

Other Hills whose Stones are Good for Working Jade

A Critical Study of Musical Theatre Fan Culture in China

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ABSTRACT

The enthusiasm of Chinese audiences for Western musicals has been increasing over the past decade. This passion is readily noticeable from a preliminary observation of Chinese theatres, as well as the press and social media in China. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine this Chinese audience and its appropriation of this genre, from a social, aesthetic, and cultural globalization perspective. In short, the overall aim of this study is to answer the research question: How and why, in terms of social and aesthetic reasons, are Chinese fans of Western musicals appropriating this genre?

This study employed the qualitative research method of purposive sampling, on account of it allowing for an interviewee selection focus on individuals with a basic knowledge of Western musicals and the related fan community. After volunteer interviewees on the relevant social media and fan platforms were selected, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the respondents, who were encouraged to describe their internal and external audience experiences and theatre fan narratives in their own terms. Discourse analysis was applied to discern individual views on this genre and its political boundaries (Bryman, 2012), with narrative analysis as a supplement.

The findings of this paper derive from a combination of Bourdieusian theory on taste distinctions and fan community research within a cross-cultural context.

The study found that Chinese audience for Western musicals has a particularly positive attitude toward this genre, achieving aesthetic and intellectual understanding in its experience of it. Chinese respondents commented that they find watching musicals very relaxing and that relaxation brought by musicals is also the important charm of this genre. That preference is related to that Chinese society has a traditional tendency to regard all culture and art as a form of entertainment (Wu, 2016). While valuing the emotional experience of theatre, the Chinese

audience has its own particular disposition (Daenekindt & Roose, 2017) toward Western musicals. This audience prefers to devote its passion to theatrical works themselves, rather than to the actors involved in them, paying little attention to Bourdieusian cultural distinctions of taste – especially as it does not share the social and cultural background of European audiences. The genre of Western musicals is, for this group, an attractive cultural phenomenon, around which is built a pure social relationship outside the spheres of kinship and livelihood (Giddens, 1991; Stebbins, 2001). The enthusiasm of Chinese fans for Western musicals is thus revealing of their lifestyle preferences.

KEYWORDS: Distinctions of taste, Cultural globalization, Western musical theatre, Chinese audience, Aesthetic distance

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1. Introduction

Chinese audiences' enthusiasm for Western musicals has increased over the past decade. This passion can be easily discovered through preliminary observations of Chinese theatres, as well as the press and social media in China. According to some Chinese media reports, Chinese audiences of Western musicals have increased dramatically since the musical *Les Misérables* made its debut in Mainland China in 2002 (Xu, 2018). After he noticed that nearly 80 percent of the audience was under the age of 35 (Zhou, 2015), Philip Godawa, resident director of The Phantom of the Opera China Tour, said, “as it’s normally the elderly people who come to the theatre in the West, it’s great to see so many young people in the theatre and getting so involved.” In the process of Chinese audiences receiving and appreciating Western musicals, many interesting phenomena have emerged. Therefore, this paper focuses on these Chinese audiences, especially on their social and aesthetic reasons for appropriating this genre from the perspective of cultural globalization.

In contemporary studies on cultural consumption and cultural lifestyle, Bourdieu's theory of distinctions of taste (1984) still has significance and universality. The relationship between economic, social and cultural capital is still evident in different social and cultural backgrounds all over the world. With the development of society and the advancement of the discipline of culture and society, researchers keep developing and supplementing Bourdieu's theory based on changed nuance in reality. Peterson's research shows a “shift from an elite-to-mass status hierarchy to an omnivore-to-univore status hierarchy” (1992, p243). Ollivier's research proved people’s openness on cultural tastes can range from positive pursuit to apathetic tolerance in their cultural practice (2008). Daenekindt and Roose found that how people consume cultural products is also worth noticing in addition to what they consume (2017). Moreover, all these theories will achieve more cross-cultural verification with the challenges brought by Chinese cultural background.

Bourdieu's priori distinctions of taste are criticized because they focus too much on external influence, thus ignoring the individualized psychological process of aesthetic reception. Thus, by considering the aesthetic distance in the reception theory (Iser, 1978) and

the concept of flow in psychology (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), the study of Chinese audience's preference for Western musicals may further provide an internal and individualized perspective to understand people's choice of taste and lifestyle with their very different cultural preferences.

Theatrical art as a general art form, on the one hand, is a legitimate art in Bourdieu's framework of cultural distinctions (1990); on the other hand, it consists of a range of distinctions. Western musicals as a commercial and popular type are ignored by Western scholarship (Heim, 2015). Thus, research on Chinese audiences' enthusiasm as well as their active cultural participation of this genre can provide a perspective on the missing part of theatrical research in a context of cultural globalization and echo Matt Hill's appeal to the study of theatre fandom (2017).

Furthermore, cultural capital is not just a label of taste; it also shapes people's cultural lifestyles. Stebbins believes that serious leisure practitioners are often people with certain economic and social capital (2001). Both Peterson (1992) and Lizardo (2006) have pointed out that people with higher cultural capital will expose themselves to a broader and richer cultural environment and establish higher-quality interpersonal relationships. Therefore, there is a possibility of explaining who exactly these Chinese audiences are and why they participate in their fan community according to Bourdieusian "distinctions," through in-depth qualitative research, in a context of very Chinese characteristics.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to answer the research question: how and why are Chinese fans of Western musicals appropriating this genre and for which social/aesthetical reasons?

To answer this question more comprehensively, I introduce three subtopics. Firstly, the economic, social and cultural background of these Chinese fans should be identified. Secondly, the reasons that have led to their love of Western musicals and the possibility of explaining it using the phenomenon of cultural omnivorousness will be the core concern. Finally, as a result of the process of cultural globalization, the different cultural status of Western musicals due to the appropriation of the genre by the community of Chinese fans offers another important cross-cultural perspective.

Since the subject is specific and narrow, the qualitative research method was selected to seek interpretation or identification of people's actions in holistic social settings and an integrated cultural context (Payne and Payne, 2004). Purposive sampling was used in this study because the potential interviewees should be selected according to their basic knowledge of Western musicals and the related fan community. The preliminary step was to publish a call for volunteer interviewees in relevant social media and fan platforms. Volunteers who responded became the first group of respondents. Then I expanded the scope of the interviewees because of the need for additional detailed data. The data were collected mainly by in-depth semi-structured interviews.

During the interviews, I encouraged interviewees to describe their internal and external audience experiences and theatre fan narratives in their own terms. In addition, the telephone interview method helped me get in touch with these interviewees all over the world and also brought a greater sense of security (Bryman, 2012) to my interviewees and encouraged them to share their hidden emotions and behaviors, which they might consider improper to share in the mainstream world.

Discourse analysis is applied to show how the interviewees constitute a particular view of this genre and its political boundary using their own terms (Bryman, 2012). Then those terms are coded, analyzed and visualized using the in vivo function of Atlas.ti. Considering the continuity and process of people's lives, narrative analysis is used as a supplement to search for the distinctions of taste among interviewees.

To investigate the definition, feelings, related behavior, culture consumption and lifestyle preferences, the results of the paper are mainly comprised of three parts. After the literature review and method description, the findings of this paper are derived from the combined Bourdieusian theory about distinctions of taste with fan community research in a cross-cultural context.

First, I found that these Chinese audiences of Western musicals, who can be called "strong pluralists" (Whiteley, 2012), are very positively inclined to enjoy this genre. For them, understanding this Western theatrical art and its variety of performative forms brings many intellectual challenges and aesthetic enjoyment. Overcoming different language and

cultural barriers gives them a sense of accomplishment and proves that they can decode the artworks. At the same time, performances such as singing and dancing give them a variety of recreational experiences that balance the difficulty of comprehending the entire theatrical art on the stage. Therefore, the experience of watching a Western musical, whether online or offline, is an opportunity for Chinese audiences to make full use of their high cultural capital to achieve aesthetic and intellectual understanding, satisfy their curiosity and provide them with high-quality artistic enjoyment.

Second, although the Chinese audience's preferences rarely include snobbery in the sense of Western cultural hierarchy, they do have their own distinctions of taste and behavior. Since Chinese society has a traditional tendency to regard all culture and art as some kind of entertainment (Wu, 2016), the attitude of Chinese audiences who watch musicals is very relaxed and light. They cherish the emotional experience of theatre, so they value the interaction between the stage and the audience. Meanwhile, they passionately participate in online fan cultural activities such as writing reviews and creating fan arts. However, as a group with higher cultural capital, Chinese audiences have their own “disposition” (Daenekindt & Roose, 2017) of enjoying Western musicals. They prefer to devote their passion to theatrical works rather than the actors or stars.

Finally, these Chinese audiences do not pay attention to the Bourdieusian cultural distinctions of taste, for they do not share the European social and cultural background about Western middle-class purified and sacralized bourgeois legitimate art that has been prevalent since the eighteenth century (Blanning, 1969; Bourdieu, 1984). Their preference for musicals is more of a social consideration. For them, the genre of Western musical is an attractive cultural object, around which they use their cultural capital to attend cultural activities persistently. Thus, they build a pure social relationship outside of kinship and livelihood (Giddens, 1991; Stebbins, 2001). In a context of cultural globalization (Crane, 2012) and the trend of transnationalist fandom (Lee, 2014), the enthusiasm of Chinese fans for Western musicals reflects their lifestyle preferences.

2. Theory/Theoretical Framework

2.1 Bourdieusian cultural capital theory and distinctions of taste

It is challenging, but could also be feasible, to apply Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and distinctions of taste to cross-cultural research. On the one hand, modern societies, even those with different cultural backgrounds, have a certain degree of commonality; on the other hand, the theory, which was rooted in and applied to European societies, is not necessarily universal. Similarly, the debate about cultural omnivorousness is complex in cross-cultural contexts, requiring scholars to respond carefully.

Bourdieu (1984) proposed that cultural taste and cultural participation are influenced by three types of capital. Economic capital directly affects the amount of money and other types of material wealth a person can spend on cultural life. In short, wealthy people have more economic capital to support their cultural and recreational activities. Social capital is related to the size of a person's network. Interpersonal relationships can also have an impact on cultural tastes. Finally, education, knowledge, and skills comprise a person's cultural capital. The greater the amount of cultural capital a person has, the more likely it is that he/she has better cultural taste and more cultural participation.

Based on his research on 1970s French society, Bourdieu (1984) also discerns the distinction between “legitimate taste” and “illegitimate taste”. The legitimate taste is related to a pure aesthetic attitude that is “purified of all sensuous or sensible interest, perfectly free of all social or fashionable interest, as remote from concupiscence” (Bourdieu, 1984, p498). On the other hand, illegitimate taste or “popular taste” is a natural enjoyment that is seen as “lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile” (Bourdieu, 1984, p33) and opposed to the refined and selfless legitimate taste.

Following up on Bourdieu's theories, Peterson brought forward his research on audience segmentation, which demonstrated a “shift from an elite-to-mass status hierarchy to an omnivore-to-univore status hierarchy” (1992, p243). Both Peterson (1992) and Lizardo

(2006) point out that people with higher cultural capital will expose themselves to a broader and richer cultural environment. Cultural omnivorousness and higher cultural capital have gradually become reciprocal causations. However, Peterson and Rossman (2015) also found that the popularity of omnivorousness, at least in American society, declined from 2002 to 2008. They put forward some assumptions. Apart from questioning the reliability of research methods, they argue that the openness to and tolerance of different cultures could have changed with political and economic conditions, or that cultural omnivorousness itself was just a short-lived phenomenon (Peterson & Rossman, 2015).

