiting, training and managing BJs. The emergence of streaming agencies contributes to the formulation of the industry chain of ‘platform-agencies-BJs’. Under the logic of the platform economy in post-contemporary socialism, broadcasting self in the front of the camera is no longer a type of leisure or a personal hobby. Instead, it represents a kind of professional work from which the young generations could make a living. For Tik Tok BJs, room and Da Shang are essential dispositif in their work. The gamification—level, title, quest, leader boards, and PK—renders the maximization of the survival rule of monetization in the production of intimacy. As producing intimacy allows BJs to gain profits, the amount of Da Shang empowers BJs

with a form of symbolic power and serves as the basis of a hierarchical system in this field.

Secondly, being a BJ mobilizes as well as restricts youth subjectivities. This paper demonstrated how 90-Hou produced affective intimacy and found that connectivity, leisure, personal tastes, and gendered embodiment became labor instruments for creating pleasing experiences for audiences in the room. And BJs try to ‘vibe’ off audiences with moment enjoyment and virtual intimacy, which aims at stimulating the behavior of Da Shang. In other words, young BJs have to transfer their subjectivity into instruments and products in order to survive in the service economy. Moreover, BJs become the prosumers who not only provide service but also the consumer in affective labor. That is, BJs are immersed in the created vibe and enjoy ‘having fun’ in interactions and self-expression.

However, when ‘having fun’ becomes ‘have meals’, the advent of agencies and the application of gamification system in online platforms have contributed to the formulation of the survival game. A series of virtual symbols - Da Shang, the number of current viewers, level, PK, quest - become decisive factors in shaping BJs’ behavior. No one knows the secret of being a successful BJ—both luck and endeavor are significant—so BJs must govern the heart to keep self-government and use all of their capital, including enthusiasm, authenticity and the capacity of dreaming.

If a BJ had enough symbols, he/she will be ‘out’ from the visibility of audiences. Current popular BJs might lose attention the next day and new BJs may become popular with a hot topic. To avoid being ‘out’, 90-Hou BJs have to exploit their body, intelligence, knowledge and emotion for more survival capitals. And the virtual intimacy also become profit-oriented in which BJs clearly recognize the importance of rich fans in their career. BJs would consider fans as their personal properties, and they must prevent other BJs to ‘steal’ or ‘absorb’ fans. The unstable dynamics between BJs and fans contributes to the anxiety of BJs and the parasitic relation between BJ and fans. As a result, BJs actively monetize the intimacy and lose interactive authenticity to some extent. Meanwhile, the labor exploitation in this new industry has been more elusive in the conspire of agencies and platforms. Though BJs

are able to be financially benefited in the process, this survival game make BJs get into the trap of authenticity and put more attention in self-development rather than the restriction of the labor exploitation from agencies and platform and the exploitation of BJs is further intensified by the lack of legal protections and regulations.

Thirdly, 90-Hou BJs construct the survivalist subjectivity in their practices. In the dilemma of monetized intimacy, self-exploitation and survival anxiety, 90-Hou BJs would reflect “what kind of person I want to be?”, “what is successful for me?” and “how will I work in the future” for their life. To deal with these questions, 90-Hou BJs use the strategy of individual capitalization and social networking to manage risk and accumulate more cultural/virtual/social/economic capital. More crucially, these behaviors are motivated by 90-Hou’s competitive consciousness and the illusional prospect of the Internet economy in China. 90-Hou was born in the rising stage of the Chinese reform, and the drastic change of Chinese society has created fortune legends. In the sense, the belief of “grasp the opportunity” has encouraged people to find the field that can give birth to next fortune legends. Live streaming is regarded as one of the fields. 90-Hou BJs may see themselves as rising balloons with the potential of upward social mobility, so they would give positive meanings to the suffering of being BJ.

Then they perform their ideal selves in the grazing from others, whereas the dream schema—‘dream=rich’—encourages young BJs to contribute rationalized snobbery in the behavior of 90-Hou BJs, because they believe ‘society is so realistic and only money is the most valued for survival’. The tension between the ambitious rise of the Chinese society and the survival anxiety of 90-Hou contributes to the emergence of neoliberal subjectivities for pursuing economic achievements through individual endeavors rather than depending on the distribution of the socialist state, while 90-Hou also have more confidence in nation development. 90-Hou are familiar to attain more resources by the individual competitive capacity, and they positively manage their heart and keep self-development for further steps. It has created positive illusions for these youth that they might attain good chance with their luck and self-government. However, it is worth noting that being a BJ is not a ‘real job’ in the

view of Chinese 90-Hou. This is because real jobs should be helpful for changing social class or status and this is not the case for BJs. Hence, being a BJ becomes a temporal job and an interim period for 90-Hou in their life journey, and they positively transfer the capital gained from being a BJ into the next employment or start-up business.

