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## Research on the Dissemination of Main-Melody Film and Television Works in the Context of Youth Subculture: A Case Study of Bilibili (Postprint)

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### Abstract

In recent years, particularly during the annual National Day golden screening period, various film and television dramas on major revolutionary historical and contemporary themes that demonstrate national spirit and respond to contemporary concerns—which in the traditional media era were disseminated through channels such as radio, television, and cinemas—constitute an important pathway for promoting core socialist values, enhancing national pride, and strengthening cultural confidence. Especially in the new media era where network technology is highly developed, youth, as primary producers and disseminators of information, can not only utilize the internet to receive information on mainstream ideology works disseminated by mainstream media, but can also employ highly developed new media tools to publish self-produced content on new media platforms such as Bilibili. This mode of communication undoubtedly represents an effective method for breaking down barriers between mainstream media platforms and new media platforms. Against the backdrop of granting audiences greater agency, it promotes secondary dissemination of information, more vigorously propagates mainstream ideology culture, and thereby maximizes communication effectiveness.

### Full Text

## Research on the Dissemination of Mainstream Film and Television Works in the Context of Youth Subculture: A Case Study of Bilibili

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**Abstract:** In recent years, especially during the annual National Day golden week, film and television dramas highlighting national spirit and responding to contemporary concerns—spanning major revolutionary historical themes and realistic subjects—have been disseminated through traditional channels such as radio, television, and cinemas. Such works represent a crucial pathway for promoting socialist core values, enhancing national pride, and strengthening cultural confidence. In the new media era of highly developed network technology, youth serve as primary producers and disseminators of information. They not only receive mainstream content through networks but also utilize sophisticated new media tools to publish self-produced content on platforms like Bilibili. This dissemination approach effectively breaks down barriers between mainstream media and new media platforms, empowering audiences with greater agency while facilitating secondary information transmission. This, in turn, vigorously promotes mainstream culture and maximizes communication impact.

**Keywords:** Mainstream film and television works; Youth subculture; Participatory creation; Bilibili platform

Throughout nearly three decades of development, a central question in film and television creation has been how the “main melody” of socialist spiritual civilization can be accepted, recognized, and emotionally resonated with by the public, particularly young people. Whether through the popularization of mainstream creation or the mainstreaming of popular culture, remarkable achievements have been made. A large number of mainstream film and television works, such as *The Age of Awakening, 1921, Minning Town, and Nice View*, have focused on portraying youth groups and writing youth stories that explore the important proposition of youth and their times. These works have won recognition from the public, especially young audiences, becoming a notable cultural phenomenon. This has not only broadened the audience coverage of mainstream works but also embedded the mainstream value concepts they carry deep in people’s hearts, gradually forming a new trend in society where “the main melody creates high frequency, and positive energy forms massive traffic.”

On Bilibili, a comprehensive video platform and cultural community where China’s younger generations are highly concentrated, one can easily find secondary edited versions of mainstream film and television works produced by young UP owners (content creators). They are disseminating their perspectives on these works to society through their own viewpoints and methods.

## 1. Formation and Evolution of Youth Subculture

**(1) The Meaning of Youth Subculture** In China, Generation Z typically represents individuals born between 1995 and 2009, placing them between 12 and 26 years old in 2022. The phrase “no longer ‘going online,’ but ‘living online’” precisely captures the living state of Generation Z youth. Having grown up in a “permanently online” network environment, this generation experienced the rapid diffusion of mobile internet information technology during their ado-

lescence and witnessed the comprehensive penetration of network applications—represented by online games, e-commerce, instant messaging, social networks, and short video streaming—into various social fields and regions worldwide. This growth environment has endowed Generation Z with characteristics in their interaction patterns, values, life attitudes, cultural tastes, and evolutionary trends that are distinctly different from previous generations[1].

The transformation of social and information dissemination models brought about by the internet has granted youth groups more initiative in cultural production and dissemination. During China’s social transformation, youth subculture, particularly online youth subculture as a unique cultural expression of youth groups, has been continuously pushed from the margins to the center. Subcultural identity, expression, and participation among youth in different circles have become one of the key forces shaping online mainstream culture and even overall social culture. This has greatly enhanced the agency, creativity, and diversity of youth culture while also presenting certain challenges to cultural construction under traditional culture and ideological guidance[1].