Considering its instability and variability, the role of cultural omnivorousness, or cultural openness, in forming cultural tastes in cultural lifestyles needs to be treated more cautiously. The results of Ollivier's (2008) research on Quebec indicated four different types of cultural openness – (1) humanist, which is related to both the intellectual challenge and pleasure in entertainment pursued by highbrow people; (2) populist, which means a middlebrow and broad taste; (3) practical, which is mainly about curiosity in various practical activities; and (4) indifferent, which means that there is no strong preference or enthusiasm. Regarding this topic of different attitudes to cultural diversity, Whiteley uses a pair of different terms to describe these differences in cultural openness: strong pluralism and weak pluralism (2012). Strong pluralism means that there is more generosity and curiosity, with an “insightful, tolerant, inclusive, and democratic” attitude, while weak pluralism means “a pluralism of indifference accepted as a default position” (Whiteley, 2012).

Besides the general attitude towards cultural diversity, some researches argue that the specific dispositions by which people appropriate culture also need to be considered in studying cultural distinctions (Daenekindt & Roose, 2017). In short, the external performance of cultural consumptions and the internal aesthetic disposition should not be seen as equivalent. Daenekindt and Roose even suggest that the styles with which people consume cultural objects, instead of what they are consuming, may emerge as a new source of distinction (2017).

Applying Bourdieusian cultural capital theory and distinctions of taste, as well as the follow-up studies that were based on European or American societies, to the research on

Chinese fans of Western musicals is very challenging, because of the different cultural background. For instance, in the hierarchy of Bourdieusian distinctions, musical theatre “remains (at best) a guilty pleasure” (Wolf, 2017, p3) without any “pure gaze” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 31). Many academics would not hesitate to enunciate their contempt for it. For instance, Lena and Peterson (2008) argue that Broadway show tunes should be seen as “non-genred” (2008, p3), and that it should be not “considered a genre in our sense of the term” (2008, p3). Thus, the reasons why Chinese musical fans “waste” their comparatively high cultural capital on a genre that is not a genre at all in the eyes of Western academics and audiences is worth further studying. One reason might be that Chinese fans do not share these Western backgrounds, so it is easier for them to treat musicals as an artistic genre without the Western-style “snobbery”. Similarly, the external performance and internal disposition of Chinese audiences/fans appreciating and consuming musicals also have their own cross-cultural characteristics. I elaborate on these characteristics of the reception process in the sections below.

2.2 Reception theory and the concept of flow

The same art/cultural form may have different statuses in the vastly different contexts of different geo-cultural dimensions: “what is at the top in one world may be at the bottom in another; what is new here may be old there, and vice versa” (Bellavance, 2008, p. 214). In short, the geographical mobility of an art genre matters in cross-cultural studies.

Iser argues that aesthetic distance is the key to aesthetic appeal. The term “aesthetic distance” in reception theory does not mean the Kantian-style deliberate disinterestedness, but rather a real cultural difference that “evades our expectations and experiences” (Sandvoss, 2011, p240). It requires more exploration and reflection to truly understand. In the process of receiving an unfamiliar art form, the intellectual challenge is critical. That is to say, whether the audience’s comments on a piece of artwork is fanatical or trivial depends on the aesthetic distance. There will be a tension between audiences’ real-life experiences and the potential experiences brought about by the novel artwork. Iser describes this process as

“normalization” (Sandvoss, 2011, p. 240). The process of normalization oscillates between the two extremes. The more the art work differs from the audience’s experience, the greater the aesthetic value it produces. On the other hand, if the work is commonplace for the audience, its aesthetic value will disappear (Iser, 1978). Jauss, another scholar of reception theory, points out that aesthetic value should be a dynamic and relational state that is measured by differently audiences (1982).

Since the judgment of aesthetic value is flexible and personal, the audience's ability to comprehend an unfamiliar artwork needs to be taken into account. According to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, there needs to be a balance between challenges and skills. This balance, which is summarized in their term “flow”, can only be reached when both challenges and skills are at fairly high levels (2002). If people feel indifferent and bored when they are thinking and reflecting on a certain piece of artwork, it is because the piece is insufficiently attractive and challenging for its audiences. If people feel worried and anxious, then its ability may be inadequate.

The normalization in reception theory and the concepts of flow can both be applied to the reception of musical theatre for Chinese fans. Considering their education and knowledge, those Chinese fans have an ample opportunity to use their cultural capital to take on the challenge of understanding and appreciating this performing genre. On the one hand, musicals are a novel performing art that consists of singing, dancing, and acting in a foreign cultural and language context, which could be an appealing challenge. On the other hand, musicals, after all, are a form of relaxing entertainment. That is to say, the performing genre hardly causes stress or excessive challenge. Therefore, the process of normalization for a Western musical in the dark of a theatre can be a challenging and enjoyable state of flow, resulting in the “complete absorption in what one does” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Even if a geo-cultural dimension is added, the love of Chinese fans for Western musicals, with the tension between cultural capital and cultural challenges, can still be considered as part of the economic stratification and taste distinctions that Bourdieu and his followers outline. Lizardo (2006) points out that due to the emergence of modern information technology, links through cultural industry can be extended to more distant places. This

convenience is used by highly educated people to make their cultural socialization more colorful. In Ollivier's research, highbrow people with humanist openness seek both intellectual stimulation and recreational fun (2008). In a cross-cultural background, the reception of the foreign art genre requires relatively high cultural capital. If we consider the fact that musical fans often go to theatres by train and airplane, the time and economic costs of the activity could be substantial.

2.3 Resonance between democratic theatre in modern Western society and audience participation in traditional Chinese theatre

It is unreasonable to regard theatre art as one single art form, because it consists of a range of distinctions (Bourdieu, 1993): "public or subsidized versus commercial, experimental versus mainstream, play versus musical, and so on" (Hills, 2017, p489). Although Bourdieu placed theatre art together with "painting, sculpture, literature and classical music" (1990, p. 96), musical theatre is sometimes seen as an exception, because it has more commercial and entertainment value.

In fact, the scholars who study fandom are highly sensitive to the cultural hierarchies, which, in most situations, means the binary distinction between highbrow art and popular culture. Jenkins defines fans as "a group insistent on making meaning from materials others have characterized as trivial and worthless"(1992, p3). These fanatic people often make researchers concerned about the threat of popular culture (Jenkins, 1992). The academic world tries to avoid using the term "fan", even in studies of relatively commercial and entertaining musical theatre. This reluctance has led to two results: (1) there is little research of the audience for higher art from the perspective of fandom, and (2) there is an interesting word replacement game. Since "fandom is not a prevalent discourse in relation to legitimate theatre" (Hills, 2018, p473), researchers tend to use other terms like "collectors" or "connoisseurs" to describe people, and "preference", "interest", or "expertise" to describe what and how they love the theatre. However, Jensen argues against this demonstrably false separation. She suggests that people who love higher art should also be seen as "fans", for

they also “display interest, affection and attachment” (1992, p9).

While studying Broadway theatre fans, Heim pointed out the audience is more enthusiastic and active because of the commercial and entertaining nature of musicals. However, little attention has been paid to the musical theatre fandom, even though these vibrant theatregoers have always been an important part of musical theatre (2016). Recently, researchers have begun to pay attention to the phenomenon of fans in higher cultures, including musical theatre. Hills points out that fan research “has largely, and unfortunately, surrendered an additional critical dimension whereby it could challenge and polemically destabilize high culture’s typically exclusionary stance on fan discourses” (2018, p478). In fact, people’s attitude to art and culture, even in Western society, is shifting for generational or technological changes. Sandvoss even argues that it “has become next to impossible to find realms of public life which are unaffected by fandom” (2005). Moreover, we can also see that many theatres have been seeking possible democratizing patterns, with “the belief that every person has the right to engage in the arts” (Hope & Ryan, 2014, p13). To reach their democratic ideals, many contemporary theatre makers would like to attract more audience to change the trend that theatre art only belongs to middle-class or upper-class. They also want to make theatrical art survive and thrive in this way. (Hadley, 2017).

While the way to appreciate the art of the theatre in Western society has struggled with change, if we turn our attention to the Chinese theatre culture, we will be pleasantly surprised to discover some democratic features. Chinese theatre culture has retained the characteristics of popularity, and has democratized to a certain extent. In other words, in Chinese culture, theatre art can belong to everyone.

Western legitimate art and culture achieved its status through long-term social and intellectual changes that Chinese society did not experience. With the rise of the middle class in the eighteenth century, aesthetics gradually stopped serving religious institutions or aristocratic elites, and began to gain in self-importance and seriousness. This sacralization of art greatly enhanced its status (Blanning, 1969; Abbing, 2002; Shusterman, 2008). This phenomenon occurred because the emerging intellectual bourgeoisie wanted to raise their own position, so artistic accomplishments which belonged to them was purified and sanctified

(Bourdieu, 1984). Theatres were “built to look like a noble palace, like temples...the visitors were not paying customers but pilgrims” (Blanning, 1969, p133). The remoteness and uselessness of legitimate culture, including theatre art and the “pure gaze” on it, occupied the top end of the binary distinction of cultural tastes (Bourdieu, 1984; Abbing, 2002).

In contrast, Chinese theatre has evolved independently from Western theatre. “In the thousand-year-long Chinese tradition, theatre along with all lyric literature, music and arts are believed to be recreation” (Wu, 2016, p65). Traditional Chinese society valued political practices and propriety. Other than the politics of ruling, the spirit of most traditional Chinese theatre longed for emancipation, and Chinese theatre became a getaway for oppressed souls. Therefore, the Chinese audience has little patience with the unrequited and serious attitude, and there are fewer tragedies in Chinese theatre. Popular and amateur theatre boomed from its earliest times to the Qing dynasty, which was the last feudal period, lasting from 1644 to 1912. (Mackerras & Wichmann, 1983). The Chinese theatre artists were never the authorities who educate the audiences or worshipped by the audiences. Actually, Chinese audience, whose response were valued much, were always taken as an important cooperator in such secular and popular Chinese theatres (Gissenwehrer, 1990).

Modern researchers in the West have started to criticize the otherworldly highbrow art that was shaped in the past two hundred years. Shusterman points out that art should not be placed into “an unreal, purposeless world of imagination” (2008, p2). While recognizing the value of quiet and private contemplation in front of an art work, Conner believes that a shift to audience-centered community could be a solution to the lack of “real, committed interest in the serious arts” (2013, p4). Therefore, the actively participatory attitude of the Chinese audience can be a good reference for the democratization of theatre.

2.4 Cultural globalization and transnational fandom

In his discussion of cultural globalization, Crane (2008) summarized the related academic research into three conceptions. The first conception is about economic globalization, which is dominated by nation-states and multinational corporations. Many scholars believe that this globalization will form some cultural hegemonic centers and reduce the cultural autonomy of

countries with less power and influence. The second conception focuses on the flow of information on a global scale. The third conception values global civil society. In other words, researchers have high hopes for the various cultural organizations that exist in the world and believe that they can bring about global democratization (Crane, 2008, pp. 359-360).