In summary, the work of being a BJ reflects the survivalist subjectivities of 90-Hou and how their subjectivity becomes a form of capital and the value of production. While the imagination of being a BJ is consistent with Chinese youth's pursuit of self-exploration and career development, the market-oriented system has caused the monetized desire as well as the alienated self-government in the endless competition. With the anxiety caused by unstable income and virtual intimacy and the reflection about 'how will I make a good life', 90-Hou has complied to such labor exploitation and give positive meanings to their sufferings.

In the end of this research, I want to clarify several points. With the normalization and the market-ripe of the live streaming industry, being a BJ is no longer an 'easy' and 'relaxed' job. Instead, it need better capital that BJ have. In the interviews, many BJs had good educational background and art talents. Thus, being a BJ was not the only choice or means through which they can achieve upward mobility. They initiatively chose speculative survival in rising development of entertainment, or aspire to pursue authentic self in digital entertainment. The learning ability and self-government of these youth who have a high level of education is relatively good, allowing them to have better performances. For these people, being a BJ is more like a way of self-expression and a temporal alternative life. However, for youth without good education, the meaning of survival speculation is more dominant in the reason of being BJ.

This study has clear limitations. First, the absence of demographic data of the total population of Chinese BJs which might reveal the overall features about 90-Hou BJ. As mentioned before, there are too many streaming platforms and the high mobility of BJ work, which led the lack of authoritative data for quantitative study. So, qualitative research is adopted in this study. Second, among the 17 interviewees, 15 of them are

born in urban areas and only 2 BJs are rural youth. Thus, this research is mainly constructed based on the experiences of urban-born youth. Due to the separate urban-rural structure in China, the characteristics between rural BJs and urban BJs may be distinctive. Hence, rural BJs' experiences need to be further studied. Third, under the COVID-19 pandemic, the fieldwork was particularly difficult given the limitation of international exit and entry. The photos of live scenes and materials of BJ education were provided from my informants. Regardless of these limitations, this is an exploratory research about professional 90-Hou BJs who are a crucial and representative generation of contemporary China, whereas most of current studies about live streaming are focused on the macro-development of the industry, interactional process or the deviance behavior of BJs. In the drastic change of China, new social phenomenon appeared and eroded in a short time, and even some cultural facts have not been noticed till it disappeared. In addition to the macro-level narratives or ideological criticism, we need to pay attention to individual life and particular groups in our society.

In this sense, this study filled in the vacancy of qualitative research about the subjective experiences of BJs. Assuming that being a BJ is a transitional period in the journey towards being a mature adult, how does 90-Hou construct and reconstruct the regime of heart under the market-oriented logic? Especially, the decline of entertainment field of live streaming is dominant in recent years, how will these youth make their future? Also, the 'visible hand' from the state has normalized the development of this industry, how will it affect the survival of these youth? Just like any other jobs, being a BJ has its shortcomings, and in endless anxieties and difficulties in the front of the reality, Chinese 90-Hou try to do more self-reflection about 'how will I be in future', and give positive meanings to their sufferings and self-government. In this process, to be a professional BJ becomes a lifestyle and an existential self-expression for young generations, and they make themselves to become the labor instrument to produce value. The desire of self-achievement and the illusion that they are able to benefit from the fast-growing industry leads 90-Hou to

comply to the survival rule as well as reconstruct their identity through the reflection of “what kind of person I want to be”.

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국문초록

중국 엔터테인먼트 산업에서 나타나는 자아기업가적 90 후의 생존적 주체성

서울대학교 대학원

사회학과

이 묘

이 연구는 중국 청년 BJ 들의 정동노동 실천과 생존적 아비투스 및 마음의 레짐 구성을 이해하고자 한질적 연구로, 중국의 틱톡 플랫폼에서 소속사와 계약관계를 맺고 활동하는 '90 후'(九零后, 즉, 1990-1999 년 사이에 태어난 중국 청년) BJ 들을 대상으로 한 인터뷰 또는 현장관찰에 기반한다. 이 연구는 다음의 세 가지 연구 질문을 제기한다. 첫째, BJ 노동에서 생존 장치는 무엇이고 어떻게 작동하는가? 둘째, BJ 들은 어떠한 방식으로 자기 주체성을 활용하여 정동적 상호작용에 이르는가? 그리고 이 과정에서 생존 장치는 BJ 들의 자기 주체성에 어떤 제한과 딜레마를 가하는가? 셋째, 제한과 딜레마에 대해 90 후 BJ 들은 어떻게 반응하고 마음의 레짐을 재구성하는가? 이 연구는 이에 대한 답을 제시하기 위해 '생존주의'와 '정동노동'의 이론과 개념, 비판적 담론 분석(Critical discourse analysis)을 활용하여 90 후 BJ 들의 생존적 실천을 분석한다. 이를 통해 이 연구는 BJ 들이 친밀성 생산을 위해 자기 주체성을 도구화하고, 플랫폼과 소속사가 구성한 게임화된 생존 체제에서 모든 자원을 활용하여 생존 투쟁할 뿐만 아니라, 고통에 긍정적 의미를 부여하며 미래를 만들어 나가는 모습을 보여주고자 한다.