## (2) Characteristics of the “Audio-Visual Needs” of Youth Subculture Groups

1. **Non-utilitarian entertainment.** Youth groups’ audio-visual needs are primarily interest-driven and non-utilitarian. This means that the more vertically segmented the audio-visual market, the more likely it is to attract attention. For example, insects—a seemingly niche topic—have a massive user base on Bilibili and have even spawned numerous influential content producers.
2. **Keen to share viewpoints and emotions to trigger resonance within the community.** They enjoy pursuing novel content and are even more enthusiastic about sharing and disseminating their viewpoints in areas of interest. Sharing is a crucial feature of the internet. When encountering excellent audio-visual content, they are more willing to share their genuine feelings online, which can easily trigger group resonance across the network.
3. **Sincere love for the Party and country, with strong identification with mainstream content.** They can maintain independent thinking abilities while possessing strong national pride. For instance, during the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics, a photo of a flag guard with tears streaming down his face went viral across major network platforms. In Bilibili’s distinctive bullet comments and messages, “No regrets in this life for being Chinese” became a high-frequency phrase. Additionally, many users processed and edited this photo as material, driving multi-round dissemination of the photo and related reports. This strong sense of national pride also provides fertile ground for the dissemination of mainstream films among young people.

## 2. Development History of Mainstream Works

“Mainstream film and television” is a specific concept broadly referring to film and television works that promote national ideology under government guidance. These works generally carry political and current affairs colors, disseminate mainstream ideology, promote patriotism and revolutionary heroism, or other positive thoughts. They possess certain educational significance and belong to mainstream cinema, with themes typically aimed at promoting the socialist era’s main melody, inspiring people to pursue ideals, and providing motivational strength[2]. The works often feature grand scenes and rich emotional appeal, with themes frequently drawn from biographies of great figures and major historical events. Occasionally, some films adopt the life experiences of ordinary people against the backdrop of grand eras as their perspective, advocating attention to grassroots social livelihoods and promoting traditional ethics and morality. In summary, we can borrow a famous quote from Comrade Deng Xiaoping to define mainstream film and television: all works that promote truth, goodness, and beauty are mainstream films.

The concept of “mainstream film and television” originated from the slogan “promote the main melody, advocate diversity” proposed by the China Film Bureau in 1987. With over two decades of development, its initial purpose was to oppose the erosion of bourgeois liberalization ideas, defend China’s cultural security, and enhance the artistic expression of “Five-One Project” and other red film and television works. Its development has undergone five stages: the proposal stage (1987-1992), the formation stage (1992-1997), the development stage (1992-2002), the enrichment stage (2002-2007), and the innovation stage (2007-present)[3]. During this period, mainstream film and television has transformed from the initial “tall, grand, and all-encompassing” approach to today’s “down-to-earth” style, reflecting the advancement of the times while returning to the most simple and sincere emotions of the people.

From *Like a Flowing River 2*, which tells the story of struggle during the reform and opening-up period, to *Mining Town*, which focuses on poverty alleviation; from *The Age of Awakening*, which recreates the story of young intellectuals seeking to save the nation a century ago, to *Medal of the Republic*, which tells the touching stories of the first eight recipients of the “Republic Medal”—in recent years, with the emergence of a batch of outstanding film and television works, mainstream-themed film and television dramas have shaken off their previously neglected status, gradually narrowing the distance with audiences. They have unexpectedly entered the spiritual world of young people and entered the social media context dominated by youth, achieving a two-way synchronization of “guidance” and “market,” disseminating mainstream values and positive energy while attracting attention and traffic.

For a period, mainstream film and television works left an impression of being highbrow and unpopular—critically acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful. However, with the rise of new mainstream film and television works that break

through the inherent appearance of traditional mainstream works, an unprecedented prosperous situation has emerged in China's mainstream film and television drama creation. Huo Yan, a young scholar at the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, believes that new mainstream works, with their metaphorical imagery, quotable dialogues, life-like scenes, and high-intensity emotional output, have greatly awakened and stimulated the aesthetic enthusiasm of the public, including young people.