Together, nations, multinational corporations, and civil multinational organizations create the flow of information and generate some competitive tensions between each other. As a bottom-up movement against top-down corporations, fan communities play a crucial role as one of the civil organizations. In today's cultural globalization flow, their participative attitudes and behaviors have substantial achievements in the sense of sharing art or cultural production (Jenkins, 1992). The trend of transnational cultural fandom, which is "actively forming around popular cultural products from overseas" (Lee, 2014, p195), has become increasingly visible in many places.

Gradually, this kind of evolving transnational fandom is competing with the industries in an interesting manner. Many scholars have pointed out that the fan community is a resistance to multinational companies, but there are also a few other researchers who have noticed the supplementary role of transnational fandom: in some niche markets that fail to develop commercial interest, fans will seize the initiative. Thus, fans are able to become the gate-openers and gate-keepers of an art genre or cultural products, ahead of industry professionals (Lee, 2014).

If researchers are able to incorporate theatre and those audiences with high cultural capital into fandom research with an open mind, many new phenomena will continue to emerge. Because of the instant nature of the Internet, fans have become less able to patient wait for the local theatrical releases (Dwyer, 2017). For Chinese fans of musical theatre, their situation is even more difficult. Regardless of whether or not they have patience, on occasion they find that they have no legitimate way to appreciate their beloved theatre, because western musicals lack seamless global distribution networks in China (Lee, 2014). Meanwhile, the Chinese government is afraid of exposing the country to "too much" foreign culture (Kim, 2015). This situation makes the fans become agents of "cultural and linguistic mediation – including translation, cultural footnoting, editing, distribution, and marketing" (Lee, 2014). With great

enthusiasm, Chinese fans spontaneously record videos in the theatre and translate and upload them online. However, this move is often limited by both governments and capital. The self-reliance of Chinese fans can be seen as a grassroots resistance to “a market economy with Chinese characteristics” (Zhang, 2016), and can also be seen as a challenge to the capital’s monopoly on copyright. Moreover, fans as full participants have changed the way in which theatrical art is presented. For example, fan fiction and fan art extend the narrative on stage to the digital form, and fan videos have converted musical theatre to an online cinematic art work, which is a more familiar form for young people who often engage in online cultural participation. Online viewing and related expressions and exchanges are almost unlimited because of the technical power of Internet.

2.5 Serious leisure, or a new form of distinction in modern life politics

DiMaggio argues that families are becoming less important in modern society, which is highly developed, industrialized, and commercialized. Strangers need to be connected to each other through a sufficiently interesting topic when they talk to one another (1987). Giddens also noticed this "transformation of intimacy." He believed that this transformation had brought about a "pure relationship", which was free of kinship, social responsibility, and traditional obligations (1991). In modern society, if people have more freedom to choose who they want to establish intimate relationships with rather than being limited by blood, profession or geography, the question arises as to what their new selection criteria are. Additionally, people may face an even more important question of how to choose their own lifestyle and build their self-identity in the modern life of pluralization.

Serious leisure might be an option (Stebbins, 2001). According to Stebbins, serious leisure is a highly demanding hobby for several reasons. First, it requires perseverance. Second, the activity must be a combination of skill, knowledge, and experience. Third, people must find positive intellectual and emotional states in doing the activity and receive good memories and hopes from it. Fourth, people can build a collective lifestyle in the activity and assume certain long-term responsibilities. Finally, although the activity requires a substantial amount of

commitment, it cannot constitute the livelihood of people, and often has no financial rewards. This also ensures that people have freedom to choose their own serious leisure (Stebbins, 2001).

The definition of serious leisure indicates that it has Kantian features, as it requires people's concentration on the spiritual process instead of the utilitarian results. It also involves a fully engaged, positive, and happy attitude towards the balance of task and skill, which reminds us of the psychological concept of flow. Serious leisure retains the people's freedom to take and give up hobbies. It also provides sufficient respect for individual differences, without imposing specific historical and cultural burdens. Its other conditions are long-term "social networks, friendship, and shared histories", which resemble the "utopian dream of unalienated labor" (Nicholson, Holdsworth & Milling, 2018). If this is the answer to modern self-identity and pure relationship, then it would be acceptable.

However, this utopia is not open to all. Higher cultural capital lets people expose themselves to a more colorful cultural environment (Lizardo, 2006). Participating in a demanding amateur activity without getting paid can also be an obvious marker of status (Nicholson et al, 2018). Additionally, "cultural socialization has penetrated more in elites than in the wider public" (Martell, 2017). In other words, people with higher cultural capital will attend more cultural activities and have more opportunities to build their social network.

This paper studies how, in the modern context of cultural globalization, Chinese fans choose their own aesthetic disposition, build social networks, and make their own distinctions in the community, based on Western musical theatre. Bourdieusian distinctions of taste in this cross-cultural fandom research is more similar to the distinctions of lifestyle related to a certain kind of theatre.

3. Methods

3.1 Research design

This paper attempts to combine the Bourdieusian theory about distinctions of taste, with fan community research in a cross-cultural context. The overall aim is to find out the ways in which Chinese fans of Western musicals are appropriating the genre, and the social or aesthetic reasons behind their behaviors. The study was conducted through a qualitative research method.

Qualitative methods utilize small groups rather than a broad sweep of large samples, and focus on interpreting or identifying people's actions in a holistic social setting and integrated cultural context. Since the subject is specific and consists of small accounts, qualitative research sets out to study naturally-emerged phenomena, with details of people's actions and the meanings that people bring out through those actions (Payne & Payne, 2004). Therefore, as a recent cultural phenomenon, the fandom of western musicals, which a small group of Chinese audiences engages in, can be studied by this inductive pattern.

This study was designed as a cross-sectional survey. In other words, purposive sampling was used in this study to select potential interviewees according to their basic knowledge of musicals. The initial data were collected mainly through several semi-structured interviews in a short time period. The semi-structured interviews ensured that there was both flexibility and cross-case comparability (Bryman, 2012). I elaborate on the sampling, data collection, and data analysis in the following sections.

3.2 Sampling

As introduced above, purposive sampling, as a nonprobability sampling technique, was applied

at the stage of searching suitable interviewees. More precisely, two stages of sampling were used in this study. In the earlier stage, criterion sampling was used, and then the snowballing sampling (Bryman, 2012).

Since I have a certain degree of familiarity with the Chinese audience of Western musicals and their social networks, the preliminary step of sampling was to publish the request for volunteer interviewees in the relevant social media groups, online forums or Bulletin Board System, or fan art blog platforms. The people who responded were the first group of respondents.

Criterion sampling was used for this step because I had to impose some requirements, based on the research questions, to find the most suitable interviewees. The request had the following requirements: I needed 20 interviewees who were experienced musical audience members, loved theatrical art, and felt that the genre meant a lot to his/her life. In addition, the interviewees had to be able to spend an hour sharing feelings and stories related to theatre before May 1st, 2019. These requirements encouraged suitable interviewees to contact me, while also providing some flexibility. First, since my research was about fans of musicals, people who thought that they were familiar with and deeply attached to the genre were proper candidates to be interviewed. Second, I did not provide a clear definition of the word “experienced”, in order to observe how fans positioned themselves as being “experienced”. Third, 20 units of one-hour interviews could be seen as an ideal size to ensure the progress of in-depth case-oriented analysis (Bryman, 2012) while leaving room for some of the interviewees to change their mind and quit the interview.

Due to the Great Firewall of China (Mozur, 2015), some popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are banned in mainland China. Therefore, China's mainstream social media is different from the Western world: it comprises Weibo, which is similar to Twitter; Weichat, which is similar to WhatsApp, and Lofter, which is similar to Tumblr. These platforms are also where musical fans are active. The original plan for sampling had been to use these platforms. However, in practice, the study was enthusiastically supported by the Chinese fan community. There were 306 forwards, 48 comments, and more than 111,000 views on the Weibo platform alone. There were far more people than expected who texted me to indicate

their willingness and eagerness to participate in the interview.

Nearly everyone who contacted me told me that they love musicals passionately. The number of musicals that they had seen was impressive. Even the person who had watched the least amount of musicals had watched about 30 musicals (which does not include re-watching the same show in theatres or online). Moreover, most of them had worked in fan production, such as fiction, fan pictures, and fan videos, and all of them enjoyed these fan productions. Given the large amount of zealous and qualified respondents, the fairest and most efficient way to select the interviews was to use the temporal sequence: the 20 interviewees were the first 20 people who contacted me.

During these 20 interviews, I believed that subsequent snowball sampling was still necessary. All the 20 interviewees talked in detail about relevant topics such as fan creation, subtitle translations, university musical theatre clubs, and the similarities/differences between Chinese traditional opera and musicals. When they discussed these issues, they recommended their friends who had professional backgrounds in, and personal experiences with musicals. I thus added 10 respondents through snowball sampling. Among these 10 respondents, there were two senior Chinese traditional opera lovers who were also fans of musicals, three volunteer translators who made subtitles, four people in charge of their university musical clubs, and an organizer of the musical fan convention. In most cases, the snowball group had similar stories as their friends in the first group, but the narrative of the story changed from third person to first person, which meant that there was more detail.

However, all these interviewees were active Weibo users, which could have caused some deviation in the sampling. The respondents were young people proficient in using the Internet, so this study may have missed some respondents with different ideas and behaviors.

In the end, 30 interviewees participated in the semi-structured interviews through online phone calls in April 2019. Three recordings were lost when my computer broke down in May. Thus, there were 27 recordings left, each of which lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. All these interviewees had Chinese nationality, spoke Chinese as their mother tongue, and spent their adolescence in China. There were 26 females and one male in the age bracket of 16–33, most of whom were living in China's major cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai. 9 of the respondents

had overseas study experience, or were living overseas for their work or study during the interview. Except for a 16-year-old interviewee who was a high school student, the rest of the interviewees had a bachelor's degree or higher. Two of them were studying for a doctorate. The detailed interviewee list can be found in Appendix 1.

3.3 Data collection

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were applied during the process of data collection. This method enabled me to obtain the interviewee's point of view (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, the flexibility of semi-structured qualitative interviews, as well as the outline in lay language, encouraged interviewees to describe their internal and external audience experiences and theatre fan narratives, in their own terms.

Due to practical constraints, all the interviews were conducted through online telephones. Depending on the respondents' location, three types of online chat software were used: WeChat, Skype, and QQ. Telephone interviews may lose some detail and interaction compared to face-to-face communication, but there are obvious advantages in some cases. It is a convenient way to reach a dispersed group around the world (Bryman, 2012). More than half of the respondents also mentioned two sensitive issues: depression and piracy. When the interviewer was not physically present, the interviewees felt more secure (Bryman, 2012) to share their hidden emotions and "illegal" behaviors in the mainstream world.

The interview outline consisted of four topics: first, how Chinese fans define Western musicals; second, their experiences and feelings about this genre in the theatre; third, their fan behavior and fan production both online and offline; and fourth, the group's preference for hobbies besides musicals (see *Table 1 and Appendix 2*).

