

# Research on the Dissemination Paths in China of Bullet Comment Culture as a Cross-Cultural Communication Medium

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**Keywords:** Bullet Comment Culture, The Third Space Theory, Relingualization, Internet, Cross-culture Communication.

**Abstract:** This study explores the popularity and influencing factors of Japanese bullet comment culture among different age groups in China. Utilizing deep interviews and a questionnaire survey, we conducted five interviews with diverse participants and collected 259 effective questionnaires. The data analysis revealed distinct characteristics and commonalities among age cohorts. Despite its Japanese origins, bullet comment culture resonates well with Chinese civilization, benefiting from factors such as the shifting economic center, Internet development, lifestyle changes, and historical context. This phenomenon reflects the nature of cross-cultural dissemination, exhibiting both regionalization and the necessity of a "third space" to enhance communication. The findings highlight that age significantly affects the acceptability of cross-cultural communication, underscoring its importance as a variable in this context.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2025, China Central Television Spring Festival cooperated with the Bilibili video platform, launching the Spring Festival bullet comment function for the first time. This phenomenon shows that the bullet comments have been very popular in China. This culture originated in Japan's video website in 2006; after that, as Japanese culture was introduced to China, the bullet comments came into Chinese sight in 2007 and became increasingly popular (Chen, 2022). However, over the past 30 years, China's Internet has developed rapidly, and by June 2024, Internet penetration reached 78% (Xie & Zhang, 2025). As a result, the Internet participation of middle-aged and elderly people is getting higher because the Internet's convenience and immediateness in interpersonal and social interactions make it easier for the elderly to establish connections with others, thereby improving the satisfaction of life (Jin et al. 2024). This phenomenon leads to the increasing frequency of contact between the elderly and the bullet comments. In daily life, it could also feel about the different attitudes of different age groups towards bullet comments. Based on this background, this study will focus on the following questions:

① The acceptance of the bullet comment and the reasons behind it.

② Is cross-cultural communication affected by regionalization?

③ Is there a "third space" in the path of cross-cultural communication that promotes communication?

The study aims to explore the spread and acceptance of the bullet comment culture in China and understand the influencing factors behind it, thus exploring the path, the influencing factors, and the time and space conditions of cross-cultural communication.

This paper will summarize the existing literature and clarify the methods of the research and data collection and then show some data results, making a detailed analysis and discussion on these data. Then, this paper will further combine the theory of regionalization and the third space to analyze the influential factors of cross-cultural transmission. In the end, this paper will summarize all the analysis and discussion results and provide a new perspective on cross-cultural communication.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definition and Origin of Bullet Comments

The so-called bullet comments are interactive functions, like real-time comments produced by the audience, and are displayed on the screen in the form of rolling subtitles during the play of a video (Li et al., 2021). In the studies of scholars represented by Nakajima (2019) and Chen (2022), this function extends from a form of entertainment to a public interactive cultural phenomenon. This opinion also provides a reference for this paper to study bullet comments as a kind of culture.

Some scholars indicate that as a product of the Internet, this culture spreads across cultures around the world, but it is particularly popular in China and Southeast Asia (Zhu et al., 2025), which is why this paper focuses on the spread of bullet comment culture in China. Cross-cultural communication is the way people from different cultures communicate at a distance or face to face (Hurn & Tomalin, 2013), and culture will spread through this process.

### 2.2 Cross-Cultural Communication Theories Related to Bullet Comments

This paper examines the spread of bullet comment culture in China and Japan through regionalization and third space theories. Regionalization, distinct from national-level regionalism, emphasizes the role of market forces and non-state actors in fostering cross-cultural diffusion (Otmazgin, 2014). Japanese popular culture, exemplified by the TV series Tokyo Love Story, has significantly influenced East Asia (Shim, 2005), highlighting regional characteristics in cross-cultural communication and the formation of cultural groups.

The third space theory, developed by post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, highlights the fluidity and ambiguity of culture, where individuals combine various cultural identities to form new hybrid identities and knowledge (Tatham, 2023). In the Internet era, social media and transnational platforms have created a new third space, offering fresh insights into cross-cultural communication (Bhandari, 2022).

#### 2.3 Previous studies on bullet comments

With the popularity of bullet comments, many scholars have studied this culture; however, these studies have certain limitations. The first type of

research, such as several scholars referred to in the previous discussion on the definition of bullet comments, focuses on the bullet screen itself as well as some large bullet comment platforms such as Bilibili, so it cannot reflect the real attitude of audiences on other platforms. The second group of scholars focused on the impact of bullet comments on the audience. For example, Ni (2017) designed a set of experiments for the study of bullet comments, focusing on the impact of bullet comments on the audience's attention allocation and social presence when watching videos. Such studies have promoted the field to the level of audience reaction, which has inspired the study of this paper. The third group of scholars studied the collateral effect of bullet comments and how to design and price them (Zhu et al., 2025). This kind of research has extended the study of bullet comments to cross-disciplinary fields, but few scholars have paid attention to the field of cross-cultural communication of bullet comments.