Young people's dissemination of mainstream film and television works is reflected not only in viewership and trending topics but also in a large amount of "secondary creation" of these works. Numerous excellent short-video UP owners combine mainstream work plot explanations with historical popularization, Party history education, achievements, and realistic backgrounds to deepen audience perception. Alternatively, they tailor content to young group characteristics by editing and showcasing life-oriented, humorous, and funny scenes, using small stories to convey great energy and increase affinity through emotional appeals. Others conduct exclusive interviews with creative teams, revealing behind-the-scenes creative processes and filming details to narrow the distance between mainstream film and television dramas and audiences, boosting word-of-mouth fermentation and "circle-breaking" dissemination.

### 3. Communication Models of Mainstream Film and Television Works

**(1) Traditional Communication Model** During a period when network technology had not yet reached a high level of development, the media for promoting mainstream film and television works mainly relied on traditional media. As broadcast channels for these works, traditional media platforms still had very limited influence. Secondly, traditional forms such as press conferences, program trailers, filming highlights, and creator meet-and-greets served as the primary promotional approaches. Under the impact of internet culture, the traditional dissemination of mainstream film and television works inevitably faces numerous limitations that hinder effective communication.

#### 1. Communication Environment Under the Traditional Model

Traditional media refers to conventional mass communication forms, mainly including newspapers, radio, television, and other media. Traditional media such as radio and television are unidirectional media. Audiences can choose to watch mainstream film and television works according to their interests, and secondary dissemination among audiences is mainly achieved through "word-of-mouth" communication.

Mainstream film and television work promotion teams convey film information to audiences through traditional media such as radio and television. Audiences receive information by watching television or viewing films in cinemas and conduct three types of decoding of mainstream film and television works: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. Audiences who actively decode works will share them with other audiences through oral communication, achieving secondary dis-

semination. Audiences primarily watch mainstream film and television works through three channels: the most common being television viewing, the second being supplementary viewing via DVD discs, and the third being cinema or screening room viewing. The government provides various support for the screening of mainstream films, including increasing screening schedules, organizing collective viewings, and selecting optimal screening times.

The dissemination of mainstream film and television works on television media follows a family-based shared model, where audiences often watch works with family members, making individual characteristics relatively blurred. Consequently, from content dissemination to reception, mainstream film and television works form a closed-loop information production, dissemination, and consumption system on traditional media. This stable information dissemination model makes it difficult to generate secondary dissemination for mainstream film and television works, thus limiting their communication impact. In the traditional media era, active audiences for mainstream films were relatively few, as the public preferred watching commercial films in cinemas, resulting in consistently poor box office performance for mainstream films. The portion of audiences who paid to watch in cinemas represented deep audiences for mainstream film and television, while schools, governments, and institutions also organized collective viewings to guarantee box office revenue and dissemination breadth.

## 2. Limitations of the Traditional Communication Model

First, in terms of communication content, mainstream film and television works easily fall into the dilemma of being monotonous, lacking 趣味性, and having high homogeneity, leaving audiences with stereotypical impressions of being serious, preachy, and dull. Compared to romance dramas, martial arts films, and other genres, they have weak market competitiveness. From the perspective of audience groups, mainstream film and television works are more popular among middle-aged and elderly audiences because their content more easily satisfies their needs in terms of values, emotional expression, and story content. However, youth growing up in the consumer era prefer watching youth idol dramas, romance dramas, martial arts films, or Hollywood blockbusters to display their fashionable, individualistic, and free mentality and express self-awareness. Especially after the popularization of the internet, the audience for television media remains this middle-aged and elderly group, while youth attention is attracted by fragmented short videos or online videos. Therefore, traditional communication content cannot expand its audience range, naturally limiting its own development.

Second, in terms of communication channels, the dissemination channels for mainstream film and television works also have certain limitations. During the traditional media period, China's mainstream film and television works were all produced and promoted by television stations. Due to technological limitations, the dissemination of mainstream film and television works mostly occurred simultaneously through television live broadcast, television recorded broadcast, cinema screening, and offline promotion. However, this communication form

was affected by multiple factors such as time and space, making the breadth and depth of dissemination less than ideal. The development of online media has gradually diversified communication platforms and forms, making the single communication form of traditional media no longer suitable for the current development of mainstream film and television works.