Table 1: *General Set-Up of the Interview Guide.*

<p>Topic 1 Definition of the genre</p>	<p>Did you “fall in love” with the genre when you watched the first musical in your life? (If not, which musical caused you to become interested in</p>
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	<p>musicals, and when did you become interested?)</p> <p>What were the most touching parts/elements in that musical?</p> <p>Generally speaking, what about musicals attracts you the most?</p>
<p>Topic 2</p> <p>Experience of going to the theatre</p>	<p>Do you have the experience of watching musicals in other countries or cities?</p> <p>Do you do any homework before entering the theatre?</p> <p>If so, what do you usually focus on? Where do you get the information?</p> <p>What kind of charm does a theatre (live performance) have?</p> <p>What factors or conditions improve/worsen your theatre experience?</p> <p>What do you think are the basic qualities of a qualified musical audience?</p>
<p>Topic 3</p> <p>Fan behavior</p>	<p>Have you made friends with other musical fans?</p> <p>Do you read/write reviews or comments? Why or why not?</p> <p>Have you watched pirated videos with/without translated subtitles?</p> <p>Have you watched/produced fan videos, fan fictions, fan pictures, or peripheral products?</p> <p>How do you evaluate various unofficial video resources and their subtitle translators?</p> <p>What do you think are the basic qualities of a good musical fan?</p>
<p>Topic 4</p> <p>Preferences for other hobbies</p>	<p>Do you think you are a person with a wide range of interests in art and culture?</p> <p>Outside of going to musicals/the theatre, do you have any other interest in arts and culture?</p> <p>Do you have any other hobbies? What is the biggest difference between watching musicals and the other hobbies in your life?</p>

3.4 Data Analysis

27 in-depth interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded through Atlas.ti. The audio and original transcription were in Chinese and summarized in English. Discourse analysis was applied to the main parts of the interview. The analysis emphasized the strategies that the Chinese fans employ when they focus on their interest, or their concern when discussing their beloved musical theatre (Bryman, 2012). The discourse or terminology chosen by these musical fans indicated how they defined musicals as a genre, how they evaluated their theatre experience, and how they chose other hobbies, thereby demonstrating how they constituted a particular view of this genre and its symbolic boundaries (Bryman, 2012). The excerpts related to topic 1, 2 and 4 were coded using the “in vivo” function of Atlas.ti. The codes, which represented the discourse of the fans, were listed and visualized with English translations. The Atlas.ti network function presented their discursive strategies distinctly (*see Appendices 3 and 4*).

In addition, narrative analysis was applied to the topic of building fan community and attending fan activities, as a supplement to searching for the distinctions of taste among those Chinese fans. This was mainly because the respondents in the qualitative interviews often told a story as an answer, which was used for the narrative analysis. The narrative analysis was not used to explain the respondents’ life span, but to focus on what they were doing as a fan and how they understood these fan behaviors as part of their life story (Bryman, 2012). The analysis revolved around the six dimensions of “characters, setting, events, audience, causal relations, and themes” (Bryman, 2012, p584), to understand how musical fans found self-identity, and the reasons why they continued their love for this genre in various fan activities. The narrative analysis of topic 3 and a small part of the other topics, could make up for the neglect of continuity and process of people's lives when applying a discourse analysis (Bryman, 2012). When they talked about enjoying musicals, the Chinese fans described musical theatre as a serious leisure activity (Stebbins, 2001). Thus, the distinctions of lifestyle in their discourse were easier to understand with their stories, since this hobby had already become part of their social life.

The results of the data analysis were structured into three parts: 1) how Chinese fans use

their cultural capital to receive and appreciate Western musicals and establish their own image as strong pluralists (Whiteley, 2012) or elites with a humanist cultural openness (Ollivier, 2008); 2) how Chinese fans use the Chinese characteristics to enjoy musicals online and offline within the framework of Chinese social and cultural values, and how they used their way of appreciation to draw the distinctions; and 3) how Chinese fans participate in fan activities as a serious leisure activity (Stebbins, 2001) to build pure relationships (Giddens, 1991), and thereby find their distinctive lifestyle.

3.5 Validity and Ethical issues

The validity of the study was provided by the abundant information collected during the 27 interviews, where the interviewees described their opinions and actions on the reception of foreign theatrical art. They were sufficient for reliable analysis.

In the cross-cultural context, this study also has a certain transferability. The Chinese cultural backgrounds of the researcher and interviewees provide a new perspective on Western art and culture, and demonstrate the universality and limitations of Western theory. Different cultures have different historical development trajectories, in which snobbery and openness may have different characteristics from those of the Anglo-Saxon world. This kind of thinking and analysis may have its own value in other multicultural studies.

Before each interview, the interviewees were provided with the form for informed consent. Most people had no objections to signing and using their real names. However, in order to protect their privacy, I have numbered each interviewee. All the interviewees are mentioned and quoted according to their numbers. In addition, one interviewee (interviewee No. 4) shared her own story with a college musical club, but subsequently said that she did not want this story to be used as research material. Therefore, my research data does not include her story.

4. Results

4.1 Chinese fans as explorers in an unknown world of Western musicals

Drawing on the information from the interviews, we find that this group of musical fans from China does have high educational backgrounds. Their tolerance for musicals of different languages, countries, styles and times shows that higher cultural capital and cultural omnivorism can be mutually evident (Peterson, 1992). They take the process of appreciating this genre as a rich aesthetic experience and intellectual challenge. With an insightful and inclusive attitude, they also take the initiative with open minds to try their best to find more musical works online and offline. Many of them have traveled many times just to see a particular theatrical work. Their geographic mobility can also be interpreted as the real status marker of the audience with higher economic capital and cultural capital (Goldberg, 2016; Bellavance, 2008).

4.1.1 Musical theatre as intellectual challenges with aesthetic distance

Although young Chinese people's enthusiasm for musicals has only risen in recent years, most of them have actually known about such theatre arts for much longer. They need to accumulate their own cultural capital to a certain level to truly realize the charm of this genre.

There was a bit of content about musical theatre in my elementary school curriculum.... However, during my last year of high school, I was more able to understand the meanings and feelings conveyed in the musicals. That's maybe because I got more mature. At that time, I realized the charm of musicals is to

make those stories that are far away from us or that do not exist at all suddenly close to us.

(No. 15 interviewee, 23 years old, female, company employee, Beijing)

The earliest musical in my memory is *Cats* in 2009. At that time, I was too young to understand plots and lyrics. When I no longer had any major obstacles with the language in 2015 or 2016, I began to really understand musicals and love them.

(No. 2 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Oxford)

My music teacher showed us *Notre Dame* in class when I was 14. But after I recently watched *Elizabeth* and *Mozart, l'opéra rock*, I really started to indulge in musical theatre.

(No. 12 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, London)

When their ability or cultural competence to decode and appreciate this genre (Daenekindt & Roose, 2017) was insufficient, the audiences were not immediately impressed with musical theatre works. As soon as they began to possess the register to solve these coded works, they understood the charm in the tension between potential experience brought by this unfamiliar genre and their own experience in the process of the exploration of understanding. This aesthetic distance (Iser, 1978) is the main source of the attractiveness of Western musicals to the Chinese audience.

It is also worth noting that for Chinese audiences, mastering a Western language does not mean that they need to understand every word in a musical story. The real aesthetic appeal is the decoding process across the different languages. Therefore, they sometimes deliberately search for musicals in European languages other than English, just for the fun of “normalization” (Iser, 1978). When they mentioned their appreciation for this foreign art form, the terms "new," "novel," "exotic," “strange,” "fresh" and “interesting” were used frequently.

I think the benefit of watching these musicals is that I have to think in the context of different languages. In this way, the perspective of my observations will be influenced by those languages, so that I can get a new experience.

(No. 16 interviewee, female, college student, Guangzhou)

I don't know why German musicals such as *Mozart!* are more intimate and interesting to me. Maybe this is just because of a novel or exotic language that I haven't noticed before. The whole experience of receiving becomes more innovative.

(No. 13 interviewee, 19 years old, female, college student, Guangzhou)

My friend and I recently discovered that the musicals in Hungary are also interesting. However, we don't understand Hungarian at all, so what we do to solve this problem is try to find the original novels of the musicals and then use the novel in English or Chinese translation as a tool to understand these Hungarian musicals.

(No. 27 interviewee, 20 years old, Female, College student, Nanjing)

When language is no longer an obstacle because of sufficient linguistic knowledge, translation tools, and other roundabout solutions, these audiences' attention shifts from decoding foreign languages to understanding the plot or the theme and appreciating the acting. The enjoyment people get from musicals certainly differs from person to person, but the commonality among them can be summarized as new learning from a different culture.

I prefer musicals with a touch of religion, such as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Les Dix Commandements*, *Adam et Ève: La Seconde* and *Chance Notre Dame de Paris*. From these musicals, I can get some thoughts on the topic of life and death that I NEVER had in my school

education.

(No. 15 interviewee, 23 years old, female, company employee, Beijing)

After watching many musicals, I found that this genre can really convey very rich and deep themes, not just historical and fictional stories that I am already very familiar with. It can be about AIDS, wanderers, child survival issues and much more. These original Broadway musicals can express such realist themes with music. In 2018, I watched 38 musicals from the United States, Britain, Germany, Austria and Japan. Every one of them brought a nice surprise.

(No. 17 interviewee, 29 years old, female, company employee, Shanghai)

4.1.2. Musical theatre as enriched and balanced aesthetic pleasure

Strangeness is a source of interest and enthusiasm for these curious Chinese audiences who have just come into contact with Western musicals. However, they will notice more theatrical features as they become familiar with the genre.

Among all the hobbies these musical fans mentioned in the interviews, stage art is very popular. Many of them have extensive and profound involvement in opera, ballet and spoken drama. When they compare these art forms, they still believe that musicals will bring more aesthetic and intellectual challenges because singing or dancing are added to the story scene as “a dimension of artificiality” (Taylor, 2012). The attention of the audience, therefore, is pulled simultaneously in two opposing directions, which are narrative devolvement and multiple performance, and they think that opposition brings a new challenge. “Comprehensiveness,” “balance” and “diversification” are the reasons these fans value musicals.

Compared with spoken drama, the music in a musical, especially the singing, is a plus. The combination of music, dance and drama can touch people more directly.

(No. 10 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Beijing)

I really appreciate musicals using music and songs to structure stories, rather than using them as background music.

(No. 16 interviewee, female, college student, Guangzhou)

Compared with Chinese traditional opera and spoken drama, the strength of musicals lies in the balance between narrative and music.

(No. 18 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Shanghai)

Moreover, the process of “normalization” across the aesthetic distance (Iser, 1978) will not disappear even if those Chinese fans continue to comprehend the genre better and better. As a comprehensive art of singing, dancing and performance in a foreign language, each new production is a significant intellectual challenge. Thus, doing homework about plots and lyrics in advance is common sense and a common practice among Chinese fan groups.

Generally speaking, I will prepare myself to be familiar with the plot and the singing style before going to the theatre using video, audio or script information on the Internet. If the musical was adapted from a famous book, I will also read its literary original, such as *Roméo et Juliette: les enfants de véronique*.

(No. 13 interviewee, 19 years old, female, college student, Guangzhou)

Usually I watch videos or listen to songs online before going to the theatre. Even if the theatre provides subtitles, it is very distracting and exhausting to watch both the subtitles and the stage at same time. Therefore, homework should be done before entering the theatre.