This paper aims to explore the attitudes and usage of bullet comments across various age groups, from young to middle-aged and elderly individuals. It expands the research to include not only Bilibili but also short video platforms and Tencent Meeting, providing a comprehensive understanding of the spread of bullet comments in China and offering insights for cross-cultural communication research.

## 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study combines qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to comprehensively analyze the key factors behind the popularity of the bullet comment culture in China.

### 3.1 In-Depth Interview

In this stage, I conducted extensive literature collection, covering relevant literature on the bullet comment culture, the historical background of cultural exchanges between China and Japan, and the personal information of the interviewees. The interviews were structured into three sections: understanding and usage, attitudes, and expectations for future cross-cultural dissemination of bullet comments. I successfully contacted five interviewees: a 49-year-old male office worker, a 47-year-old female lawyer, an 18-year-old male high school student, and two 20-year-old female college students. Among them, the middle-aged interviewees frequently use various video apps, the male student is an ACG culture enthusiast, one female student

specializes in cross-cultural studies, and the other is studying in Japan.

The research aims to provide a reference for the design of the questionnaire, so the interviewees need to have some knowledge of the Internet or Japanese popular culture. Given that the study focuses on the spread of bullet comments culture in China, all interviewees were Chinese. Interviews were conducted one-on-one offline, which not only helped the interviewer control the interview direction but also captured the interviewees' attitude changes and language details. Especially for the otaku culture group, who take the Internet as their social platform, this interview method can alleviate their language expression barrier in public.

The data will be processed through textual analysis. Firstly, the interviews were transcribed into text scripts and then classified and summarized according to the themes. The analysis focused on sorting out the different answers given by different interviewees and transforming them into questionnaire questions. In addition, I will sort out the new ideas and insights raised in their answers to provide a new direction for the questionnaire design.

### 3.2 Questionnaire Survey

Since there is no authoritative questionnaire suitable for this paper, I decided to use a self-designed questionnaire for investigation. This questionnaire, which contains 13 multiple-choice questions and 2 blank questions, was designed and distributed through the online platform. Given that the research objects are mainly Internet users, the online questionnaire format not only fits the characteristics of the target group but also can effectively improve efficiency. This stage aims to reveal the potential reasons for the acceptance of bullet comment culture by analyzing the attitudes and usage of different groups.

The data will be classified according to the age groups, and their similarities and differences will be analyzed using quantitative analysis methods. In this study, the age of 35 will be used as the cut-off point, and the respondents will be divided into two groups: young people and middle-aged and elderly people for comparative analysis. The classification method refers to the classification of young people in the Medium and Long Term Youth Development Plan (Communist Party of China Central Committee and State Council, 2017).

## 4 RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1 Different Age Groups' Attitude Towards Bullet Comment

#### 4.1.1 Young People: Active Users of the Bullet Comments

183 data were collected from young people aged 35 years and under in the survey phase. The survey results indicate that regarding the frequency of young people's contact with the internet, approximately 77% of young individuals have stated that they cannot live without the internet. They typically utilize a combination of online and offline social methods, with 38.25% of young individuals relying more on online social methods. According to the data from the responses to the question "Whether to enable bullet comments and use them," over 82% of young people enable the bullet comments feature while watching videos, with only 2.73% never opening the comments. The further question concerns the time when they first started using bullet comments; most young people began using them between 2010 and 2020, when they were still teenagers. During the pandemic, they often used online meeting software such as Tencent Meeting. According to the answers in the in-depth interviews and questionnaires, most young people agree with the view that bullet comments are a kind of online social way and believe that they are communicative and interactive. Back to the questionnaire about attitudes toward bullet comments, 61.2% of the young people like the current atmosphere of bullet comments, and more than 91% of the young people adapt to the use and functions of bullet comments.

As short videos are an important place for producing bullet comments. When asked about Chinese young people's preferences for short videos, more than 96% of them have a positive attitude, and 69.95% of them often watch various short videos and are active on different short video platforms. They watch a variety of videos; some like to watch animation, shows, and other entertainment videos; some like to watch educational videos such as science or courses; and some like watching TV series and movies and so on.