**(2) New Media Platform Communication Model** Surveys show that in the past two years, the most popular new mainstream TV dramas, such as *Minning Town*, *The Age of Awakening*, *Medal of the Republic*, and *A Lifelong Journey*, have approximately two-thirds of their audience under 35 years old—a somewhat surprising statistic. New mainstream film and television dramas have repeatedly “broken circles,” with young people recommending them to each other (“recommendation” culture), and even recommending them to their parents’ generation. This was previously unimaginable but has genuinely occurred in the past two years. Simultaneously, during the golden period for mainstream film and television works each year—the National Day holiday period—cinema audiences for these works have become predominantly teenagers and young adults. This phenomenon is inseparable from the creation, production, and dissemination of mainstream works on new media platforms within the context of youth subculture.

### 1. Communication Model Under the Youth Subculture Background

As the main battleground for contemporary youth community culture dissemination, Bilibili has established a relatively stable user group and formed its own brand style. On this platform, the characteristics of youth subculture are particularly prominent. Over time, subculture has gradually evolved into “youth culture,” constructing a pluralistic value system that continuously transforms toward popular culture and mainstream culture. According to iResearch Consulting’s *2021 China ACG Industry Research Report*, the ACG industry has entered a period of explosive growth, with the overall market size reaching 100 billion yuan in 2020 and an annual growth rate of 32.7%<sup>[4]</sup>. As a high-quality dissemination ground for ACG culture, Bilibili enjoys high user loyalty. In such a platform environment, young users can better create and disseminate their own ideas and works.

According to 2021 Lanshi Wendao statistics, the average age of Bilibili users is 22.8 years, making it a content community with the highest concentration of university students. As a gathering place for youth subculture communities in the internet era, social interaction is an indispensable user behavior within the “community.” Bolstered by diversified video content and community circle atmosphere, the dissemination of mainstream film and television works on Bilibili has shifted from a mass communication model to an audience-interaction model. Whether through platform film playback or self-produced videos by UP owners, topic discussions are triggered within the community. During this process, users interact and communicate through bullet comments, comment sections, or fan groups, satisfying their need to use video media for social participation.

In addition, Bilibili serves as a participatory content creation platform that has generated tremendous response among youth groups. The one-to-many unidirectional communication model dominated by communicators has begun to transform into a many-to-many new communication model where media producers and audiences co-create content and audiences interact and share with each other. Audiences have significant participation rights in the dissemination activities of mainstream film and television works. Through various news and social platforms, they can actively participate in interactive dissemination and expanded reproduction of content. More and more mainstream film and television works choose to broadcast on network platforms, allowing audiences to transform their viewing experiences into bullet comments or reviews at any time, achieving interaction with the works or other audiences. Under the incentives of various data metrics such as view counts, likes, subscriptions, and topics, producers actively produce and release secondary creation content on new media platforms. Secondary creation and content reproduction are also very common communication methods. Driven by interests, audiences use character settings, narrative styles, and language styles from mainstream film and television works as materials for content editing and reprocessing[5]. For example, during the broadcast of the TV drama *The Age of Awakening*, audiences created short videos using the distinctively portrayed characters “Chen Qiaonian” and “Chen Yannian” as protagonists. Such works achieved widespread dissemination on platforms like Bilibili, Douyin, and Weibo, attracting more audiences to watch the original works.

## 2. Production and Communication Forms in the New Communication Environment

In the new media era, network media has begun to strengthen audience subjectivity, transforming audiences into discoverers, collectors, and disseminators of news content. Audiences are no longer passive “receivers” but participate in the dissemination of mainstream film and television works through forms such as commentary, sharing, creation, and supervision. The diversity of media platforms has broken the original unidirectional communication pattern, providing new methods for two-way or even multi-way communication between audiences and creators.

### (1) Audience Creation

Before the prevalence of participatory culture, audiences mainly received information passively. The rapid development of network media enables audiences to directly participate in content dissemination. On this foundation, self-media emerged, allowing more and more audiences to directly participate in information creation. Every audience member can record stories around them or express feelings about certain events. This creation model expands the scope of dissemination to a certain extent, and audience-created content may even develop into widely discussed news hotspots.

For film and television content dissemination, a new form has emerged—

secondary creation. Secondary creation refers to using characters or content from film and television works as prototypes for secondary processing and integration to generate new video content. Audience creation is the prerequisite for audience commentary and sharing. Only after completing content creation can audiences proceed with commentary and sharing behaviors. In other words, audience creation is also the basic form of audience participation. In the participatory network field, every audience member can publish content and disseminate viewpoints through platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin. As communication subjects, audiences occupy increasingly important positions.