(No. 5 interviewee, female, postgraduate candidate, Cambridge and Beijing)

It is difficult to find online materials for many European-language musicals. Last

week, I went to see the musical *Divine Comedy*. I went to visit a friend who studies Dante on purpose to learn more before I went to the theatre. However, the music helps a lot with breaking the barriers of language. Even if you can't understand every line accurately, you can probably understand the general idea of the story and enjoy the drama through the logic of its music.

(No. 24 interviewee, 25 years old, female, college students, Bologna/Vienna)

Meanwhile, singing and choreography also lift and augment the script into a more expressive and stereographic realm and add more relaxing entertainment, which can reduce language barriers and ease the audience's anxiety when they are facing a completely unknown work. Therefore, music and dance enrich this aesthetic enjoyment and relieve comprehension difficulties at the same time.

One of the benefits of musicals is that you can understand more with detailed homework, and you can still be moved by live singing and acting without any preview. Anyway, it's not that hard to guess the meaning in this theatre art with such a strong expressive force.

(No. 22 interviewee, 27 years old, female, company employee, Shanghai)

4.1.3. Cultural omnivores with Chinese characteristics

Sandvoss once stated that the Bourdieusian priori distinctions of taste, as a certain common assumption in Western societies, undermines the notion of aesthetic value in the process of reception (2011). Therefore, it is worth noting that in the context of interculturalism, these Chinese audiences, as beholders of Western culture, do not impose European-style or Bourdieusian standards of cultural distinctions on it, although sometimes they do have a clear awareness of these standards. For example, they do not think that musicals are inferior to opera or ballet. Many interviewees like all three art forms, but still prefer musical theatre. While emphasizing that they are by no means ignoring the virtue and value of traditional

European highbrow culture, Chinese fans praise the flexibility of the musical art form. In their words, musical theatre is a "free," "diverse," "variable" and "unfixed" art. This feature is also why they prefer musicals when they compare them to traditional Chinese opera art.

In addition, some researchers have pointed out that cultural omnivores sometimes tend to despise commercial success and therefore promote high-quality artworks (Goldberg, 2016). However, these 30 respondents never mentioned whether a musical show had achieved commercial success or not. In fact, many of them are aware that musical theatre in the Western art world is only a category of mature commercialization and sometimes even is seen as "(at best) guilty pleasure" (Savran, 2014), but this does not affect their preference for it.

I found the style of musicals is very free. I have been in love with this performing art for almost three years, but I realize I am still in constant contact with new forms of musicals. The first shows I saw were some German musicals, which was more philosophical and thought-provoking. Later, I watched French musicals, the styles of which are closer to the excitement of pop or rock concerts. Now I have also watched many American Broadway musicals and found that they are also very different. In this art form, I keep discovering many different new things.

(No. 1 interviewee, 24 years old, female, national institution employee, Xuancheng)

In the field of traditional Chinese opera, "school" is a very important aspect. That's to say the style of singing and performance of an actor or actress are supposed to be similar to his/her "master" or the founder of this singing or acting school. The performers of Western musicals do not have this burden.

(No. 23 interviewee, 18 years old, female, college student, Shanghai)

Since its birth, the opera always has held an obvious tendency and certainty, so it will encounter an ontological crisis as soon as it "wants" to change the form even

a bit. The musical theatre, on the contrary, is very flexible.

(No. 16 interviewee, female, college student, Guangzhou)

The cultural omnivorousness of these fans can also be found in their other hobbies. Most of the interviewees believed they had a wide range of interests in art and culture. Considering all the categories of hobbies they mentioned during the interviews, this statement is veritable. The “distinctions” of taste are rarely expressed or even realized. They explain why they choose their hobbies in a very creative and individualized way.

I think that theatregoing is definitely first on my hobby list, then come museum exhibitions and visiting gardens. I really love the Chinese traditional gardening art and landscape art. Like musicals, these two hobbies also need people to go out and enjoy them with, in a specific environment.

(No. 18 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Shanghai)

Reading a book is like listening to someone telling a story of the past; watching a movie is like watching a story of someone else as a bystander; and watching a musical is like you are right there in the story. So the difference between reading, watching movies and watching musicals lies in the different distance between you and the story, and I like them all.

(No. 25 interviewee, 21 years old, male, company employee, Beijing)

I'm a classic music lover now. There was a Japanese anime called *Classica loid*, relating stories of music masters such as Mozart or Beethoven. In this animated fandom, there are many professional classical music students and experienced connoisseurs. They use their expertise to explain the jokes and punchlines in this cartoon about classical music as well as masters' biographies or anecdotes.

Because of this knowledge shared by those talented friends, I gradually entered the fantastic world of classical music with better understanding.

(No. 27 interviewee, 20 years old, female, college student, Nanjing)

In summary, I refer to these Chinese musical fans as "cultural omnivores with a humanist openness that has Chinese characteristics." They actively take up the intellectual challenges that Western musicals bring them. They receive this theatre art as a novel genre that can "stimulate their minds and acquire new knowledge" (Ollivier, 2008). Meanwhile, they also enjoy the aesthetic pleasure of the entertainment aspect. Moreover, they show no interest in making a distinction between any "legitimate" and popular art in a Bourdieusian way that is related to Western historical and social legacy.

4.2 A Chinese-style distinction related to emotion

4.2.1 Defense on emotional pleasure

In fact, these musical fans, as cultural omnivores with Chinese characteristics, do not treat every art form equally without discrimination. Instead of emphasizing sanctity and authenticity, they value the emotional features of the art. Most of the 27 interviewees highlighted the emotional experience very clearly when discussing why they prefer musicals.

The most impressive thing about *Les Misérables* is the pain of the heartbreaking characters, especially in the song "Empty Tables and Chairs".

(No. 2 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Oxford)

The combination of music and dance can express emotions more intuitively and directly.

(No. 10 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Beijing)

When watching a musical, I pay more attention to the emotional experience that it brings to me.

(No. 18 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Shanghai)

As many researchers have observed, the binary opposition between highbrow and lowbrow culture that persisted in the humanities in the twentieth century sometimes caused theatre art to fall into an embarrassing and anxious situation (Taylor, 2012). The Kantian aesthetic encourages disinterestedness (Bourdieu, 1984); remoteness and uselessness have also become the necessary standards for shaping the sanctity of higher art (Abbing, 2002). However, one of the decisive characteristics of theatre art has been the capacity to arouse emotion ever since the time of Aristotle. Mamet, a contemporary screenwriter, even suggested that “the thrill of the communal hunt” is the real reason for the audience going to the theatre (Heide, Porter, & Saito, 2012). Thus, there is almost an absence of musical theatre scholarship in humanities that measures its emotional features against aesthetic rationale, as well as its commercial popularity (Wolf, 2007; Heim, 2015). However, those detached features that belong to highbrow art, as well as the “pure gaze,” which is the proper attitude to appreciate legitimate art, are products of the sacralization of art while the position of bourgeois class was rising during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Blanning, 1969). In other words, the trend is artificial.

There is no similar historical process in Chinese culture. Certain characteristics of Chinese culture have even improved the emotional status of their theatrical works. While Chinese traditional society values philosophy, history and political practice with orders and rituals in a pragmatist way, Chinese theatre as an antiauthoritarian art always pursues the release of emotion (Wu, 2016). Therefore, Chinese audiences are very open to experiencing and expressing emotions in the hopeful theatrical moments with “utopian performatives” (Tylor, 2012, p19).

Emotional intensity is one of the important criteria among these musical fans. They used words such as “emotion,” “catharsis,” “empathy” and “immersion” as compliments. Compared with other hobbies, the emotional intensity in the musicals becomes one of the most decisive factors, even if they are able to recognize other virtues in other art categories.

Recently, I began to watch more opera, because opera music is great. But musicals have stronger emotional expressions, which make them richer and more interesting than opera.

(No. 3 interviewee, 24 years old, female, PR professional, Shanghai)

The spoken plays are more informative and more thought-provoking than the musical. But the musicals are so much more emotional. I think this is their unique aspect. During the development of the story, music always plays a crucial role in promoting emotions. The same melody could be repeated in different passages in a story with different memories or different meanings, which presents a lot of emotion.

(No. 21 interviewee, 25 years old, female, doctoral student, Shanghai)

Figure skating is more about technology; dramas are more about thought. But their emotional intensity is not comparable to musicals.

(No. 2 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Oxford)

In addition, until recently, Chinese audiences would not agree that a piece of dramatic work could be performed without music or singing. From this perspective, all Chinese traditional theatrical art forms can be called "opera" (Mackerras & Wichmann, 1983). Therefore, it is not surprising that they first noticed the effect of music on emotions. In musical theatre, music is a kind of "emotionally-motivated control" (Marshall, 2000) that takes over rational narrative. The musical, vocal and physical acting together "create the experience of voluptuous and excessive sensations" (Tylor, 2012, p169). Thus, Chinese fans consider music one significant factor that improves emotional development.

Music can bring more emotions.

(No. 16 interviewee, female, college student, Guangzhou)

In terms of expressing emotions in music, there are many similarities between

Chinese traditional opera and Western musicals. The most touching moment is the moment of empathy.

(No. 18 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Shanghai)

Expressing emotions in singing and dancing is a human nature, and it feels good to follow this nature.

(No. 30 interviewee, 24 years old, female, lawyer, Beijing)

Many Chinese fans mentioned during interviews that the first experience of watching Western musicals in their lives was not in a theatre, but online. Various forms of media production have led to a large number of “nonresident” audiences of all kinds of local theatre art (Athique, 2014; Heim, 2016). Chinese musical fans also benefit from media technology to become nonresident audiences on the Internet. However, they often emphasize the necessity of theatregoing because watching live performance brings them a sense of presence. A theatre is a place where people gather physically. The Chinese fans found that the movements of the performers and spectators affect the emotional experience. As Garner argued, “motor resonance has been shown to be one neural route to empathy among others” (2018, p9). Thus, this is also the way Chinese fans emphasize the importance of theatregoing and the intense emotional feelings “on site.”

Each live performance has its own uniqueness. And the reaction of the audience is different in every performance, which will bring wonderful chemical reactions to the actors.

(No. 6 interviewee, 22 years old, female, college student, Philadelphia)

The theatre can give me a feeling of immersion. In addition, some stage mistakes and remedies are also very interesting. These nuances of performance bring more fun.

(No. 2 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Oxford)

Another important aspect related to emotions is the healing effect of musicals, which let audiences escape from reality and balance the pressures of their daily lives. Marshall pointed out that the complete music structure in a musical will make sure there is a safe catharsis with no emotional breakdown even if there is much ecstasy and despair (2000). This is one reason why Chinese audience value musical theatre so much. According to Bourdieu, functional aesthetics of relaxing the body and mind belong to the working class (Bourdieu, 1984; Daenekindt & Roose, 2017). However, given their economic and educational background, it is difficult to say that these Chinese audiences are working class. As Iwabuchi argued, these Chinese fans just use musicals in their unique way and “do not perceive themselves as being on the periphery of Western culture” (Crane, 2008, p364).

Musicals are my favorite. They are not only beautiful, but also help me be very relaxed in this difficult real life.