#### 4.1.2 Middle-Aged and Elderly People: Emerging Audiences for the Bullet Comments

76 data from middle-aged and elderly people aged 36 years and older. The question of the first usage of the

bullet comment function showed that middle-aged and elderly people saw an increase of nearly 33% in bullet comment users from 2020 to 2025, and the group of senior Chinese netizens who had been exposed to the screen reached 90.79%. In this group, more than 84% of participants said they used online meetings more or less during the pandemic. It is worth noting that more than half of them believe that the popularity of online meetings has increased their contact frequency with the bullet comments. Most people also believe that the function and usage way is easier to adapt to, which accounts for 61.85% of this group. According to the high-frequency entry of the questionnaire, most of them also believe that the bullet comments will bring more positive effects to their lives, which can lead to a collision of ideas and a convenient tool to use. In terms of short videos, 88.15% of the middle-aged and elderly groups prefer to scroll through short videos, and only 2.63% of people never watch short videos.

## **4.2 The Influence Factors of Acceptance of the Bullet Comments**

### **4.2.1 The Interactivity of Bullet Comments for Young People**

From the data obtained, it can be seen that the young group in China has a high acceptance of bullet comments. This phenomenon is influenced by many factors. It can be seen from the data that young people have gradually gotten used to online social networking. For them, the Internet is equivalent to a virtual "community" where they can interact with others, and bullet comments are a tool or way of communication. A group of people with a common hobby or interest will gather together through different video types to interact with like-minded people in the bullet comments of such videos.

### **4.2.2 The Practicality of Bullet Comments for Middle-Aged and Elderly People**

Compared with the young group, middle-aged and elderly Chinese are more concerned about the functional rather than the entertaining nature of bullet comments; that is, they usually use the culture as a tool to facilitate their remote work communication. In the interview, some middle-aged people also said that the two main reasons for them to use bullet comments are:

- ① the practical value of bullet comments and
- ② the low difficulty of using bullet comments.

Survey data also show that most middle-aged and elderly people think they can adapt to the use of bullet comments, and it is because they can quickly master this tool that bullet comments could gradually become popular among middle-aged and elderly people.

### **4.2.3 Similarity of Two Groups**

No matter the young group or the middle-aged and elderly group, their attitude towards bullet comments is relatively positive in general. This phenomenon is mainly influenced by the regionalization of cross-cultural communication and the existence of the third space conducive to communication. The reasons and influences of these two factors will be analyzed in the following section.

## **4.3 Bullet Comments' Cross-Cultural Communication and Regionalization**

### **4.3.1 The Shift of Economic Center**

Japan's economy grew rapidly after World War II, and economic exchanges increased after China's reform and opening up in 1978 (Xu, 2024). In particular, the signing of *the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China* in 1978 provided a political and social foundation for Japanese animation to enter the Chinese market (Wang, 2005). As a result, a Japan-centered subculture group gradually formed. Policy support makes capital gradually intervene in cross-cultural communication. Following Bilibili and Acfun, platforms such as iQiyi and Youku have adapted the bullet feature to their applications (Chen, 2022), and the formation of subcultural groups has led to the increase of the user group of bullet comments, thus increasing the market scale.

However, Asia's economic center has been shifting gradually since 2020, and the pandemic has accelerated that process. China recovered early from the impact of the pandemic with strong policy responses, while the stabilizing role of state-owned enterprises and taking the lead in controlling the epidemic and resuming exports have made China a relative winner in the post-pandemic era (Alliance, 2021). This phenomenon has led to a shift in the economic center in Asia and even the world. Studies have shown that by 2030, the global economic center will be located at the intersection of China, India, and Pakistan (Alliance, 2021). The shift of the economic center will lead to the shift of the cultural center.

Therefore, the groups that accept the subculture cultivated by Japan are also chinization, so the bullet comment culture is constantly chinization, which is more suitable for the use of Chinese groups.

### 4.3.2 The Development of Internet

In the early days of Internet development in Asia, Japan's Internet development was always a step ahead of China's, but the overall development was similar. For example, in 1993, the first public access service provider in Japan began to provide services, marking Japan's official entry into the Internet era (McLelland et al., 2017). China followed with full access to the Internet in 1994, marking the beginning of China's Internet era (Xie & Zhang, 2025). In 1999, i-mode mobile Internet services were launched in Japan and rapidly spread across the country (Delamar, 2002). Then, within five years, China began to shift to mobile internet with the launch of the QQ mobile version (McLelland et al., 2017). Due to the similar development stages of the Internet in China and Japan, the Internet users in the two countries have similar acceptance and ability to accept Internet products, so that Chinese Internet users can quickly accept the Japanese bullet comments culture.