이 연구는 반구조화된 심층면담, 비참여관찰, 연구자 본인의 BJ 경험을 토대로 연구 데이터를 수집했다. 심층면담은 12 명의 90 후 BJ 들과 5 명의 소속사 직원들을 대상으로 진행했다. 비참여관찰은 2020 년 3 월부터 2020 년 8 월까지 BJ 들의 생방송, 채팅방을 관찰하면서 진행했다. 다양성을 반영하기 위해 연구자가 직접 BJ 가 되어 현장을 경험했으며, 트레이닝자료와 모집 공고도 수집했다.

연구 결과는 다음과 같다. 첫째, 소속사와 플랫폼은 이익 지향적인 게임화된 구조를 도입하여 친밀성을 '다생이'(打赏, 가상 선물을 보내는 행위)를 중심으로 표현하는 기호적 시스템을 구성했다. 둘째, 이 시스템 안에서 BJ 들은 시청자들과 가상적 관계를 맺기 위해 여가 능력, 개인적 취향, 감성, 사교술 등의 자기 주체성을 도구화했고 즐거운 분위기를 생산하기 위해 정동노동을 수행했다. 이익 최대화를 추구하는, 그러나 '보이지 않는', 생존 장치 속에서 BJ 들은 적극적으로 친밀성을 다생이로 전환시켰고 시청자들도 다생이를 통해 BJ 들을 통제했다. 청년 BJ 들은 부와 인기에 대한 욕망으로 인해 관계적 억압에 순응하는 생존적 마음을 보였으며, 다시 자발적으로 억압의 굴레로 되돌아가는 모습을 보였다. 뿐만 아니라 소속사와 플랫폼의 생존 '유도' 지향적인 진정성의 덫(trap of authenticity)에서 열정노동을 하도록 했다. 연구 참여자들은 장기간의 친밀성 억압과 변화될 수 없는 착취 시스템에 무력하고 '피곤한 마음'을 느끼고 있었다. 셋째, 심층면담 결과 90 후는 BJ 로 대표되는 신규사업의 급부상에 대해 일루지오, 욕망 또는 열정을 보이고 있었으며, 억압이나 착취에도 불구하고 생존적 투기를 위해 이 사업에 몰입하고 있었다. 그들은 타인과의 상호작용 또는 실시간 피드백을 통해 항상 자신과 대화했고 싸웠으며, 1 인 기업을 운영하는 것과 같은 끝없는 자본화 전략으로 개인적 생존 능력을 축적했다. 이로부터 경험한 고통에

긍정적 의미('어른의 성공을 위해 필요한 고통이다')를 부여했다. 그러나 젊은 주체성을 이용한 BJ 직업은 연구 참여자들에게 '진짜 직업'이 아니었다. 그들에게 진짜 직업은 중산층 진출이나 개인 사업에 도움이 되는 직업이었다. 중국 90 후에게 '같이 놀기', '관계 맺기'를 특징으로 하는 정동적 직업은 오히려 성인이 되는 길의 일시적인 과도기를 의미하고 있었다. 그들은 나중에 어떻게 먹고 살지에 대해 치열하게 고민했고 더 나은 미래를 위해 그들이 축적한 자본을 경제/사회/문화적 자본으로 전환하고 있었다.

결론적으로, 인터넷 생방송으로 대표되는 중국 엔터테인먼트 사업의 급부상에 따라 청년 BJ 들은 이 새로운 직업을 통해 생존적 투기를 하고 있었으며, 정동적 친밀성을 생산하기 위해 자기 주체성을 일종의 자본으로 도구화하고 있었다. 또한 소속사와 플랫폼이 만든 게임화된 생존 체제에서 90 후 BJ 들은 관계적 억압에 순응하며 자발적으로 억압의 굴레로 되돌아가고 있었다. 그들은 경험한 신체적 정신적 고통에 대해 긍정적인 의미('자신의 성장에 도움이 된다')를 부여하고 있었고 이와 같은 방식으로 그들의 생존적 주체성을 구성하고 있었다. 그러나 이런 정동적 직업은 실제로 사회 계층을 높이거나 사업의 성공을 이루기 어려웠다. 이에 따라 90 후의 BJ 되기는 자아통치를 통해 자본을 축적하고 미래로 나아가는 삶의 과도기로 의미화되고 있었다.

키워드: Broadcasting Jockey, 90 후, 주체성, 생존주의, 수익화(monetization), 정동노동, 기업가적 자아(self-entrepreneurship)

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