(No. 1 interviewee, 24 years old, female, national institution employee, Xuancheng)

In the theatre, I can feel more emotions. The theatre is where I used to escape dry reality.

(No. 5 interviewee, female, postgraduate candidate, Cambridge and Beijing)

Generally speaking, when the black dog found me, I would like to see a musical to heal myself.

(No. 12 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, London)

These musicals can calm my emotions when I am depressed.

(No. 15 interviewee, 23 years old, female, company employee, Beijing)

The greatest charm of a musical for me is its beauty of relaxing people. That's why it cannot be replaced by other artistic forms. Even when the theme of a musical is realistic and serious, there is always a very dreamy charm to it.

(No. 17 interviewee, 29 years old, female, company employee, Shanghai)

Besides happiness, some musicals also give people a sense of despair, and this despair can be thoroughly developed in the emotions of music. However, there will still be a power in the songs, and then you will feel the feeling of being alive.

(No. 26 interviewee, 16 years old, female, high school student, Shanghai)

4.2.2 Democratic theatre online and offline

Jenkins used two phrases to describe fandom: “bottom-up participatory culture” and “a scandalous category” (2006). The former is appropriate to the attitude of Chinese fans of Western musicals. In theatres, they interact with actors on the stage in a fanatical manner. Schechner (2013) stated that this audience participation changes a theatrical event into a social event by shifting art-and-illusion watching to the solidarity between performers and spectators. In other words, audience participation is not doing theatre, but undoing it by breaking the usual agreements between performer and spectator (Hillman-McCord, 108). Chinese fans are not afraid of emotional expression. They do not care about Kantian aesthetic distance. According to the distinctions in their minds, the way of indifference and alienation is inferior, so they will never consider their enthusiasm something “scandalous.” As the study’s interviewees stated, they proudly wear their handmade costumes in the theatre just as they do when they go to a grand comicon; they cheer and sing along during the performance; and they communicate with their favorite actors boldly and frankly and leave gifts for them at the stage door when the show ends.

While some Western scholars suggested that those fiercely active and loyal audience members who have relevant knowledge, cognitive effort and intense enthusiasm should be called “committed patrons” who possess “consumer expertise” (Espinola and Badrinarayanan, 2010), this group of passionate Chinese audience members in my research would rather be self-recognized and self-evaluated as “fans.” It is not only a word replacement game, but also

a reflection of deeper social and cultural psychology: in China, going to the theatre is for fun. Given that many of them have studied abroad, interviewees in this study also have a reflexive attitude when they compare the performance of Chinese and foreign audiences. But in any case, active participation is still the most praised way.

Speaking of the performance of the audience in the theatre, I don't like the overly quiet state of the Japanese audience. Even if they felt deeply moved, they forever stay still. If they dare to be a little vocal, their cheers and applause are blindly followed by each other.

(No. 17 interviewee, 29 years old, female, company employee, Shanghai)

I like the interaction of actors and audiences in the theatre. In the West End of London, this interaction is rare. Everyone in the dark just watches the show indifferently, or even lifelessly. Chinese fans, especially when enjoying French musicals, are very interactive. That atmosphere is cute and fun.

(No. 5 interviewee, female, postgraduate candidate, Cambridge and Beijing)

I know that some people will criticize the young Chinese audience for being too noisy. Anyway, these Chinese audiences are really into the dramatic art, which is very nice.

(No. 16 interviewee, female, college student, Guangzhou)

In the contemporary Western theatrical circle, professionals have begun to advocate the trend of "democratization" to change the situation that theatrical art only serves the upper or middle classes. Some theatrical works, especially musicals, try to use more actor-audience reaction to bridge the gulf between the stage and the spectators. In the last two decades, the Western audience finally got a chance to change the state of "sitting practically comatose in the dark" (Heim, 2015). On the contrary, Chinese traditional theatre has long been unrelated to religion and has favored the grassroots for thousands of years. Therefore, the audiences are

always significant coworkers with the actors (Gissenwehler, 1990). In terms of democratic theatre, Chinese audiences have some innate advantages.

Moreover, the trend of democratizing theatrical art is not only limited in the theatre; it also spreads across the Internet. Internet technology, especially social media, can help theatre professionals interact with audiences in new ways (Hadley, 2017). Brecht, as one of the great theatre-makers who first tried to take audiences as critics, once argued that honest feedback from the audiences is also artistic and valuable. Actors and screenwriters in Western playdom began to invite audiences into theatrical engagement (Heim, 2015). The Chinese fans in this study are proficient Internet users and are willing to join the online ensemble with theatrical professionals all the time. They make themselves critics and fan art creators to reach a “culturally constructed understanding that their part in the interpretive function—their role as decoders of meaning” (Conner, 2013, p2). They particularly enjoy their active way of appreciating musicals.

One trend I like very much is that fans actively recommend and comment about musicals they like on social media. This actually helps others choose the shows they like.

(No. 28 interviewee, 28 years old, female, game designer, Shanghai)

Reading review articles of other fans on social media is like an experience of "cloud" theatregoing.

(No. 10 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Beijing)

The Fan-edit video is a source of joy for me. There are times I have become interested in certain new shows because I saw them in these funny videos. This is why I am getting to know more and more musicals.

(No. 2 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Oxford)

Sometimes the potential audience may be attracted by the high-quality fan art

and then become interested in musical theatre, just like me.

(No. 2 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Oxford)

4.2.3 Fans of theatre versus fans of idols

Acting as the coworkers of the theatre artists, Chinese fans do not believe that commercial success will reduce the value of theatrical art. They are not motivated to monopolize scarce cultural resources, either. Therefore, they embrace and even promote the business success of musical theatre very sincerely. During the interviews, all the Chinese fans stated that they hope there will be more audiences in the future and they are willing to make efforts to promote the genre by attending all kind of fan activities. However, while advocating emotional enjoyment and active participation, Chinese fans have gradually formed their own forms of distinctions.

Daenekindt and Roose suggested distinctions of disposition can be taken as the substitute of distinction of taste (2017). In a context of cultural abundance in modern society, the objects and frequency of cultural consumption may not be convincing enough to become the proof of cultural capital, even if they can still reflect the gap between rich and poor. Holt also argued that cultural taste can be reflected by what people consume only in a society with a hierarchy between highbrow and lowbrow art that is clear and distinct (1998). In Chinese society, cultural boundaries were so blurred that all lyrical literature, music and arts could be taken as entertainment (Wu, 2016). Therefore, the importance of how people appreciate an artwork or cultural product stands out. While the interviewees discussed the proper way of enjoying a musical in Chinese fan community, they generalized the question about disposition as, “Craziness is acceptable, but what are you crazy about?”

When they realize the audience's enthusiasm is not for the theatrical works but only for the actors or actress, a general anxiety arises among these fans.

Many people worship musical actors like they are pop idols or movie stars. Nowadays, some of the performing companies depend on this trend too much. (No. 3 interviewee, 24 years old, female, public relations professional, Shanghai)

If the audience's vocal response is for the show, then it's OK. For example, the audience was so moved by the story and performance that they can't help crying, laughing or applauding. But it's not proper that every interaction is for your idol. (No.13 interviewee, 19 years old, female, college student, Guangzhou)

I do not understand why some people would deliberately become close to the actors and then brag that they have developed personal relationships with their idols. How on earth does this help your theatre experience? (No. 20 interviewee, 23 years old, female, teacher, Jinan)

Talking about the tension between fans of theatre and fans of idols, these Chinese fans often mentioned another preference when choosing musicals, that is, musicals with complexity, logic and intellectual challenge. This standard has also been applied to various fan products. Although most Chinese fans love musical stars and do not hesitate to express this love, the boundary of distinction lies in whether one is paying enough attention to the theatrical work while worshiping the musical stars.

I like works that provide some challenges in terms of aesthetics and intelligence. So, I might prefer a story that is complex, profound, or sad. If a comedy can reach such a level of challenge, I can accept it. (No. 28 interviewee, 28 years old, female, game designer, Shanghai)

The reason I notice and love an actor/actress basically is an excellent script to support his/her performance of singing and acting. (No. 21 interviewee, 25 years old, female, doctoral student, Shanghai)

When reading a theatre review article or joining a discussion about musicals on social media, I hope that I can also learn more from a relatively professional point of view, rather than just worshipping some performers as idols.

(No. 30 interviewee, 24 years old, female, lawyer, Beijing)

If fan fictions can deepen the emotional relationship in the story and further logically develop the plot, it is acceptable. If they just present the stereotype of some actors' sexy image, then that's meaningless.

(No. 25 interviewee, 21 years old, male, company employee, Beijing)

Three of the Chinese musical fans who were interviewed are also fans of traditional Chinese opera (No. 16, 18 and 23). In their view, the audience of traditional operas are much noisier and even use mobile phones very frequently. The applause in the theatre is often given to outstanding performers, not to the delicate design of the plot. Traditional Chinese society, seen as regarding all theatrical art as recreation, has its own negative effects, including lack of respect for artworks and artists (Mackerras & Wichmann, 1983). While the Chinese musical fans in this study value and respect high-quality scripts, which bring more substance than just beautiful tunes, dazzling sets or charming actors, they add a seriousness to their emotional participation.

4.3 Distinctions of lifestyle in modern society

As individuals, these Chinese fans of Western musicals are passionate theatregoers as well as online critics, writers, artists or video editors who create diverse fan art. However, there is an obvious feature of this group of Chinese fans of Western musicals: they spontaneously form a vigorous fan community and conduct high-intensity interactions both online and offline, rather than standing ovations in theatres. If their enthusiastic attitude and active reaction are part of their personal choices with their own aesthetic, intellectual or social disposition, then

the fan community they built and the interactive and collective lifestyle of this community are often outside of the objective need.

4.3.1 Pirates as Prometheus and their partnership

In the process of cultural globalization, transnationalization among cultural fandom is an outstanding tendency (Lee, 2014). Enthusiastic consumers of overseas cultural products, as well as the flourishing market for imported cultural products, have become common in many places of the world. Athique believes there are already many more nonresident audiences of artworks or cultural products than local or resident audiences because of the rapid development of technological media (2014). However, theatre art has inherent disadvantages in this trend globalization. It is not easy to copy the entire theatre experience from overseas or across the language barriers; the niche market of videos of musicals also fails to develop commercial interest of Western transnational corporations. That made the official distribution networks of Western musicals in China very rare. In addition, the Chinese government imposes a very strict censorship system on foreign cultural products. They not only censor the content, but also control the number of imports (Zhang, 2016). Chinese fans facing these objective difficulties often find themselves “thirsty.” This forces them to gather with others who share similar tastes and cooperate to acquire their beloved theatrical products.

In this research, all the respondents except one became interested in Western musical theatre because of online videos with Chinese subtitles and annotations. Even the most enthusiastic of these theatregoers have watched many more musicals online than in real theatres. This young generation's passion for Western musicals, to a great extent, is inspired and cultivated by videos on the Internet. And everyone knows that these videos are mostly pirated videos produced and translated by a group of selfless pioneers.

Making these pirated videos requires crowdsourcing cooperation. This mode of collective activity is common for this generation in China. Because of censorship and market

control, young Chinese people cannot acquire enough overseas cultural products. Therefore, they have organized volunteer translation communities called subtitle groups for Hollywood movies, Japanese anime and Korean TV series. In short, they are willing to do unpaid translation work for all kinds of cultural products that are banned or controlled by the government (Zhang, 2016).