Moreover, there are regional differences in the Internet population in China. Compared with the inland areas in central China, the eastern coastal areas of China have earlier Internet access and a higher population rate, so users in these areas have higher demand and acceptance for the Internet. At the same time, local governments in these regions pay more attention to innovation and inclusiveness in Internet governance and encourage the development and innovation of Internet enterprises (Xie & Zhang, 2025). This region is the closest to China and Japan geographically, and these regional development characteristics of the Internet are more conducive to the introduction of Japanese Internet culture into China.

### 4.3.3 Similarity of Languages

Due to various factors, Chinese and Japanese languages borrowed words from each other, and a large number of Chinese characters were introduced into Japan from China. During the Meiji Restoration period, many Japanese words were also introduced into China, namely, "Wasei Kanji" (Wang, 2024). Modern Japanese is also greatly influenced by Chinese characters. For example, modern Japanese retains a large number of Chinese characters, and many of the characters are basically the same, but the pronunciation is different from modern Chinese

(Kirnosova & Fedotova, 2021). As a result, there are many similarities between the languages of the two countries, and bullet comments are also a function related to language. Therefore, the similarity of language provides a solid foundation for the landing of Japanese bullet comments culture in China.

This foundation is mainly reflected in two aspects. First, both Chinese and Japanese cultures belong to high-context cultures; that is, people's communication depends more on context and shared background knowledge (Wu et al., 2023). Therefore, because the bullet comments function is only related to a video or even a certain segment, it provides an established context for the audience, and because the audience of the same video has similar background knowledge after watching the same content, people with high-context culture are easy to accept this function. At the same time, high-context culture makes people not need to express as completely as low-context culture, so it is more suitable to send short, concise bullet comments.

Secondly, since both Chinese and Japanese characters have the characteristics of pictography and ideography, the shape, pronunciation, and layout of Chinese and Japanese characters in the text provide rich clues for information coding and decoding (Kirnosova & Fedotova, 2021). This feature is very consistent with the increasingly rich and diverse functions of bullet comments. People can express different meanings by adjusting the color, size, position, and way of appearance of comment fonts.

### 4.3.4 Online Social and Fragmented Information

With the development of the Internet, the way of social interaction between Chinese and Japanese people has also changed from offline social interaction to a combination of online and offline social interaction. At the same time, the information transmission of the Internet is timely; that is, the time interval from the generation of information to the acceptance of people is very short. The amount of information on the Internet is also very large and increasing. The interactivity of the Internet is also very strong, which promotes multidirectional interaction between different groups (He, 2023). As a result, Internet users have been accustomed to receiving a large amount of fragmented information for a long time, which is very consistent with the information characteristics of bullet comments. In the new media era, fragmented reading has become more and more common, especially among college students. This reading style is characterized by

scattered content, scattered time, and scattered attention (Liu et al., 2022). Young groups such as college students are the most active audiences of bullet comments. Therefore, it has further promoted the popularity of bullet comments culture.

#### **4.4 The Cross-Cultural Communication of Bullet Comments and "The Third Space"**

##### **4.4.1 The Internet: A Virtual Space**

Young people in the new era are those who have grown up in a digital environment, and they use social media frequently and can flexibly adapt to various online social platforms (Kullolli & Trebicka, 2023). This means that the Internet platform provides a virtual space conducive to the dissemination of Internet culture, such as bullet comment culture, through which young people can be exposed to such culture. Studies have pointed out that social media is not only a communication tool for the young generation but also a platform for self-expression (Kullolli & Trebicka, 2023), and the bullet comments function can meet their desire for that. Moreover, the Internet identity of contemporary netizens has undergone a great change, from passive recipients of media culture to "productive" audiences who actively participate in the production of media texts and culture (Yan, 2017), providing the producer for the development of bullet comments.

At the same time, digital media platforms offer ample possibilities for the rediscovery, replication, and re-importation of cultural products, as some popular cultures can spread rapidly across regions and countries through the spread of social media and the promotion of digital influencers (Uchiyama et al., 2024). This also provides a solid foundation for the spread of bullet comment culture. In terms of interaction patterns, people have a unique interaction pattern on social media, integrating digital platforms seamlessly into their daily lives and preferring visual and video-oriented platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (Kullolli & Trebicka, 2023), which are the production sites of bullet comments. In addition, the use of these platforms for cultural communication is almost free but can have a greater influence, which enables the widespread use of bullet comments.