During the dissemination process, mainstream film and television works continuously innovate forms to compete for audience participation initiative. They launch reward-based UGC (User-Generated Content) activities on internet platforms. By planning UGC content collection related to work dissemination, they can not only promote better work dissemination and win ratings but also attract content production through reward mechanisms, stimulating audience enthusiasm for participating in dissemination activities. Popular mainstream films such as *The Battle at Lake Changjin*, *The Sacrifice*, and *1921* have all designed UGC activities on Weibo platforms combined with work content, expanding the influence scope of mainstream film and television works through social dissemination.

## (2) Audience Commentary

Technological iteration and media empowerment have given rise to diverse expression forms of audience commentary. In the traditional media era, audiences had to rely on textual content in news for self-expression for a long time. With continuous empowerment from participatory culture, various forms such as images, audio, video, animation, emojis, and kaomiji have gradually been integrated into audience commentary. Weibo, as a public discourse platform, is a gathering place for audience commentary. Audiences can choose to participate in discussions through combinations of video, audio, images, emojis, and text. Rich and diverse audio-visual effects stimulate other audiences to participate in discussions about related topics, receive information about relevant film and television works, enhance the enthusiasm for universal participation, and expand content dissemination effects and influence.

In addition to participating in commentary on hot topics, film and television works have relatively diverse commentary forms. First, audiences can input bullet comment text to comment on content while watching videos in real time, and even comment on other audiences' bullet comments. The participatory, interactive, and real-time nature of bullet comments adapts to audiences' fragmented reading patterns and can stimulate their enthusiasm for participating in commentary. Second, they can express their attitudes toward original content published by others through likes and comments. Comments with relatively high recognition can become the object of audience commentary again, developing into "hot comments" that influence audience attitudes toward works. "Hot comments" are an indispensable part of current online media. Some neti-

zens even comment that “the comments are better than the content,” indicating that audience commentary is also a factor affecting communication effects.

#### 4. Analysis of Communication Strategies for Mainstream Film and Television Works

**(1) Enhancing Content Quality to Strengthen Intrinsic Appeal** As the times continue to develop, the communication content of mainstream film and television works changes with the external environment to adapt to social needs. Creators and disseminators must continuously update the communication content of mainstream film and television works according to the social environment while achieving alignment with life, audiences, and reality. On the basis of continuing high-quality communication content, they should create works that represent the main melody of the times and are deeply loved by the people. In the new era, the communication content of mainstream film and television works should not be limited to war and historical themes but should pay more attention to current social realities and maintain consistency with policies. Themes such as anti-corruption, poverty alleviation, grassroots work, and epidemic prevention are all products of mainstream culture in different eras.

**(2) Innovating Interaction Mechanisms to Mobilize Audience Participation Enthusiasm** Participatory culture has awakened audience discourse awareness, and audiences have begun to attach importance to the sense of participation in communication activities. Youth groups are the core force in constructing the mainstream film and television culture industry. By innovating interactive communication mechanisms, enhancing audience interaction and participation in communication activities, and strengthening audience stickiness, audiences can maintain their attention to mainstream film and television works.

Mainstream film and television works should actively innovate communication activities, mobilize audience participation enthusiasm, and improve secondary dissemination and audience retention rates. From the early planning stage, mainstream film and television works should fully leverage audience positions in the communication process, creating a favorable public opinion environment. They can conduct appropriate marketing campaigns on square-type communication platforms such as Weibo to allow audiences to fully understand work information in advance. During work broadcasting, they should enhance the connection between audiences and works. Topics related to plot development can stimulate audience participation enthusiasm, allowing audiences to participate in plot direction and content discussions anytime, anywhere, and share interactions with other audiences.

**(3) Extending the Communication Life Cycle to Continuously Enhance the Long-Tail Effect** In the current dissemination process of mainstream film and television works, a relatively prominent issue is the intermittent and discontinuous nature of communication activities. For example, a

large amount of mainstream film and television work promotion emerges concentratedly each October, while related content is scarce during other time periods. Dense and high-intensity promotional content can easily cause audience aversion and rejection, while scattered non-October content cannot form memorable points to leave impressions on audiences, directly affecting the life cycle of communication effects. To extend the communication life cycle of mainstream film and television works and maximize communication effects, a strategy of constant dripping wears away the stone should be adopted. The frequency of communication activities should be reasonably arranged to allow audiences to gradually receive “red culture” in their daily lives.

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