As mentioned, traditional Chinese society regards all cultural activities outside of politics and philosophy as entertainment (Wu, 2016). Similarly, the contemporary Chinese government actually does not take recreational consumption and related collective behaviors strictly because they are much less dangerous than sensitive political issues. In this way, fan translation activities, which are not profitable, survive in the space neglected by both the Chinese government and Western musical industry. In recent years, varied subtitle groups have produced many translations of musicals, and Chinese fans have rated this Robin Hood-style behavior very positively.

These videos are the best way to promote musicals among my friends. What else can we do? You can't make a person who knows nothing about musicals enter the theatre.

(No. 21 interviewee, 25 years old, female, doctoral student, Shanghai)

Theatre should not be an art form that only serves the privileged class, and therefore pirated videos and translation can change this situation. My personal thought is that making a video without affecting the actors is acceptable. In the capitalist environment, I really think that the shooting and uploading of shows can't be called evil at all, unless people begin to sell such videos or make a profit.

(No. 6 interviewee, 22 years old, female, college student, Philadelphia)

The copyright owner certainly believes that this is illegal. But as far as I know, it's very ironic that there are many substitute actors who are eager to be recorded so that more people could see their performance.

(No. 4 interviewee, female, college student, USA)

According to three interviewees (No. 17, 21 and 25) who have this experience of this cooperation about subtitle translation, there are six stages of production: generating interest, finding partners, cooperating on translating and proofreading, uploading the completed work, accepting praise and controversy, and then discussion and reflection. This process of cooperation undoubtedly requires a great deal of time and effort, and it is also demanding of the participants' educational backgrounds. However, interviewees who had this experience did not concern themselves with this difficult or laborious process, but emphasized this voluntary collective activity with high cultural capital as a way of building friendship.

When we did this translation together, we brainstormed a lot. No one can get all the punchlines and allusions without mistakes working by himself. So we helped and backed each other up. It deepened my understanding and passion for the musicals. Moreover, this experience helped me establish a deep friendship with many partners.

(No. 17 interviewee, 29 years old, female, company employee, Shanghai)

Translating the German musical *Mozart!* with my friends was a very important experience in my life. Before we got the official DVD, we translated some of it according to the script in English and German we found on the Internet. Then we bought the DVD and modified the subtitles word by word. When we came to the saddest part of the story, we were crying together while translating. This is not only a big help for my German study, but also a charming social experience. Actually, I had been a person with few friends. Because of our collaboration on the musical translation, I met so many friends online. Later, they also became my friends in real life.

(No. 25 interviewee, 21 years old, male, company employee, Beijing)

To sum up, these subtitle group members seldom mentioned their high cultural capital and selfless unpaid contributions in their discourse. Being a gate opener and gatekeeper of Western musicals in the Chinese cultural environment is not their original intention. The fundamental reason for choosing to engage in and enjoy this activity is their love for this art genre and the friendships established in the process of cooperation.

4.3.2 Amateur theatre and its companionship

Chinese fans of Western musical have another notable collective activity, that is, amateur theatre. Of the 27 interviewees, six mentioned musical clubs in universities. Although the influence and spread of college students' activities about musical theatre cannot be compared with the online subtitle group, amateur musical performances in famous universities in China have still had a very far-reaching impact upon this very young group of musical fans.

During my university time, I founded the musical theatre club of Nanjing University. In 2008, our club rehearsed the German musical *Elizabeth*, which was premiered in Germany in 2006. I had already graduated at that time, but I still expressed a lot of enthusiasm for this with my friends. We were very lucky to get a sponsorship of RMB 140,000, so we rented a commercial theatre in Nanjing to perform this grand show. In 2014, *Elizabeth* was officially performed in Shanghai. Many theatregoers mentioned on social media that they only went to see the show at the theatre because they saw our amateur performance in 2008.

(No. 29 interviewee, 33 years old, female, teacher, Hong Kong)

Amateur theatre groups are very public compared to the hidden nature of online video. This has led to more discussions about copyright. This bottom-up cultural participation of Chinese fans, in a sense, promotes and competes with the musical industry. Scholars such as Nicholson have pointed out that drama culture has always been proud of egalitarianism, but in

practice, amateur performances are often ignored, ridiculed and hindered by professionals, who act to maintain a cultural and economic privilege (Nicholson, Holdsworth & Milling, 2017). This has also been verified in the practical experience of Chinese fans.

In the summer of 2017, our university's musical club performed *Les Misérables*. Many people thought we violated copyright, and some quite severe criticism was directed at us. Someone wrote to Music Theatre International, the copyright owner. They sent a letter of inquiry to my university. As the law major in the cast, I had to explain so many times to my university on the basis of the Berne Convention.

(No. 30 interviewee, 24 years old, female, lawyer, Beijing)

Similar to the volunteer subtitle translators, although the actions of Chinese amateur musical club members have an obvious bottom-up "revolutionary" nature, they care more about "social networks, friendship and shared histories" (Nicholson et al., 2017) in this experience.

The daily rehearsal meant singing and dancing together. In my opinion, this activity was very in line with the human nature of expressing emotion. It was happy to have like-minded people working together for a beautiful thing. Even if I am already working, I will go back to college to do some research on musicals with my friends. Many of the partners at the time became very good personal friends.

(No. 30 interviewee, 24 years old, female, lawyer, Beijing)

I made good friends through my amateur musical performances. When I got married, I also invited these friends to my wedding. This friendship is special to me.

(No. 29 interviewee, 33 years old, female, teacher, Hong Kong)

In contemporary life, this creative engagement is a new form of life politics. These Chinese fans kept themselves busy, not for employment, but for enjoyment, weakening the boundary between work and leisure. When valuing their choices among hobbies, they often emphasize the particularity of this activity with its social functions. DiMaggio (1987) and Fiske (1992) suggested that culture and art are the subjects in which people form social groups and connect with each other outside family and fixed working relationships. It is the result of their economic and cultural capital. Therefore, the performance of creative leisure, like attending amateur theatre, has also become a point of “distinction.”

4.3.3 Serious leisure as a distinction of lifestyle

As cultural omnivores, Chinese fans of Western musicals have a wide range of hobbies. Even if they are not subtitle translators and members of musical clubs, the fans in this study still show a clear preference for the social value of enjoying musicals in their fan community. Besides the cross-cultural intellectual challenges and emotional aesthetic experiences brought about by musical theatre, establishing a “pure relationship” (Giddens, 1991) that is irrelevant to blood and livelihood becomes the unique charm of musicals.

I really like to visit the museum. I have been pursuing this pastime for seven or eight years. However, I have never found a relatively stable museum community. Until now, I have always gone to the museum by myself. The musical fan community is enthusiastic and stable. Its members are also relatively mature and well-educated. I feel very comfortable in this community.

(No. 1 interviewee, 24 years old, female, national institution employee, Xuancheng)

Musicals allowed me to meet nice friends as well as excellent actors, which made me feel that sometimes people are not so untrustworthy.

(No. 23 interviewee, 18 years old, female, college student, Shanghai)

My friends and I held a "Musical Only" last year. It's a bit like a Comicon. That has given me an unparalleled memory. We rented a hotel lobby, in which many people exchanged their own fan art about musicals. The participants came from all over the country, and the whole convention is like a family reunion.

(No. 28 interviewee, 28 years old, female, game designer, Shanghai)

I met 90% of my friends in Beijing because of watching musicals. My classmates and I established a musical theatre club in my university. Therefore, I began to make even more friends.

(No. 10 interviewee, 21 years old, female, college student, Beijing)

The private meditation of the aesthetic experience is a critical form of authoring meaning, while the social aspect of interpretative function brings more pleasure (Conner, 2013). The Chinese fans of Western musicals prefer appreciating this genre as their hobby, not out of snobbery. Being superior to others is not important. Waldinger has pointed out that good interpersonal relationships are critical to happiness (2015). That is also why these Chinese fans have established new high-quality social capital by applying their own cultural capital, thus gaining more happiness from their sense of participation.

Intellectual challenges, long-term commitment, collective lifestyle and good interpersonal relationships are crucial elements of "serious leisure" (Stebbins, 2001). This is how and why these Chinese fans of Western musicals draw a boundary of distinction. For the Chinese fans, this lifestyle organized around the theatre has another significant meaning. As Jenkins (2006) said, fan culture may be preparation for better public culture with the ethos of democratization, especially for young people.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This study is an interesting and challenging attempt to apply Bourdieusian cultural capital theory and distinctions of taste, which was based on French society in the 1970s, to an analysis of cultural participation and consumption by Chinese people. During the research, especially the analysis process, the universality and limitations of Bourdieu's theory gradually emerged. Modern societies are not equal in many aspects, and people's cultural tastes are subject to external objective conditions. Chinese society and Chinese people are certainly not exceptions. Their distinctions of taste are also closely linked to their economic and cultural capital. In this sense, this application of Bourdieu's theory is still feasible in the context of a cross-culture study. However, the historical developmental trajectory of each culture and society is not consistent. The theory based on Western sociology does not explain all the cultural phenomena in the Chinese cultural environment.

The reception of Western musicals by Chinese audiences is a good example of cultural globalization. First, only when these Chinese audiences have sufficient economic and cultural capital do they have the opportunity to encounter this theatrical art genre from a different culture. As Peterson (1992) and Lizardo (2006) argued, people with higher cultural capital will expose themselves to a broader and richer cultural environment. In particular, theatre art, as a very ancient art form, is more difficult to spread compared to modern industrial cultural productions like movies, TV shows and animations that rely on new media technologies. The Chinese audiences of Western musicals in this study embrace humanist openness, which allows them to actively receive and understand the musical theatre, which is rooted in European and American culture.

In this study, we can observe many interesting comparisons of aesthetic judgment, the disposition of cultural consumption, and the cultural participant style in different societies.

Musical theatre has already achieved great commercial success and popularity in Western society, but this genre lacks top-down corporations and distribution in Chinese society. That is why those Chinese fans have to become strong pluralists (Whiteley, 2012) and very active fans. If they do not attend these bottom-up cultural activities, they merely lose the opportunity to enjoy this genre.

One reason musicals are criticized as being too shallow and empty in Western society might be that those Western local audiences have no obstacles to understanding the plots and lyrics. If Chinese audiences want to understand this genre, they first need an excellent educational background to help them acquire the ability to decode between different languages. In the process of applying one's own cultural capital when consuming different cultures, a person will enjoy a great sense of accomplishment. It seems that high cultural capital helps people achieve self-sufficiency in gaining enjoyment through foreign artworks. The aesthetic distance in the reception theory (Iser, 1978) constitutes an intellectual and aesthetic challenge that is one of the necessary conditions in coming to the state of "flow" in Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi's psychological research (2002). In the face of this kind of challenge, on the one hand, Chinese fans have enough cultural capital to solve these difficulties; on the other hand, the multiple performances of musicals also balance the challenge and increase the entertainment atmosphere. Those conditions together make the entire reception process a very positive, enjoyable and rewarding aesthetic experience.