Two other attributes of the Internet also make it a natural "third space" conducive to cross-cultural communication, which are its boundlessness and anonymity. Borderless refers to the fact that due to the lack of border control and the difficulty of accessing content, it is not necessarily related to the

geographical location of the content. The Internet can easily migrate from one server to another or even mirror the same website on multiple servers around the world (Dan, 2006) so that there is no clear boundary between countries. Meanwhile, the Internet is not controlled by a unified central authority, so it is a decentralized system (Dan, 2006). These characteristics enable people from different countries and cultural backgrounds to conduct cultural exchanges and collisions.

The anonymity of the Internet refers to the state that individuals cannot be identified by others or self-identified on the Internet (Christopherson, 2007). As a result, people in China and Japan with reserved national characteristics are more willing to express themselves through the Internet without feeling insecure. Studies have shown that in some cases, anonymity can make individuals more strongly identify with the group (Christopherson, 2007). This feature leads to the audience of the same video having a stronger sense of identification with each other through bullet comments, which makes them more daring and willing to publish comments, thus realizing a virtuous cycle of publishing and recognizing bullet comments. Therefore, the Internet can be regarded as a third space conducive to people's communication and collision.

##### **4.4.2 The Culture: A Hybrid Space**

China and Japan have a very long history of cultural exchange, mainly in the form of trade and war, especially Japan's occupation of some parts of China from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century (Kim et al., 2016), and it has led to cultural exchanges and even the birth of children. This history has led to the formation of a certain cultural consensus between the Chinese and Japanese people and even the birth of many groups with complex cultural identities, thus forming a space of cultural convergence. From the 1990s, Japanese popular culture spread rapidly in East Asia, covering areas such as animation and manga. During this period, the relationship between the East Asia region and Japan in terms of politics and economy gradually improved, creating favorable conditions for the spread of Japanese culture (Otmazgin, 2012). To a certain extent, people's acceptance of Japanese popular culture promotes people to accept this country and its cultural connotation, forming an accepted cultural space in which Japanese culture can be more accepted, thus providing a fertile ground for the root of bullet comment culture.

#### 4.4.3 Economy and Politics: Cooperation Space

From the perspective of national economic exchanges, Sino-Japanese relations ushered in a huge turning point in 2006, when Shinzo Abe's "ice-breaking visit to China" broke the long-standing tension between China and Japan, and Japanese bullet comment culture entered the Chinese market in the following year. China and Japan have always been important partners of each other. China has received a large amount of investment from Japan, while Japan has sold a large amount of goods to China. With the implementation of *the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership*, China-Japan economic cooperation has entered a new stage. In the context of the rapid development of economic globalization in the 21st century, the economic relationship between China and Japan has reached an unprecedented degree of interdependence (Xu, 2024). This economic cooperation also increases the opportunities for the people of the two countries to come into contact with each other's culture, thus forming an economic third space.

On the other hand, Chinese and Japanese companies are also constantly cooperating, especially in the animation industry. Even when China and Japan were in a state of war, animation was still a bridge of communication between the two countries. In the 1940s, many Chinese animated films were created by Japanese animators. For example, Japanese animator Mochinaga Tadahito and others worked in the Manchuria Film Studio in northeast China from 1945 to 1953 (Jones, 2019). Through such economic cooperation, the enterprises of the two countries realize cultural exchanges and form a "third space."

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study explores Chinese audiences' acceptance of bullet comment culture across age groups and the reasons behind its cross-cultural spread in China, covering historical, cultural, economic, and political factors.

It is found that the cross-cultural transmission of bullet comment culture has regional characteristics, affected by the similarities in the development stage of the Internet in the region and the convenience brought by economic and cultural exchanges, bullet comment can be more quickly accepted by people in the area. In addition, the cross-cultural dissemination of the bullet comment culture also uses the "third

space" of the Internet, culture, economy, etc., which has provided a place for the spread of this culture to China, allowing people to understand the culture in these places and to try to accept it.

This study suggests that cross-cultural communication has regional characteristics, which may inspire future cross-cultural communication strategies, which are to consider the similarities in the era, economic and language aspects, and to use and meet these characteristics to spread more effectively. At the same time, "the third space" should be actively established or used, finding that the two countries can communicate and eventually achieve the middle zone of fusion to increase the possibility of cross-cultural communication. Future research can further explore how to find the similarities between different cultures and build a third space conducive to communication between the two countries.

Moreover, due to the limited research time, the sample size of the questionnaire in this study is not large enough, the age division is not fine enough, the research scope is not broad enough, and the distribution is not uniform, resulting in the data source not being representative enough. In the future, the scope of research will be further expanded, and different groups will be more carefully divided to bring more rigorous data support for such studies.

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