The attitude toward art in Chinese society has a very special tendency for historical and political reasons. Chinese people tend to think of all kinds of different arts as a way to share happiness. In this functional aesthetic that appreciation of art is for happiness and comfort, the intensity of emotion naturally becomes an important evaluation criterion. When Chinese people have the opportunity to choose their hobbies from various cultural and artistic forms in the West, musical theatre, as a genre closer to the disposition of enjoying art and cultural objects, will see more possibilities to be really selected and loved. Among stage arts, such as musical theatre, spoken drama and dance drama, which of them possesses larger aesthetic distance from the Chinese disposition of cultural appreciation? It is difficult to answer briefly. However, Chinese fans in this study have their own answers. If challenges in the process of understanding artworks

are based on objective cultural differences, then they will take up the challenge with an open attitude. Musicals bring aesthetic pleasure to Chinese audiences after they bridge this aesthetic distance. If they need to use Western self-restraint to appreciate this art, then that process is difficult for audiences with a Chinese cultural background.

In addition, the high cultural capital of these Chinese fans has become the basis for their active participation in various fan creations. In the political and economic environment of modern China, they have to become the gate opener and gatekeeper to resist the government's control of cultural imports by virtue of their cultural capital. Translating subtitles, attending amateur theatrical performances and organizing fan conferences can all be a rebellious and bottom-up power in the cultural flows of globalization (Crane, 2012).

However, it is worth noting that the happiness of these Chinese fans does not come from this resistance. They also do not value the role of fighters much. What they pay attention to is the friendship established in the process of this "serious leisure" (Stebbins, 2001). In this sense, serious leisure has a certain universality among different modern societies. As long as it is a long-term, intimate cooperation with aesthetic enjoyment and intellectual challenges, it will have a unique appeal in people's life politics (Giddens, 1991; Stebbins, 2001). In both China and Western society, its charm may not be much different. In a sense, this kind of positive social relationship established through cultural participation may be the secret to happiness. The next question we face is how to get more people out of the burden of life and acquire more cultural capital and chances to build this serious leisure and pure relationship (Giddens, 1991).

Some researchers suggest that cultural omnivorousness will occur in more democratic countries, such as Netherlands and America (Van Venrooij and Schmutz, 2010). However, the disposition of the Chinese appreciating musicals is obviously very "democratic." How we should predict the level of cultural omnivorousness and the democratic values of openness and engagement in different cultural contexts will be a very interesting discussion.

The title of this paper, "Other Hills Whose Stones Are Good for Working Jade," is a line from *The Book of Songs*, the most ancient poetry collection in China. It literally means that the stones on the other mountain are even harder than the jade on this mountain, so they

can be used to carve jade. In the process of doing this study, whether I observe Chinese culture from the perspective of Western culture or vice versa, I draw similar conclusions.

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Appendix 1. An overview of the (anonymous) respondents

	Sex	Age	Education	Career	City
1	Female	24	Bachelor	National institution employee	Xuancheng
2	Female	21		College student	Oxford
3	Female	24	Bachelor	PR person	Shanghai
4	Female		Bachelor	College student	A City in USA
5	Female		Bachelor	College student	Beijing/Cambridge
6	Female	22		College student	Philadelphia
10	Female	21		College student	Beijing
11	Female	23	Bachelor	Company employee	Tianjin/Manama
12	Female	21		College student	London
13	Female	19		College student	Guangzhou
14	Female			College student	Shanghai
15	Female	23	Bachelor	Company employee	Beijing
16	Female			College student	Guangzhou
17	Female	29	Bachelor	Company employee	Shanghai
18	Female	21		College student	Shanghai
19	Female	22	Bachelor	Postgraduate student	Montpellier
20	Female	23	Bachelor	Teacher	Jinan
21	Female	25	Bachelor	Doctoral student for Medicine	Shanghai
22	Female	27	Bachelor	Company employee	Shanghai
23	Female	18		College student	Shanghai

24	Female	24		College student	Bologna / Vienna
25	Male	22	Bachelor	Company employee	Beijing
26	Female	16		High school student	Shanghai
27	Female	20		College student	Nanjing
28	Female	28		Game Designer	Shanghai
29	Female	33	Master	Teacher	Hongkong
30	Female	24	Master	Lawyer	Beijing

1. No. 4, No. 5, No. 14, No. 16 and No. 20 interviewees refuse to tell their age. No. 4 interviewees refuse to tell her resident city.
2. The recording and related materials or information about No. 7, No.8 and No.9 interviewee was lost in the process of repairing my computer in May.
3. No. 20 interviewee lived and studied in San Francisco, USA for her college time

Appendix 2. The interview guide

Warming up

age

career

gender

education level

city

Definition of the genre (topic 1)

What is the first musical you have ever seen? When?

Did you watch it in a theater or online?

Were you “falling in love” with the genre when you watched the very first one?

(If not, which one made you become interested in the musicals? and when?)

What are the most touching parts/elements in that musical? Do you remember how you felt at the most unforgettable moment?

Generally speaking, what in musicals attracts you the most?

How many musicals have you watched in the theater/online?

Experience of theatre going (topic 2)

Do you have the experience of going abroad to watch musicals?

Do you have any experience of watching musicals in other provinces and cities?

Do you do any homework before entering the theater?

(if so) what do you usually focus on? Where do you get the information?

What kind of charm does the theater (live performance) have? (with examples)

What factors or conditions will improve/lower your theatre experience?

After watching the musical, will you talk about it? How? with whom?

What do you think are the basic qualities of a qualified musical audience/fan?

What crazy things have been done for musicals?

Fan behavior (topic 3)

How do you get to know other musical audiences? Do you want to make friends with other musical fans?

Do you read/ write reviews or comments?

Before watching a musical, would you refer to other people's comments? Why or why not?

In the discussion of musicals, what topics do you pay the most attention to? why?

Have you watched cover versions or pirate videos with/without translated subtitle?

Have you watched fan videos, fanfictions, fan pictures?

Have you purchased peripheral products (official products or homemade)?

Have you ever produced the above items?

How do you evaluate various unofficial video resources on the Internet? How do you evaluate subtitle translators? How do you enjoy/utilize these resources?

Preferences / likes and dislikes (topic 4)

(1) About musicals

What kind of musicals do you like more? (with examples of Favorite repertoire) Why?

Do you have any preferences when choosing to watch a show (country/language, plot, lyricist/musician, cast, original/adapted, time background, etc)?

Are there any musicals that you find you don't like? why?

What kind of musical actors/actresses do you like/dislike? (Who are your favorite actors/actresses? Why?)

What kind of reviews do you like/dislike?

What kind of fanart do you like/dislike?

Have you ever seen any phenomena and behaviors of Chinese musical audiences and fans that make you happy/angry/sad?

(2) About other genre/hobby

Do you think you are a person with a wide range of interests in art and culture?

Outside of going to musicals / the theatre, do you have any other interest in (going to) arts and culture? If so, what and why? (Pop music, Classical music, Visual art, Performing art, Poetry,

Literature...)

Do you have any other hobbies? What is the biggest difference between watching musicals and doing other hobbies in your life?

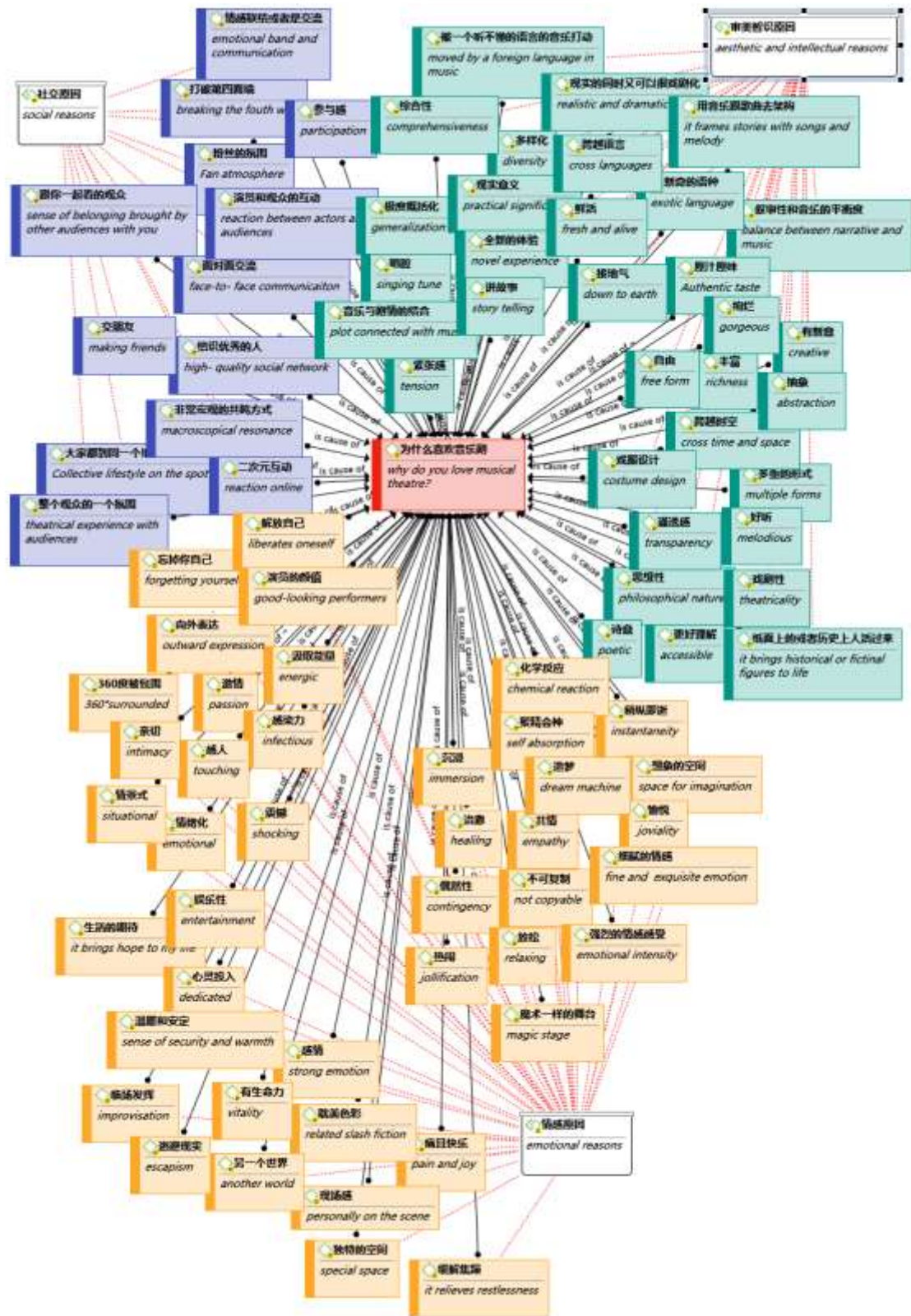
Other things related to this interview according to your respondents (things you didn't ask/mention) (topic 5)

Has your life become different in a sense since you became interested in musicals?

Is there something I forgot to ask you?

Is there something you explained, but not fully – would you like to elaborate on it, or change / correct something you said during the interview?

Appendix 3. The presentation of visualized discourse analysis about the reasons Chinese fans love western musicals



Appendix 4. The presentation of visualized discourse analysis about the dispositions of Chinese fans enjoying western musicals

